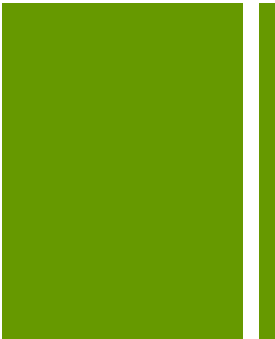


Scrutiny Annual Report 2015 – 2016 (a summary of highlights)



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1. Foreword

Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Councillor Tim Harman



I am pleased to present the Overview and Scrutiny annual report 2015-16.

The committee co-ordinates the Overview and Scrutiny function of the Council; which it does by maintaining an overview of performance and commissioning scrutiny task groups to carry out detailed work. It is also responsible for receiving call-ins of Cabinet decisions and determining how they should be dealt with, though there have been no call-ins in the last year.

Over the last year, the committee has taken a keen interest in engaging with external bodies and organisations on issues that are important to the Town and residents, including; meeting with the Police and Crime Commissioner, receiving a presentation from the Lido Trust, reviewing lessons learnt by Severn Trent following a programme of work carried out across the Town and discussing future plans for sites at Cheltenham and Gloucester with the Gloucestershire Hospitals Foundation Trust. The Railway Station and Cycling & Walking scrutiny task groups reported their findings to Cabinet in Autumn 2015 and work is ongoing by the Devolution and Broadband (joint scrutiny with Gloucester City Council) task groups, which will make recommendations in due course.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank, both, members of the committee and those that have taken part in scrutiny task groups, as well as officers, for their hard work and commitment throughout the last year.

Looking ahead, the committee will continue to focus on adding value to delivery of the Council's priorities and to shining a light on issues of concern to the Town and its residents, in the most effective and appropriate way it can.

2. Pat Pratley Head of Paid Service



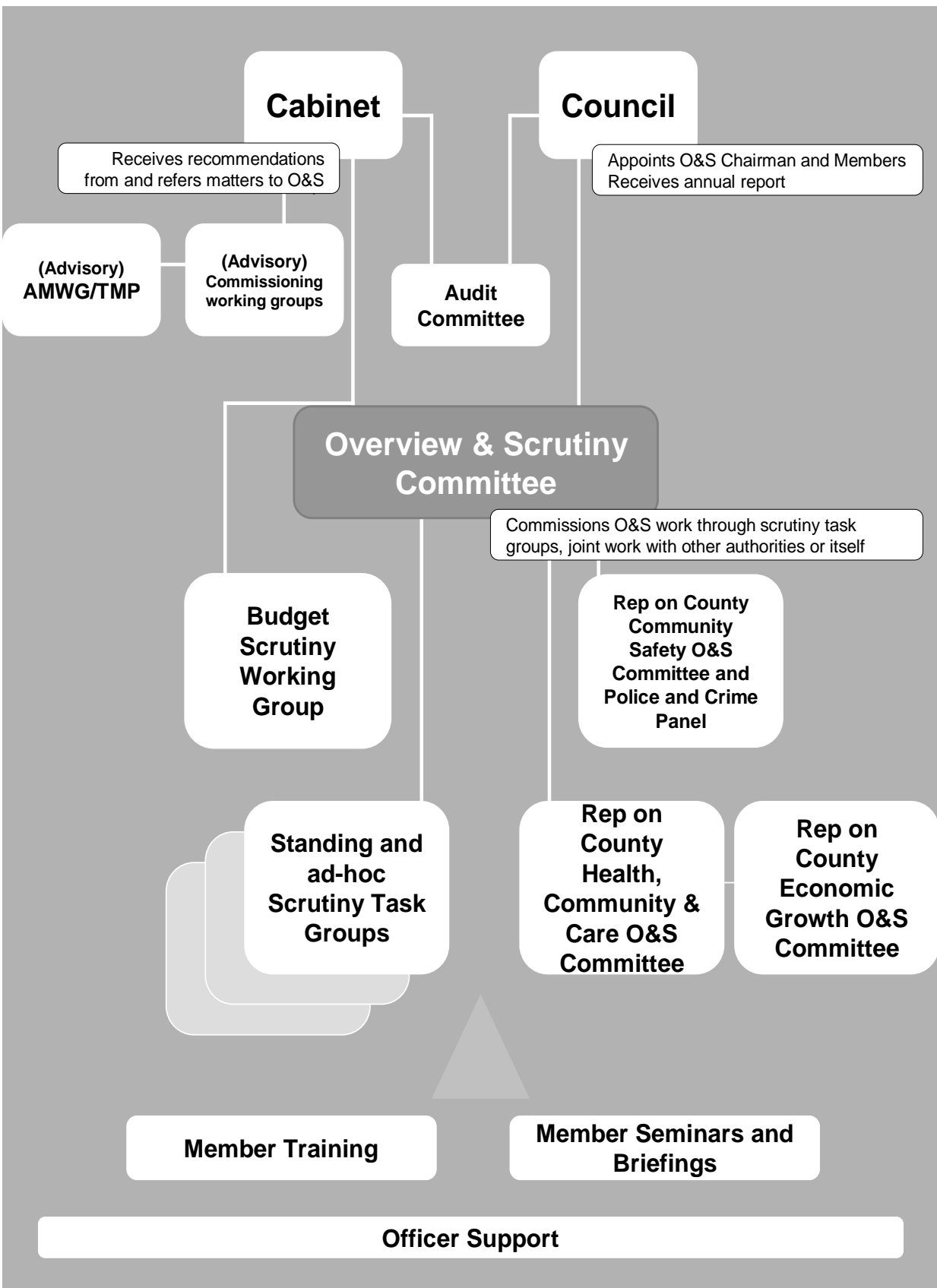
The overview and scrutiny committee has continued, through a number of scrutiny task groups, to fulfil its role in local democracy by holding the Cabinet, officers and the wider council to account. Members will be aware, as was mentioned in last year's introduction, that the council continues to go through a period of major change, organisationally, at the same time as, for example, responding to the outcome of the EU referendum and continuing to work with the other Gloucestershire authorities on proposals for devolution.

