

Overview and Scrutiny :-

A guide to overview and scrutiny in Central Bedfordshire

(Published in August 2014)

Not Protected

Introduction

The Council's Medium Term Plan sets out an ambition to ensure that Central Bedfordshire is a great place to live. To deliver this aspiration it is important that the overview and scrutiny (O&S) process supports the Council's approach in particular by:-

- Focusing on customer experience and valuing the contributions of residents;
- Being open and transparent; and
- Focusing on efficiency and value.

This guide aims to provide guidance to residents, contributors and participants on the role of O&S at Central Bedfordshire Council and the way in which this role is undertaken. The guidance sets out the key principles in relation to the Council's O&S process and the ways in which others can get involved. There is also a toolkit that is available, which provides more detailed and useful guidance and best practice for officers when engaging with the process to ensure that the process adds value and supports the Council's aspirations.

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

The Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) process introduced to local authorities in 2000 to provide a mechanism for engaging non-Executive Councillors and residents in the Council's decision making process. O&S provides an opportunity for elected Councillors and residents to discuss and comment on the Council's policies, plans and strategies before they are implemented. In Central Bedfordshire the specific roles of O&S are to...

...provide an 'overview'

Overview items or matters for information purposes are received by Members outside of committee meetings in detailed briefings and quarterly updates to raise awareness of key issues for Members and the public and where appropriate will be added to the work programme of the relevant committee so that it can be considered in more detail.

...deliver a robust challenge

OSCs challenge policies and strategies and poor performance to ensure the Council and partners comply with statutory duties and there is a suitable process for holding people to account by focusing in detail on those issues where Members can add value. OSCs have a statutory role in scrutinising crime and community safety matters and any 'substantial' changes in health services. OSCs are also receive call-ins of items where Members wish to review decisions that have been taken.

...engage public & partners

OSCs encourage public engagement in the democratic process, engaging proactively with residents and partners to develop working programmes that reflect issues of concern and encourage residents to attend meetings. The OSCs can also receive petitions from members of the public where the matters are relevant to their terms of reference. OSCs are mindful of the role of partnerships to ensure that where possible duplication of effort is minimised.

