

SCRUTINY PANEL – REVIEW OF SCRUTINY

QUESTIONS – EXTERNAL INTERVIEWS

Leading question:	Checklist of subjects to cover:
1. Can you tell us about how your overview and scrutiny committees are structured and the sorts of things they get involved in?	
Cherwell – three the Community, Environment and Resources Select Committees.	(1)How many committees?
Cherwell Community Select – leisure and housing, the cultural, housing and rural strategies, concessionary fares and local transport, relationships with, and grants to, voluntary organisations/community associations and relationships with other local authorities (including parish councils); Environment Select – development (including planning control but not individual planning applications), the Local Development Framework, amenity services (recycling and refuse collection), strategies relating to the environment, economic development, public health and environmental health, building regulations and licensing (excluding individual applications); Resources Select – financial management (including capital and revenue budgets), borrowing (audit issues have now transferred to the Accounts Committee), internal management, IT, property and other support services excluding staffing matters, housing benefits, best value processes, electoral registration issues and local land charges.	(1)What subjects do they cover? (terms of reference)
Cherwell – every two months. Reserve dates are programmed into the Calendar every other month and these are often taken for meetings.	(3)How often do they meet?
Cherwell – the size of the agendas varies although the maximum number of items is in the region of 8 -10. There is often a significant amount of paper circulated as part of agendas especially when budget, monitoring reports and planning items are submitted for consideration.	(4)How big are agendas?
Cherwell – 2 – 3 hours on average.	(5)How long are the meetings?
Cherwell - the three select committees in Cherwell each comprise 14 members. The Committees are politically balanced – a view has not been sought on an optimum size to deal with overview and scrutiny matters.	(6)Best size for a committee?
Cherwell – the chairmen are drawn from the controlling group (currently they are all Conservative) and includes a former member of the Executive (Councillor Blackwell – Resources Select).	(7)Who chairs committees?

Leading question:	Checklist of subjects to cover:
2. Do you think some topics are better dealt with in small, informal, single subject scrutiny panels?	
Cherwell – yes. The select committees have all established scrutiny panels to consider and report on a number of one-off subjects. Generally speaking, these panels comprise 3/4 members. Subject areas have so far included, a review of conservation, car parking standards in new residential developments, the development of the Council's Green Travel Plan (all Environment Select) the formulation of the Older People's Strategy (Community Select) and the Council's use of consultants (Resources Select) – in other words, a mix of policy development and review, and scrutiny of decisions/use of resources.	(1)What use is made of scrutiny panels?
Cherwell – not at the moment.	(2)Are there any standing panels?
3. How do you establish your work programme for scrutiny committees?	
Cherwell – the select committees put together their work programmes at the start of each Council year when there is input from both members and officers (see the attached process map).	(1)Who initiates the list of topics?
Cherwell – in the main, yes. Starting point for work programmes was relevant Community Plan themes and aims and relevance of corporate objectives continues to be a key point of reference.	(2)Are they related to corporate priorities or objectives?
Cherwell – this part of the overview and scrutiny function has been identified for further development, although it is true to say that some work has been carried out in this important area. It is anticipated that the scrutiny review will help to further develop this aspect of the select committees' role, which perhaps needs to be more effectively focussed by understanding both what constitutes "policy review and development" and the benefits it can bring to the Council.	(3)How much policy review and development work do scrutiny members undertake?
Cherwell – see answer to the preceding question, but basically the Executive (especially for main strategies and policies) and the select committees by a number of routes including Member initiatives which are then included in respective Work Programmes.	(4)Who initiates policy review and development?
Cherwell – there is no systematic programme in place at this time although issues are picked up by means of the adopted monitoring framework.	(5)How do you scrutinise decisions over time?
Cherwell – details are set out in the Process Map.	(6)Do you have many items that must be reported to scrutiny?
Cherwell – by monitoring the highlights and exceptions as detailed in the review reports setting out progress on achieving the targets included in adopted strategies and the Cherwell Community Plan 2016.	(7)How much performance management is done through scrutiny? How?

	Leading question:	Checklist of subjects to cover:
4.	What do you consider has gone well? (examples of 'good scrutiny')	
	Cherwell – examples: Community - airing/answering public concerns – Woodgreen Pool and LSVT (transparency and accountability); Older People's Policy review; scrutiny of Youth Service/Courtyard Centre; homelessness policy/spend. Environment – use of alternative fuels (green energy); development of the Council's Green Travel Plan; resources/priorities for conservation. Resources – homelessness resources/spending; Council Tax/benefits performance monitoring.	
5.	Do you have dedicated officer support? (scrutiny officers)	
	Cherwell - no	(1)Do you have dedicated scrutiny officers?
	Cherwell n/a Cherwell n/a	How many? Who do they report to?
	Cherwell - the work of the select committees is supported and co-ordinated by the Head of Corporate Services together with the three Democratic Services Officers from the Democratic Services Service Unit.	(2)If not, where does officer support come from?
	Cherwell – this particular issue will be considered as part of the scrutiny review – evidence is to be taken from those authorities that have this resource. •	(3)Are dedicated scrutiny officers a necessity or a luxury?
6.	How well do you feel you engage with the public and outside bodies?	
	Cherwell – (a) engaging with public – limited – notably LSVT and Woodgreen; also some health scrutiny; (b) enagement is generally by Executive/officers; only to limited extent by select committees eg County Council (eg Youth Service, road safety), Police, Health Trusts/PCTs.	(1)Do you engage with partner organisations on subjects like the community strategy and joint working?
7.	What is the relationship like with the Executive and how is it managed?	
	Cherwell – attendance is not a requirement –Executive Members attend, albeit infrequently, either at the invitation of the relevant select committee chairman or if an item is under discussion in which they have a particular interest within their portfolio.	(1)How often do executive members attend scrutiny meetings?
	Cherwell – not necessarily, there is no established convention relating to the attendance of Executive Members at select committee meetings	(2)Do they attend <i>only</i> for those matters that involve scrutiny (or pre-scrutiny) of Executive decisions?

Leading question:	Checklist of subjects to cover:
Cherwell – no	(3) Is there a protocol setting out the ground rules for the relationship between the executive and scrutiny members/committees?
Cherwell – no formalised arrangements	(4) Do scrutiny chairmen meet regularly with the relevant executive portfolio holders?
Cherwell – there is no formal established dialogue. Matters are referred from the Executive to select committees and vice versa and comments and views are made known to the Executive in this way.	(5) What sort of dialogue is there between executive and non- executive members?
Cherwell – generally speaking yes	(6) Does the Executive initiate all major policies and strategies and consult scrutiny committees on their content?
Cherwell – there are no clear guidelines; when Executive considers a report and then consulting select committees <i>before</i> actually making a decision this tends not to be seen as –pre-scrutiny ('the die is cast').	(7) If and when is pre-scrutiny of reports going to the Executive appropriate?
8. What do Executive and non-Executive members feel about scrutiny – is it effective?	
Cherwell – not as well as they might be – hence review.	(1) Are non-Executive members engaged?
Cherwell – the feeling is that there is room for improvement hence the review.	(2) Do they think it's worthwhile?
Cherwell – agreement with Members that some organisational changes are necessary so that an effective system of overview and scrutiny can be established in Cherwell.	(3) What do officers think of it?