The financial pressures facing the council are no less demanding than last year and therefore the role that the budget scrutiny working group continues to play will be as important as ever. Furthermore, the implications for 100% retention of business rates and the fair funding review will have implications for the future shape of local government finance and service delivery for many years to come.

This year's report shows the breadth of the work undertaken by scrutiny and an active and keen interest to engage more widely with those who have a role to play in shaping Cheltenham as a place. The work with regard to broadband and the railway station are examples of members of scrutiny being actively engaged in things that matter to the economic prosperity of the town, as were the receipt of representations from Severn Trent and the Gloucestershire Hospitals Trust on their work and plans.

Looking forward the continued focus on improving the prosperity of Cheltenham as a place, economically, socially and culturally is going to be even more important. The challenge for scrutiny members, as was the case last year, is to ensure they actively participate, and through the scrutiny process continue to question, challenge and add value to the council's decision making processes during what is likely to be another period of change, challenge but also exciting opportunities.

3. Overview and Scrutiny Structure



Scrutiny Task Groups 2015-16

4.0 Budget scrutiny working group Chairman: Councillor Chris Nelson

The budget scrutiny working group forms a permanent part of the scrutiny arrangements at Cheltenham Borough Council. The rationale being that the budget is a complex area that cannot be scrutinised effectively as a one-off exercise. Members of this working group have built up their expertise and understanding of financial matters so that they can review the budget strategy, the bridging the gap programme and be in a position to respond to the budget proposals as well as scrutinising the business cases of major projects within the commissioning framework.

Chair of the working group, Councillor Chris Nelson said that "The Budget Scrutiny Working Group continues to do good work, examining key Council budgetary proposals and asking searching questions on a whole range of issues, including: our car parking strategy, or lack of one; long term investment to find new sources of income; energy supply; recycling budgetary under performance; capital works planning and associated delays; business rates; planning fees; new homes bonus; whether we should apply for a 4 year funding settlement; and much, much more. We have a good working relationship with officers and the working group plays an important part in the Council's financial programming."

The working group considered the budget proposals at their meeting in January 2016 and as a result made a number of recommendations to O&S which were forwarded to Cabinet. These recommendations covered their views on investment assets, the council tax freeze, pooled business rates and the use of the reserves to support the medium term financial strategy. They were all taken account of in the final budget proposals to Council in February and the Cabinet Member Finance thanked the group for their valuable input.

During the year the budget scrutiny working group have been responsive to urgent requests and have scrutinised the accommodation strategy in some detail and the financial aspects of the REST project before that went to Council. They have now been given an important action by Council to ensure that the financial benefits of the REST project are delivered.

The Director of Corporate Resources and Projects also commented that " this has been a very valuable process which has given members an opportunity to input into the development of the budget proposals and key initiatives which has added value to the process. The financial position remains very challenging and it is very both helpful and important to have a forum for deeper consideration of the issues facing the council and wider member influence over the strategy for dealing with it."