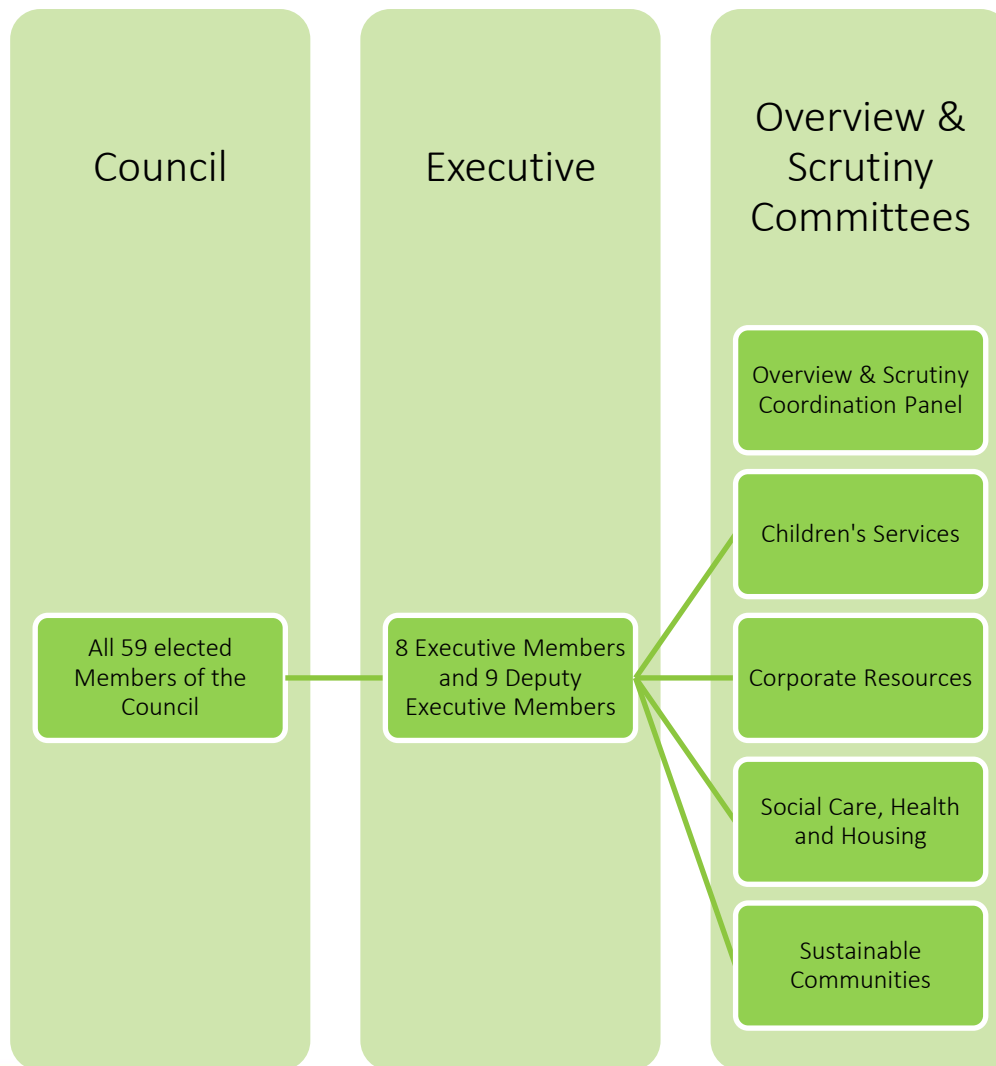
...drive improvement

OSCs drive improvement of 'place' by tracking the outcomes of meetings and providing opportunities to learn from the best practice of others.

How Scrutiny fits into the Council's committee process

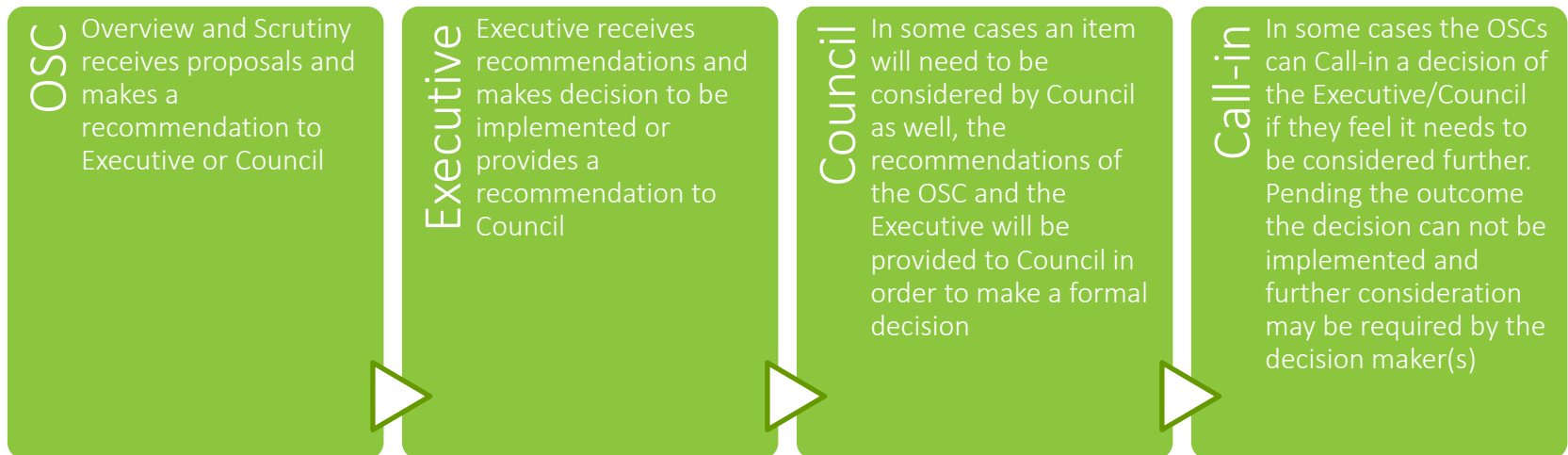
In order to deliver the O&S function the Council has several overview and scrutiny committees (OSCs) that each have specific areas of responsibility. OSCs, made up of non-Executive Councillors are held throughout the year to consider proposals and whilst they do not make decisions they provide recommendations to the Executive or full Council. These recommendations are considered before the Council makes any final decisions. There are four OSCs in Central Bedfordshire, each of which meet seven to ten times a year and are aligned to the Council's services. There is also a Co-ordination Panel (OSCP) consisting of the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the OSCs, which meets quarterly.

In addition to the elected Members, there are three parent governors and two diocesan representatives, one for each of the Church of England and Roman Catholic churches appointed to the Children's Services OSC. A representative of Central Bedfordshire Healthwatch also attends meetings of the Social Care, Health and Housing OSC as an observer.



