

Scrutiny Annual Report 2017 – 2018 (A summary of highlights)

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1. Foreword

Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee from May 2018: Councillor Chris Mason



As the newly elected Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, I am pleased to present the Annual Report for 2017/18.

I would like to thank Councillor Tim Harman, former Councillor Jon Walklett and Councillor John Payne for their contributions to the work of the committee during the year and I look forward to working with Councillor Payne and my new vice-chair Councillor Klara Sudbury during the coming year.

The committee is responsible for co-ordinating the Overview and Scrutiny function within the authority. It commissions scrutiny task groups to carry out the detailed work ensuring that they have clear terms of reference. It is also responsible for receiving and determining how call-ins of Cabinet decisions should be dealt with.

My vision for the future is that scrutiny should be a powerful tool to enable all members of the Council who are not part of the Executive to hold the Cabinet to account on behalf of the electorate but also to act as a critical friend in helping to develop new policies and ideas. Most important to me is that scrutiny makes a difference and achieves positive outcomes for the people of Cheltenham.

Councillor Harman as the outgoing chair had this to say about the past year for O&S:

"As well as ongoing monitoring of performance across the council, the committee has played a key role in providing input to the developing Place Strategy and Corporate Strategy. We have also requested regular updates on important projects such as North Place, West Cheltenham, Gloucestershire Airport, the Public Realm planting strategy and Leisure@ redevelopment, Waste and Recycling, and the cremators. We are providing input at key stages and holding the Cabinet and officers to account, a key part of our overview and scrutiny role.

Call-in is an essential part of the democratic process which ensures that any decisions taken by Cabinet are taken in accordance with the rules set out in our Constitution. Call-in should not be seen as a failure of decision making but rather a robust challenge to ensure high standards of decision making are maintained. We had two call-ins this year – the first in June 2017 was a call-in of the decision on the application for designation of a neighbourhood area and neighbourhood forum by the Springbank neighbourhood forum. The second was a call-in of the revised taxi and private hire licensing policy approved by Cabinet in March 2018. Both call-in meetings considered all the evidence and heard from a variety of witnesses before reaching our conclusions. The first call-in resulted in asking Cabinet to reconsider the Springbank application and Cabinet

subsequently upheld their original decision. Regarding the taxi policy the committee concluded that Cabinet's decision had been properly taken but requested that Cabinet initiated further discussions with taxi drivers regarding mitigation measures. Cabinet approved our recommendation and a report on this consultation is due to come back to the committee in October.

Again this year, the committee has given focus to people and organisations that play a key role in the Town, having welcomed, Martin Surl, Police and Crime Commissioner, the Cheltenham Guardians and we have regular updates from our representatives on health and social care scrutiny and economic growth scrutiny in Gloucestershire.

The committee continued to play a key role in shining a light on issues of concern for the Town. Amongst them, the task group which reviewed the issue of 'street people' and culminated in the recommendation that the authority adopt an integrated, coordinated, multi-agency approach with close partnership working.

As a result of a scrutiny request raised by Councillor Parsons the committee devoted their August meeting to considering the impact of race meetings on local residents and a number of positive steps were taken as a result.

Councillor Willingham raised a topic on the town wide parking strategy and the committee had a wider ranging debate on the issues for Cheltenham at their April meeting and a number of members of the public gave their views."

Thanks to Councillor Harman and I am sure you will agree that the committee covered a lot of ground last year. During my time as chair I want to reinforce the role of O&S committee as a planning and co-ordinating body and I would like to see more work carried out in scrutiny task groups where they can adopt more informal ways of working. We already have a task group set up on the impact of Urban Gulls which have been meeting over the summer.

I would also like to strengthen the role of O&S so that they are viewed by Cabinet and Officers as an essential part of the democratic process. These are challenging times for the council and we have big ambitions for Cheltenham so the check and balance that O&S can add will be invaluable going forward.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite all members to contact me and the other lead members with regard to any suggested areas of activity or of issues of concern to Cheltenham and its people and which are appropriate for scrutiny.

Finally special thanks go to Democratic Services who support all our meetings and continue to work behind the scenes to make scrutiny happen and we could not achieve what we have done without all their support.

