

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
VALUE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
3 July 2014 (7.30 - 9.00 pm)**

Present:

Councillors Clarence Barrett (Chairman), Philippa Crowder (Vice-Chair), John Crowder, Steven Kelly, Robby Misir, Barbara Matthews, Barry Mugglestone, David Johnson and Graham Williamson

No apologies for absence were received.

1 COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The membership of the Committee was noted.

2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 April 2014 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PRESENTATION

The Committee received a presentation giving an insight into how Overview and Scrutiny worked in Havering. It was important that the Committee understood the difference between Executive decisions and those made by the Council. Members were informed that Council functions were explicitly the responsibility of the full Council and/or its Committees or staff on their behalf. Whereas Executive functions, were the responsibility of the Executive, meaning the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members, or staff on their behalf. The principal interest of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) was the Executive decision making function.

Overview and Scrutiny was the function by which Council decisions, or indeed any actions taken in connection with Council functions, could be reviewed and/or scrutinised. Overview and Scrutiny Committees were able to make reports and/or recommendations to each of full Council, Cabinet or any policy committee. These reports could be in connection with the discharge of any functions.

The Committee noted that the former local government minister, Nick Raynsford MP, once stated *“Scrutiny is a powerful tool to help identify weaknesses in existing policy and practice, as well as driving improvement”*

In Havering there were seven overview and scrutiny committees, five dealt with various aspects of Council services and were aligned with the overall goals of the Council. They were:

- Children and Learning
- Environment
- Individuals
- Towns and Communities
- Value

The other two Committees – Crime & Disorder and Health were principally outward looking and scrutinised local crime and disorder-related issues and local health services respectively.

The Committee noted that only non-Cabinet members could sit on an overview and scrutiny committee, however there was nothing to prevent a Committee meeting with or questioning a relevant Cabinet member in order to aid aspects of scrutiny. Overview and Scrutiny meetings were open to the public and anyone, including Cabinet Members, could attend.

Each overview and scrutiny committee consisted of between six and nine members. Under the political breakdown rules, the political breakdown of the seats reflected, as far as was practicable, the make-up of the Council as a whole.

The Committee was informed that a major part of their work would be undertaking Topic Groups, either as part of an agreed work plan, or because a specific issue had arisen that needed investigation. The Committee itself would approve the terms of reference and the scope of its Topic Groups and could set parameters within which they would work. A recent change was that Council had agreed that Topic Groups could include – or indeed be wholly comprised of – members who were not actually members of the parent OSC. Therefore if a member not on a particular OSC had expertise or an interest in an area being investigated by a Topic Group, he or she could take part if the committee agreed to their inclusion as a member of the Topic Group.

The factors for successful scrutiny carried out by Topic Groups were outlined to the Committee. The more tightly and realistically framed that the recommendation was, the more likely they were to be adopted/implemented. Members were encouraged to look at various aspects of Council services, by meeting Council officers, holding discussions with the public and community groups and undertaking site visits both within Havering and other local authorities to gain an understanding of the situations in other Councils.

The Committee was informed of the call-in process and how this would be dealt with by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The officer explained

that often a special meeting of the OSC would be called to deal with the matter.

The Councillor Call for Action (CCA) was a power that allowed any Member to bring a matter of concern to an OSC. The issue could not relate to planning, licensing, health and crime and disorder issues, as separate powers covered these areas. Members must have attempted to resolve the issue directly with the department concerned prior to bringing them to scrutiny in this way.

The Committee was informed that one change, enacted by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, was the requirement of each Council to nominate a Statutory Scrutiny Officer. This person was required to promote the role of Overview and scrutiny in the authority as well as support all Members and officers in their work and dealings with Overview and Scrutiny. In Havering the Statutory Scrutiny Officer was Andrew Beesley, Committee Administration Manager.

During a brief debate Members discussed the possibility of encouraging "one day" scrutiny exercises/Topic Groups and suggested perhaps looking to see if other local authorities had had any experience of such practice.

Members also discussed the nature of the scrutiny carried out and agreed that previously Committees had challenged the Executive rather than challenging the operations of the Council.

Some Members also questioned the previous amount of presentations that had been put before the Committees which had effectively "strangled" the work of the Committees, forcing members to proceed with requisitions of Executive decisions rather than discuss them prior to the decision making.

Members agreed that all Topic Group recommendations need to be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed) and costed effectively.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

4 **COMMITTEE'S WORK PLAN 2014/15**

The Committee considered a report which outlined a draft work programme for the municipal year 2014/15.

Several possible areas for scrutiny had been identified at a pre-meet between the Chairman and a member of staff from Committee Administration.

The Committee made the following points on each of the possible areas of scrutiny.

oneSource/One Oracle

Members commented that it would be useful to see a list of the services covered by the oneSource agreement and the report that had previously gone before Council. It was also agreed that a timetable of the review process and a copy of the management structure would benefit members. Members also discussed the benefits of possibly talking to staff from the London Borough of Newham to gain an insight into their perception of the arrangement. A copy of the One Oracle presentation would also be of benefit to members.

Budget Review

Members agreed that the previous information, regarding budgets, supplied to Councillors had been rather lightweight and meaningless. It was felt that more information regarding what savings were being achieved and where underspends were occurring would be beneficial to member scrutiny.

It was suggested that a Topic Group scrutinising the Council's reserves would be of benefit as reserves were a "value" consideration.

Corporate Performance Indicators

Members agreed that there had been some improvement lately in the way that the performance indicators were presented to the Committee but it was agreed that a review of the information provided was needed. It was agreed that the new members of the Committee should see sight of previous performance indicator reports so that they could get a feel of what had previously been presented to the Committee.

IT Review

Following discussions it was suggested that the following areas within IT be scrutinised in the future.

oneSource IT provision
Members portal
StreetCare reporting system

Asset Review

Members agreed that it would be beneficial to scrutinise the Council's assets in particular the number of Right To Buy applications that were being received and completed and which of the Council's properties were money making and which ones were not.

NNDR Review

It was agreed that members wished to see how businesses qualified for Business Rate relief and what the performance levels were of Business Rate debt recovery.

Customer Services Review

During discussions members commented that the Customer Services review was also linked with the IT review. As had been mentioned previously there were problems with the StreetCare reporting portal that allowed the closing of cases when orders had been raised and not when the job had been signed off to a satisfactory standard. It was agreed that transparency was important in several issues in particular when spends of over £500 continued to happen then officers needed to look at why those works were not incorporated into a single contract.

Following the discussions it was agreed that some reports, particularly those dealing with budgets, perhaps would be better viewed in hard copy as perusing the reports electronically could prove difficult.

It was agreed that electronic reports/links would be forwarded to members and if any members wished to receive the reports in hard copy then arrangements would be made for them to be available.

Chairman