4.1 Cheltenham Spa Railway Station Scrutiny Task Group

Chair: Councillor Roger Whyborn

Task group members: Councillors Flo Clucas, Chris Mason, Dan Murch, John Payne and Max Wilkinson

Officer support: Jeremy Williamson (Cheltenham Development Task Force) and Saira Malin

Initiated in September 2014, the task group were asked to better understand the franchise renewal process. The group were also tasked with developing a wish-list of improvements to the station, transport links and rail service itself and establish if and how they were being progressed. In April 2015 the DfT extended the London train service franchise with the existing franchisee, First Great Western, by a period of three and a half years and therefore the task group did not undertake to understand the franchise renewal process further and instead focussed on the other objectives.

Having met with a variety of experts, including representatives from Network Rail, First Great Western and Stagecoach West; the group agreed a number of recommendations which were tabled with Cabinet in November 2015.

Cabinet have yet to formally respond to the recommendations of the task group but in June 2016 the Leader updated the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that;

- Collectively (ie via rail industry and Task Force) we now have secured all 5 separate funding streams
- GWR/Network Rail are progressing designs and programmes
- A positive meeting held on 27/05/16 between rail industry, CBC, Stagecoach, GCC, cycle lobby over some draft concepts, notably the forecourt changes – feedback from this will inform next iteration of proposals
- Unsure of a timeline as action/lead rests with rail industry but hope to have a revised design for wider consultation later this summer

4.2 Cycling and Walking Scrutiny Task Group

Chair: Councillor Max Wilkinson

Task group members: Councillors Tim Harman, Adam Lillywhite, Max Wilkinson and Suzanne Williams

Co-opted members: John Mallows (Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Cycling campaign), Bronwen Thornton (Walk21) and John Newbury (Living Streets)

Officer support: Rhonda Tauman, Wilf Tomaney and Tess Beck

Set up in September 2014 following the submission of a 'scrutiny topic registration form', the task group were tasked with identifying opportunities for improving provision for cycling and walking in Cheltenham and making recommendations which would facilitate these improvements.

The group met with a variety of officers from the borough and county, as well as seeking advice from experts and they even undertook a field trip to Bristol to see what could be achieved through implementing a cycling and walking strategy supported by a team of dedicated cycling officers at Bristol City Council.

The task group devised a number of recommendations and tabled these with Cabinet in November 2015.

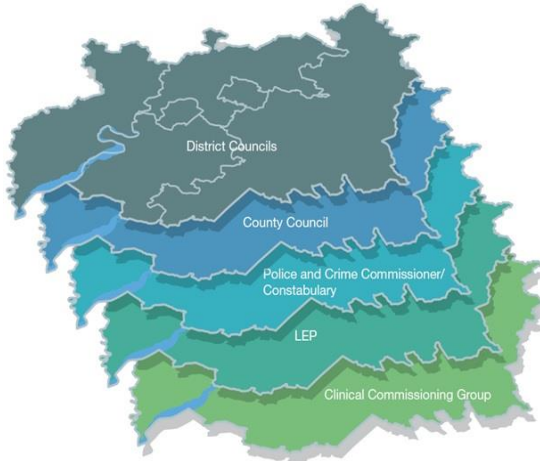
Cabinet provided a formal response to the recommendation, which it accepted in full in January 2016.

4.3 Devolution Scrutiny Task Group

Chair: Councillor Chris Mason

Task group members: Councillors Flo Clucas (now Cabinet Member), Chris Mason, Tim Harman, Colin Hay, John Payne, Roger Whyborn (now Cabinet Member) and Parish Councillor Mike Palmer. Following the elections in May – Councillors Suzanne Williams and Paul McCloskey have joined the group

Officer support: Rosalind Reeves



The scrutiny task group devolution was set up following a suggestion by the Leader of the Council at the 21 September 2015 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to identify the opportunities for Cheltenham that Members would want explored in any devolution arrangements for Gloucestershire. The group could also act as a sounding board for Members as the devolution bid develops and review any governance and scrutiny arrangements being proposed.

The group has met four times since last October. Their first meetings were concerned with getting up to speed on the bid that had been worked up over the summer and both the Leader and the Chief Executive were in attendance to answer any questions and give them the latest updates.

Overall the scrutiny task group were supportive of the initiative of working with our partners to explore the opportunities offered by devolution with the potential for more local decision making and local spending power. They were keen to engage as a critical friend and in particular assert what was good for Cheltenham in any negotiations taking place particularly with regard to local decision making on transport issues.

The task group last met in January 2016. On the 25 February Leadership Gloucestershire were advised of the Cotswold Unitary bid and then the government delayed any announcements on the Gloucestershire Bid in the Chancellor's budget statement in March. These events together with local election and referendum meant that work was put on hold for a while. The task group understand that devolution discussions are now underway again and the chair will call a meeting of the task group once there are any firm proposals for the group to discuss.