2. Pat Pratley Chief Executive



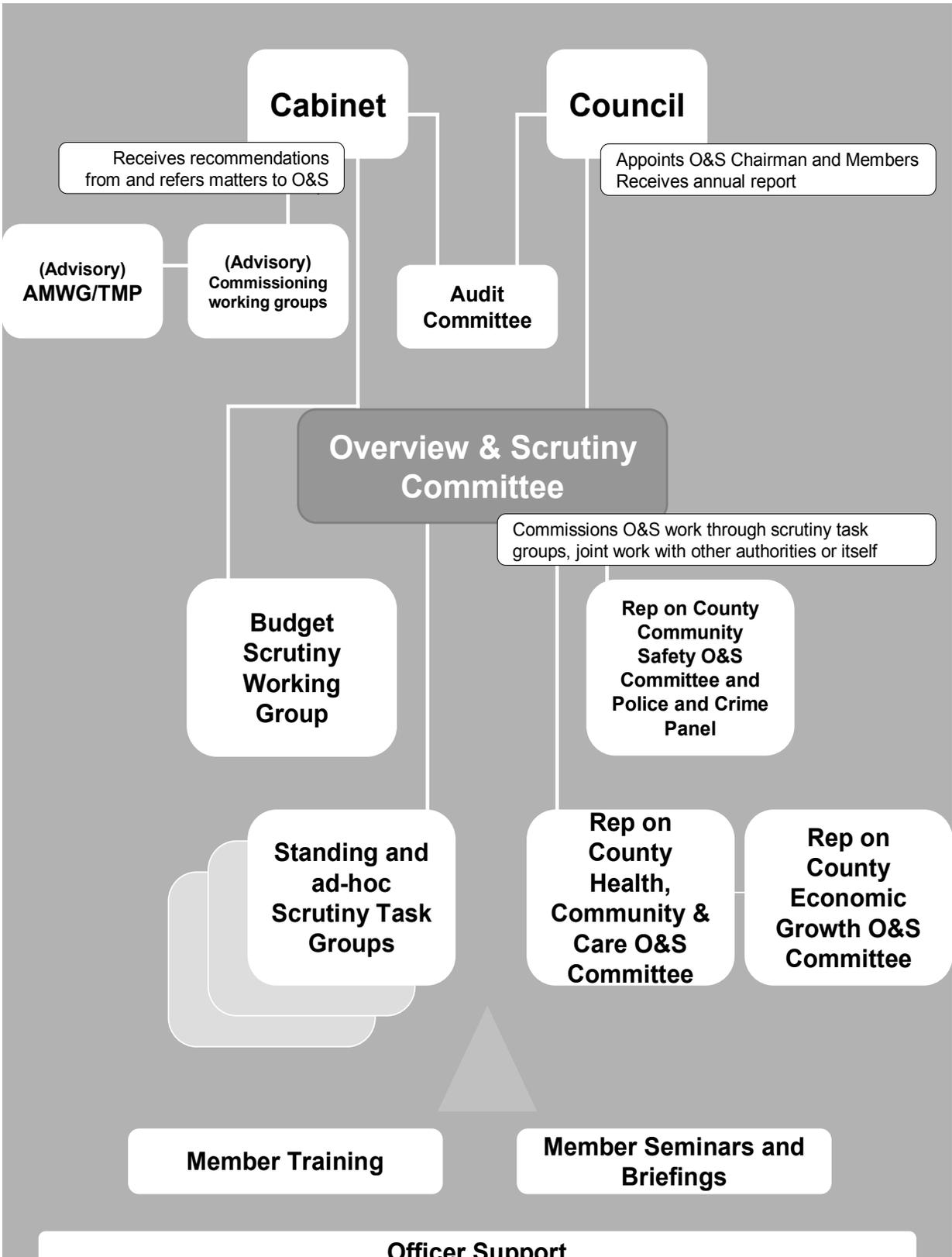
The role that the committee plays in local democracy in holding to account both members and officers is as important as ever, as the authority, the town, and in fact the whole country, continues to experience a period of significant change. It will therefore be important for the overview and scrutiny committee to continue to question, challenge and probe and provide that challenge which adds so much value to our democratic decision making process and the decisions taken by members.

Last December I was interested to read the report from the Communities and Local Government Select Committee following an inquiry into whether the overview and scrutiny model was meeting its objectives and how decision-makers could be best held to account. The Committee's report on overview and scrutiny in local government felt that scrutiny was often not held in high enough esteem, leading to a lack of constructive challenge to improve services for residents. It recommended measures to strengthen the independence of overview and scrutiny committees and I asked our Democratic Services team to reflect on how our O&S arrangements in Cheltenham matched up to these recommendations. I am pleased to say that our arrangements stood up very well in the following areas:

- We do regularly review our scrutiny arrangements - following recommendations from the LGA peer review of 2014, O&S has played a more important role in scrutinising key projects and prioritising its work plan.
- O&S welcomes attendance of Cabinet Members at O&S meetings and their involvement in task groups
- Our Constitution already requires us to have an opposition chair
- Confidential items are shared with O&S when relevant
- We have a designated officer in Democratic Services to support the committee and relevant Members of Exec Board attend to give support when required
- We organise regular officer training and include an introduction to O&S as part of our new Members induction
- We have had Members of the public along to our scrutiny meetings - though we would always welcome more
- We have a protocol in place which underpins any requests we make for officers from other decision making bodies to attend scrutiny to give evidence with regard to the impact decisions made in other places have on Cheltenham

In conclusion it is always good to review the way we do things and I am sure the new chair will be keen to make some changes. I really value the work that scrutiny has done over the past year and as Chief Executive, myself and my Exec Board team will continue to give the members our full support.

