

Thurrock's Democratic Services Scrutiny Self-Evaluation

<u>CfPS Scrutiny Evaluation Framework Characteristics</u>	<u>Thurrock's Democratic Services scrutiny process</u>
<p>1. Overview and scrutiny (O&S) has a clearly defined and valued role in the council's improvement and governance arrangements.</p>	<p>The current administration follows a pre-scrutiny process where all reports with key decisions that are going to Cabinet go through O&S for Members of the Committee to scrutinise beforehand. In addition, Chairs of O&S can attend Cabinet meetings to ask questions and make recommendations to an item on the agenda that relates to their O&S committee.</p> <p>Every year the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report is brought to Full Council which offers all Members a chance to debate the function of O&S and also raises the public profile of O&S.</p>
<p>2. O&S has the dedicated officer support it needs from officers who are able to undertake independent research effectively, and provide councillors with high-quality analysis, advice and training.</p>	<p>Dedicated support is provided by Democratic Services who ensure O&S runs smoothly by organising meetings, checking the quality of reports and being the liaison between Committee Members and Officers. To give Councillors a better understanding of items on the agenda Democratic Services arrange site visits when Councillors request them. For example, Members of Cleaner, Greener and Safer O&S had visited rubbish and waste sites to analyse potential problems of rubbish and waste processes and sites.</p> <p>At the beginning of each year the work programme for O&S Committees is drawn up by Democratic Services who work with the relevant Director to discuss which reports are due. After each meeting the work programme is updated should anything be added at the request of the Committee. Democratic Services ensure these reports are received and published on time, in line with statutory obligations.</p> <p>O&S reports are detailed with evidence and research by council officers. Officers benchmark against other councils on statistical data. For example, in Children's Services O&S, Children's Social Care reports compare Thurrock's child assessment rates with the England average, Thurrock's statistical neighbours and with East</p>

	<p>England.</p> <p>A Director and report authors attend the meetings and are usually able to answer Members' questions in detail and provide answers by email for any questions that require further detail or data. Reports are also brought back to the Committee when requested and Democratic Services ensure this is reflected in the work programme.</p>
<p>3. O&S provides viable and well evidenced solutions to recognised problems.</p>	<p>Most of the reports brought to O&S provide the Committee with an update on performance and plans within the service.</p> <p>Where a service has identified areas requiring more scrutiny or made aware of issues, solutions are given and are supported with evidence as to why/how it would work. For example, the Orsett Hospital Task and Finish Group had been created from the Health and Wellbeing O&S to look at the services and proposed closure of Orsett Hospital.</p> <p>Reports also ask for the Committee's approval of solutions before going ahead as can be seen in the Tree Planting Strategy in Cleaner, Greener and Safer O&S. Update reports on projects also seek comments/approval from Committee Members before moving onto the next stage or submitting a design e.g. the Planning, Transport, Regeneration O&S is regularly updated on the Purfleet Regeneration project at each stage of development. This gives the Committee a vital opportunity to offer alternatives to the suggested recommendations.</p>
<p>4. O&S councillors have the training and development opportunities they need to undertake their role effectively.</p>	<p>Members are provided with scrutiny training (Committee Skills Member training) every municipal year. Individual and specialised scrutiny committee training is provided to Committee Members e.g. Health & Wellbeing Adult Social Care Member training, Preventing Child Sexual Exploitation Member training. There are also opportunities for Members to attend external training sessions throughout the year.</p>

<p>5. The process receives effective support from the council's corporate management team who ensures that information provided to O&S is of high quality and is provided in a timely and consistent manner.</p>	<p>There is effective support from the council's corporate management team who are aware of the scrutiny process in that key decision reports are to go through O&S before Cabinet.</p> <p>To further ensure the quality of O&S reports, they are discussed at Directors' Board before final submission. In addition, each O&S is supported by the relevant Director who is the 'sponsor' and they would attend each Committee meeting to provide support to reports or answer questions.</p>
<p>6. O&S is councillor-led, takes into account the views of the public, partners and other stakeholders, and balances the prioritisation of community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance.</p>	<p>O&S is led by Councillors as they can request relevant reports to the Committee and influence service operations. For example, in Health and Wellbeing O&S, during a verbal update from Healthwatch, an issue was raised in relation to SEERIC and the intended outcome was for a separate report to be brought back to the Committee for discussion. Additionally, Councillors can put forward a motion at Full Council requesting a relevant O&S to look into an issue. For example, a motion was raised requesting the Cleaner, Greener and Safer O&S to look into Tree Planting in which a report detailing a strategy to this was provided and agreed on by the Committee.</p> <p>The Lower Thames Crossing is a prime example of prioritising Thurrock's community concerns, so much that a Task Force was set up for sole devotion to the opposition of the LTC. To ensure the local community had their own voice, Councillors called for representatives of the local community to be involved and these 3 representatives are from:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thames Crossing Action Group. 2. Residents. 3. Thurrock Business Board.
<p>7. O&S meetings and activities are well-planned, chaired effectively and make best use of the resources available to it.</p>	<p>O&S meetings are planned in advance and agreed at Annual Council at the start of each municipal year. Extraordinary meetings or the setup of task force groups will usually have meetings planned at least a month in advance</p>