How Scrutiny fits into the Council's committee process

If committee members feel it is necessary they can also “call-in” decisions of the Executive. During a call-in a committee will re-consider a decision that has been made to determine whether the decision should be implemented straight away or referred back to the decision maker to be reconsidered.



Work programming

In order to plan ahead effectively each of the OSCs maintains an annual work programme of the items that Members would like to consider. These items can arise from various sources including:-

- Suggestions by the Council's directorates;
- Requests of Committee Members;
- Items on the Executive Forward Plan;
- Requests of members of the public.

Each OSC is responsible for its own work programme but for each of the items that are added it is important that there is the potential for Members to add value during their consideration of the topic. Topics will usually include those that are on the Executive Forward Plan or those policies/strategies at an earlier stage of development where a steer would be helpful on the direction that the Council should go in. The OSCs will not consider individual complaints but will always consider whether an item is for information purposes or if there is the potential to add value. Those items where Members can have the greatest contribution will usually be prioritised on the work programme. Further detail on work programming is included in the toolkit.

Work programmes are regularly updated and in addition to printing a detailed work programme with each OSC agenda a summary of the work programmes for each of the OSCs is available online and regularly updated.

Consolidated work programme:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/committees-and-decision-making/overview-and-scrutiny.aspx>

Examples of items considered by the OSCs

The Councils Constitution sets out the operational procedures for the OSC as well as the topics that are normally considered. A full copy of the Constitution is available on the Council's website and an example of the topics that are usually considered is outlined below:-

(<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/modgov/ecSDDisplay.aspx?name=Constitution&clean=1>)

Corporate Resources OSC	Children's Services OSC	Social Care, Health & Housing OSC	Sustainable Communities OSC
<p>Matters relating to the Improvement and Corporate Services Directorate and Financial Services including communications; customer service, partnerships and performance; Community Strategy and corporate planning; procurement; HR; legal & democratic services; and property and asset management.</p>	<p>Matters relating to the Children's Services Directorate including children's specialist services; learning and school support; development and commissioning; integrated services (Children's Trust, youth support and extended schools).</p>	<p>Matters relating to the Social Care, Health and Housing Directorate including independent living and care management; landlord services; homelessness, private sector housing. Also all statutory matters relating to scrutiny of the NHS.</p>	<p>Matters relating to the Regeneration and Business and Support Services Directorates including strategic planning, housing strategy, transport and infrastructure; economic growth, regeneration; highways and parking; waste and recycling; community safety. Also all statutory matters relating to scrutiny of crime and community safety matters.</p>

Task force reviews

In addition to OSC meetings the Committees can also establish task forces to undertake in-depth reviews of a particular topic. These task forces involve a smaller number of committee Members who will review an issue in more detail on behalf of a committee. The task force generally usually provides an opportunity to receive and consider evidence from various sources in more depth prior to drafting a report and agreeing recommendations. Due to the detail that is often considered the task force meetings will usually take place over several months and will meet on numerous occasions. Task forces will sometimes commission research or consultations and will normally invite witnesses or professionals to attend meetings to help discuss the topic.

The recommendations of a task force will be submitted to the committee that asked for the review to be undertaken along with a report outlining the conclusions of the review. The recommendations and findings are discussed in public prior to be presented to the relevant decision maker who is usually asked to report back after a period of two months on the ways in which the recommendations have been taken forward.

Whilst the process for undertaking detailed task force reviews will depend on the subject being considered an illustration of the normal process is included in the appended toolkit.

Speaking at meetings & further information

The residents of Central Bedfordshire are Overview and Scrutiny's most useful resource for finding out what the key issues are. Residents, community groups, local businesses and others that live or work in the area can make valuable contributions to much of the work Overview and Scrutiny does.

Meetings of the OSCs are normally held in public and residents are encouraged to attend to ask questions and make comments on the reports on the agenda. There is an item on each OSC agenda entitled “questions, statements & deputations” during which members of the public can ask questions on any item on the agenda. Members of the public are required to ask to speak prior to the start of the meeting and provide us with two days notice of any questions that they would like to raise so that we can try to provide an answer at the meeting. Where we do not receive advance notice of any questions it may not always be possible to answer your question on the day.

The work programmes of the OSCs are also flexible, so if there is an issue that you would like to see included on an agenda or if you would just like to find out more about Overview and Scrutiny at Central Bedfordshire Council please contact the Overview and Scrutiny team on scrutiny@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk or 0300 300 8301.

Details regarding forthcoming meetings, including copies of the reports and a list of future meeting dates can be obtained from the Overview and Scrutiny website at the following link:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/committees-and-decision-making/overview-and-scrutiny.aspx>