

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

20 November 2018

Outcomes from the Overview and Scrutiny (OS) Councillor Workshop:

Making OS meetings effective – 10 October 2018

Purpose

1. To report the main discussion points and outcomes from this workshop held on 10 October 2018 as part of the OS learning and development programme.

Background

2. The Management Committee has a responsibility to ensure that those councillors undertaking OS activity have appropriate knowledge and skills. In June 2018 the Committee approved a learning and development (L&D) programme for OS councillors during the 2017-21 council.
3. The L&D programme includes a programme of thematic workshops delivered inhouse. The workshop themes were chosen following a survey of non-executive councillors asking them to prioritise a range of topics and competencies relevant to OS work. 'Making OS meetings effective' was voted the most important topic to address and was therefore the first event held. The next workshops to be delivered will address 'Gathering and using evidence' and 'Questioning and listening skills'.

Event evaluation

4. The workshop was held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, on 10 October 2018. The session comprised information briefings from Scrutiny officers, open discussion and participative group exercises.
5. Six evaluations on the event were received and these scored it highly across all areas (including content, activities, facilitation and support, venue and meeting its objectives).

Workshop objectives and findings

6. The stated objectives of the workshop were to explore,
 - a. What an effective OS meeting is (outcomes)

- b. What 'ingredients' do they need (process)
- c. In Wiltshire, what is and isn't working well
- d. How can we continue to improve?

What is an effective OS meeting?

7. There was general agreement amongst attendees that an effective OS meeting,
 - Meets its particular objectives
 - Addresses agreed priorities, at the right time
 - Draws conclusions from evidence – not anecdote or politics
 - Includes robust, respectful challenge of decision-makers
 - Leads to constructive recommendations being put forward
 - Values and encourages everyone's contribution (including co-opted members and stakeholders)
 - Enables to the public to engage (where appropriate)
 - Decides clear next steps.

8. In order to deliver this, an effective OS meeting requires,
 - Good timekeeping i.e. committee meetings preferably not longer than 2.5 hours
 - An appropriate venue and a seating layout that clarifies attendees' roles
 - Clear and relevant information being provided to councillors in good time and in manageable quantities
 - Attendees having read the information provided and developed lines of enquiry
 - OS councillors and co-optees asking relevant, lay questions, that are not repetitious
 - OS councillors taking a countywide rather than parochial approach
 - The public being supported to watch and/or engage whenever possible
 - Witnesses providing clear, candid answers – including witnesses from the 'front line' when possible
 - Resolutions that accurately capture the group consensus.

Current strengths and development areas of OS meetings in Wiltshire

9. There was general agreement that the following are current strengths of OS meetings in Wiltshire:
 - Informative pre-meeting information briefings
 - Effective chairing
 - A clear purpose
 - Addressing the right priorities
 - Generally evidence-based rather than political
 - The right questions being asked.

10. There was general agreement that in the following areas practice could improve or be delivered more consistently. Also included are suggestions regarding how these might be addressed:

Development area	Suggested action
Officers providing clear, prompt notification of changes to meeting times	Relevant teams to be advised
Officers providing reports that are manageable in length	Report authors to supported to provide concise reports
Councillors always reading reports prior to meetings	Raised for Committee awareness
<p>Engaging with services more to promote deeper councillor understanding of 'on the ground' delivery</p> <p>Involving more 'front line' delivers (as witnesses)</p>	<p>OS chairmen and Scrutiny officers to explore all possible opportunities to do this, potentially to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-meeting info briefings • Visits to service providers • Task groups meeting operational staff
Greater engagement with the public	OS activities (particularly task groups) to be supported to do so by the Scrutiny team, whenever opportunities exist
Meeting with the Executive and partners more often to develop the forward work programme.	A new programme of work planning meetings to be scheduled with the Executive
Holding OS meetings in different communities – 'taking OS to the people'	<p>Where issues have a local emphasis, OS meetings to be held in the locality where possible</p> <p>Relevant guidance on this to be added to the OS Task Group Protocol</p>
Having the right (committee) meeting room layout to clarify different roles	Relevant teams to be advised, including circulation of the select committee room layout guide
Avoiding repeating questions already asked	Raised for Committee awareness
Taking a countywide rather than parochial perspective	Raised for Committee awareness

Proposal

11. To note the discussion points and outcomes of the OS councillor workshop held on 10 October 2018.
 12. To note that further workshops on 'Gathering and using evidence' and 'Questioning and listening skills' will now be arranged.
 13. To note the strengths of OS meetings in Wiltshire listed under paragraph 9.
 14. To agree the actions listed under paragraph 10 to address the development areas identified.
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Appendices

None