3. Overview and Scrutiny Structure



4. Scrutiny Task Groups 201-18

4.0 Budget scrutiny working group

Chairman: Councillor Matt Babbage

Task group members: Victoria Atherstone, Martin Horwood, Nigel Britter, John Payne.
Officer support: Sarah Didcote, Beverley Thomas

The Budget Scrutiny Working Group is a small but effective group that keeps a careful watch on in-year spend and the developing budget for the following year. During the year we took an active interest in all budget areas. We had our usual opportunity to scrutinise the budget proposals for 2017/18 and we concluded that the group were largely supportive of them and in particular welcomed future property investment as a means of generating a new income. Achieving a balanced budget will continue to be a challenge for this Council and therefore there is a continuing role for the budget scrutiny working group throughout the year.

The Chief Financial Officer commented that " this has been a 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. BSWG have also provided an independent review of the financial performance of the council during the year, as well as considering the final outturn position. The financial position remains challenging and it is 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 Street People Scrutiny Task Group

Chair: Councillor Louis Savage

Task group members: Councillors Colin Hay, Chris Nelson, Dennis Parsons, John Payne, Louis Savage and Simon Wheeler
Officer support: Saira Malin

Set-up in response to concerns from members of the public and local businesses that there had been an increase in the number of 'street people' in Cheltenham, the group were tasked with: establishing the extent and nature of the problem in Cheltenham; understanding the responsibilities and powers of Cheltenham Borough Council and; assessing whether the existing support networks could be more effective.

The task group met on three occasions and spoke to Council Officers and representatives from other agencies and organisations. From the data that was presented it was evident that there had been an increase in the numbers of 'street people' and that a large proportion of these individuals were not in fact homeless. They were instead, begging to fund a drug addiction or to buy alcohol and/or causing a nuisance (littering, urinating and defecating).

Discussions had touched on some of the successes that Gloucester City Council had, had in addressing this very issue through Project Solace. Having met with representatives from Project Solace the group agreed that it represented a proven means of successfully

dealing with the issue, and one that Officers at Cheltenham Borough Council had voiced support for.

Prior to the task group submitting their final report to the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee, Cabinet resolved that Cheltenham Borough Council should join the Solace Partnership to tackle priority anti-social behaviour. This decision was welcomed by the task group, not only because it planned to make this very recommendation, but for the fact that the decision represented a solution to the issues that the task group had identified as part of its review.

Having considered the final report of the task group in June 2017, O&S Committee endorsed the recommendations and commended the task group for producing a report which they felt demonstrated the sensitive and measured approach that the task group had adopted when undertaking the review.

The STG recommendations were accepted by Cabinet on the 11 July 2017 and a briefing on progress came back to O&S in the autumn.

5. Cabinet Member Working Groups

Last year when our Annual Report went to Council, it was suggested that we also mention the work of non-Executive Members on Cabinet Member Working Groups. We would highlight that these are fundamentally different to scrutiny task groups in that they are set up and chaired by the Cabinet Member and their aim is to assist the Cabinet Member in formulating their final report to Cabinet. By contrast scrutiny task groups are scrutiny led and can only make recommendations to Cabinet or Council or another body. However what they do have in common is that very often Cabinet Member working groups are helping to formulate new policy and offer challenge which are both key parts of the overview and scrutiny function.

The working groups this year include:

Cemetery and Crematorium

Waste and Recycling

Asset Management Working Group – property and asset related issues

Planning and Liaison

Newly formed is the Members ICT Working group so we look forward to their report.

6. Overview and Scrutiny – what's next?

- Officers from Gloucestershire County Council are attending our October meeting to discuss the implementation of the Cheltenham Transport Plan.
- We will be following up on our recommendations regarding the taxi policy in October.
- We will be receiving the annual report from Publica in October and will have the opportunity to question the Managing Director and Chair.

- The scrutiny task group looking at Urban Gulls is already underway and aims to report in time for any costing implications of its recommendations to be considered as part of the budget process.

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:	