	<p>after confirmation of Member nominations and availability.</p> <p>Briefings are held before Committee meetings which are organised between Democratic Services and the Chair. With the agenda the reports arise from the work programme which is a combination of Officer and Member initiative.</p> <p>Available resources for meetings include rooms and IT equipment which are always available for Officers to use when booked in advance. There is also a small budget available for project work.</p>
<p>8. Decision-makers give public account for themselves at O&S committees for their portfolio responsibilities.</p>	<p>Portfolio Holders rarely attend O&S meetings at present but Chairs could invite them to attend where necessary to answer the Committee's questions. This can be the case where a key decision report is by the Portfolio Holder. For example, Councillor Halden had attended Children's Services O&S to present and answer questions on the Pilot Development for Head Start Housing for Vulnerable Young People and Care Leavers.</p>
<p>9. O&S is recognised by the Executive and Corporate Management Team as an important council mechanism for community engagement, and facilitates greater citizen involvement in governance.</p>	<p>Most reports going to Cabinet usually go through O&S first. Cabinet can request for reports to go back to O&S which had been the case for the Grounds Maintenance Charge in Housing O&S as they had the research background into the charge so were able to look into it further.</p> <p>In addition, a review into reducing the timeframe for submitting questions had been looked into by the Constitution Working Group which had been agreed at Full Council. This facilitated greater citizen involvement and gave more importance to the function of O&S.</p>
<p>10. O&S is characterised by effective communication to raise awareness of, and encourage participation in democratic accountability.</p>	<p>The Communications Team in the Council tweets of upcoming O&S committee meetings to notify the public. The public occasionally attend and they are able to ask questions or present a petition as set out in the Constitution under Chapter 4, Part 3 – section 5.</p>

	<p>In 2017, public participation in the democratic process was reviewed by the Constitution Working Group with a report from Democratic Services. The improvements made from this were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council website was amended for better clarity. • The timeframe for the public to submit questions was reduced. • Clarity was given to the Mayor on accepting late questions at their discretion.
<p>11. O&S operates non-politically and deals effectively with sensitive political issues, tension and conflict.</p>	<p>There is no evidence of partisanship within the function and the Monitoring Officer has not received any complaints or evidence to the contrary.</p>
<p>12. O&S builds trust and good relationships with a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders.</p>	<p>Trust is built with external stakeholders by ensuring solutions from council services have a positive impact. For example, Health and Wellbeing O&S works together with the NHS and Planning, Transport, Regeneration O&S works with the C2C on train service times. Representatives would attend O&S to provide reports and take comments and questions from Members.</p> <p>Other external stakeholders also attend O&S Committees as Co-Opted Members and to provide updates. HealthWatch attends the Health and Wellbeing O&S to provide the Committee with regular meetings. In Cleaner, Greener and Safer O&S, Essex Police had attended a recent meeting for the Gang Related Violence Update Report to give the report together with Thurrock Community Partnership.</p>
<p>13. O&S enables the 'voice' of local people and communities across the area to be heard as part of decision and policy-making processes.</p>	<p>Councillors on O&S Committees represent the 'voice' of the local community. Many questions and comments posed by Councillors are done so with the local community in mind and discussions revolve around how a solution or decision would impact the local community. For example, on the A13 Widening Scheme report in Planning, Transport, Regeneration O&S, the</p>

Appendix 1

	<p>Committee had raised concerns on disruptions and noise to local residents to which Officers had given solutions to reduce the impact of the works.</p>
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