4.5 Broadband Scrutiny Task Group (joint with Gloucester City Council)

Chair: (formerly) Councillor Roger Whyborn

Task group members: Councillors Matt Babbage, Nigel Britter, Neil Hampson (Gloucester City Council), Gordon Taylor (Gloucester City Council) and Roger Whyborn

Officer support: Annette Wight and Rosalind Reeves

The task group met for the first time in October 2015, after the Overview and Scrutiny Committee set it up to undertake joint scrutiny with Gloucester City Council. Their terms of reference were as follows:

- To establish what areas in Cheltenham and Gloucester require improved broadband service
- To understand the reasons why this service has not already been improved in those areas
- To lobby the relevant organisations to see what can be done

Fastershire, who are tasked with improving broadband delivery to Gloucestershire and Herefordshire using government funding, were able to provide a map which identified problem areas in Cheltenham and Gloucester. The group then invited BT to their next meeting who gave a presentation and then answered their detailed questions. The group requested officer support in clarifying the responsibilities of Fastershire and BT for resolving some of the problem areas and to then report back to the task group.

Following the elections in May 2016, the Chairman of the task group was subsequently elected to the Cabinet. Scrutiny Members were invited to join the group and the vacancy was filled by Councillor Adam Lillywhite in June 2016. The county council advised in August that they could no longer provide officer resources to support the scrutiny task group and instead they would be reporting to the Gloucestershire Economic Growth O&S Committee. The former Chairman and Officers have drafted an interim report for the O&S committee to consider at their meeting in September which sets out a number of options on the way forward for addressing this important issue for Cheltenham.

Other scrutiny successes

5.0 Severn Trent

Representatives of Severn Trent were invited to present 'Lessons Learnt' to the committee following a 12 month programme of work across multiple locations throughout Cheltenham.

Members shared examples of some of the positive feedback that had been received from residents and businesses across the Town and congratulated Severn Trent on what members considered to have been a 'job very well done'.

5.1 Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Members were pleased to be able to welcome Professor Clair Chilvers and Dr Sally Pearson, Chair and Vice-Chair of the Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

Whilst responsibility for scrutiny of this body officially lies with the Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee at County level, the Trust accepted an invitation to meet with the committee.

They provided a short presentation and answered member questions on the future plans for the estates at Cheltenham and Gloucester.

5.2 The Cheltenham Trust

Julie Finch, Chief Executive of the Cheltenham Trust gave a presentation which set out the Trusts aims and objectives and outlined some performance highlights from their first year of operation.

5.3 Overview and Scrutiny Training

8 new councillors were elected in the May 2016 borough elections and Overview and Scrutiny training formed part of the Induction Programme offered to new members.

Whilst only 1 of the newly elected members was appointed to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 9 members in total, including some existing members who simply wanted a better understanding of the scrutiny process, attended the training.

5.4 Q&A with Cabinet Members

The committee receives Cabinet briefings at each meeting; outlining anything Cabinet feel would be of particular interest to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In addition to this, the committee recently invited the Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment to a Q&A session on the recycling review.

Members felt that this was a really useful exercise and decided to undertake to do this on a more regular basis; inviting a Cabinet Member to a Q&A session on a particular topic.

6. Overview and Scrutiny – what's next?

- The September meeting of the committee will be held at St Vincent's and St Georges Association on Winchcombe Street. The committee will be given a tour of the facilities before the meeting and a presentation on disabled access in the Town will form part of the meeting.
- Cabinet Member Corporate Services has been invited to attend the September meeting of the committee and answer questions about 2020.
- A review of the prevalence of begging and rough sleeping in the Town centre has been initiated.

- Cheltenham Festivals have been invited to attend the October meeting of the committee to discuss current performance and future plans.
- The October meeting will focus on 'Place' with the committee reviewing the strategies (as they stand) for Tourism, Car Parking and Economic Development.
- Further Overview and Scrutiny training to develop officer's skills and understanding of the scrutiny process will be arranged for later in the year.
- We would welcome any suggestions or thoughts on how we can make the overview and scrutiny process better. Please contact one of the Democratic Services team.

7. Contacts

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SCRUTINY TOPIC REGISTRATION



Do YOU have a topic that you think Cheltenham Borough Council should scrutinise? Please fill out the following form and return to Democratic Services.

Date:	
Name of person proposing topic:	
Contact details: email and telephone no:	
Suggested title of topic:	
What is the issue that scrutiny needs to address?	
What do you feel could be achieved by a scrutiny review (outcomes)	
If there a strict time constraint?	
Is the topic important to the people of Cheltenham?	
Does the topic involve a poorly performing service or high public dissatisfaction with a service?	
Is it related to the Council's corporate objectives?	
Any other comments:	