



**Northampton Borough Council**



**NORTHAMPTON**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Overview and Scrutiny**

**Excellence Action Plan 2013-2015**

## **What is Overview and Scrutiny**

The Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) function was introduced to Local Government over ten years ago as part of the Local Government Act 2000, as means of providing non-Executive Councillors the opportunity to inform policy development and critical friend challenge to the Council's executive policy makers and decision makers (Cabinet). It has played a strong role ever since in promoting the engagement of non-executive councillors in a diverse range of policy development activities, including performance improvement at the Council. The Council's O&S activities are regularly cited by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) and other organisations as examples of best practice. In recent years, O&S has been seen by officers and Councillors as an increasingly important way in which Councillors from all political parties can work together to get to the heart of issues and problems both within the Council and wider community and find effective ways to resolve them. This Excellence Plan seeks to build upon the strong foundations that have been carved for O&S in recent years, and sets stretching targets that would see O&S build upon its success over the next two years. In writing the Excellence Plan, reference has been made to the Centre for Public Scrutiny's four principles of good Scrutiny, as well as drawing upon suggestions made by two mini peer reviews in 2012. The Excellence Action Plan will be monitored and updated regularly by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

### **Our Mission Statement**

*“Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton aims to enhance the quality of life of all who live and work in the Borough by ensuring services are delivered effectively and supporting improvement in the Council's services, policies and performance. Scrutiny aims to be objective, evidence-based, transparent and constructive, and to reflect the interests and concerns of local communities.”*

### **Our Vision:-**

*“By 2015, the effectiveness of Overview and Scrutiny's contribution to policy development and decision making at the Council is held in high regard by both the Council and the citizens of Northampton, as well as being a national example of best practice”*

### **Our Values and Principles:-**

*“Taking pride in delivering a quality and value for money Overview and Scrutiny Service*

*To uphold the four principles of good Scrutiny”*

**Councillor Jamie Lane**  
**Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Specific Objective	Measures (Success Criteria)	Steps to Attain	Timescale (Deadline)	Progress Report
<b>Steps for successful Overview and Scrutiny (O&amp;S)</b>				
A clear mission statement for Overview and Scrutiny (O&S)	Adopt a mission statement for O&S and that it be the focal point of the O&S function; working towards being a nationally noted excellent service	A mission statement has been produced, considered and included within the O&S Toolkit	Excellence Plan to be adopted by the O&S Committee by September 2013	Excellence Plan to be presented to the O&S Committee for adoption.
Internal and external recognition of O&S at NBC	To submit an application form(s) and win a Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Good Scrutiny Award by June 2015  To increase Councillor satisfaction with O&S, year on year (target to be confirmed and measured via feedback forms and Councillor surveys)	Six-monthly reviews of delivery against the Excellence Plan, monitoring of feedback and agreeing any remedial action that is required	Excellence Plan to be adopted by the O&S Committee by September 2013	A number of O&S processes and procedures have been recognised nationally as examples of best practice:  Suggest an issue for Scrutiny form Call-in process and procedure Witness Protocol and guidance notes Review process (Scrutiny Panels) Clear O&S Review reports
Effective use of O&S committee time	O&S meetings conclude on time, all agenda items discussed, with effective meeting management	Timed agendas produced for each meeting of the O&S Committee  No discussion takes place on 'to note' items	June 2013 and onwards	Good, effective meeting management takes place – Already in place
<b>Principle One: Work Programme</b>				
Encourage greater public input to the O&S Work Programme	Number of public suggestions for O&S Reviews received increases year on year.  20 in 2013/14, increasing to:  25 for 2014/15 30 for 2015/16 and subsequent years	Further development of the current process of inviting the public to forward ideas for future Scrutiny Review  Continue to increase the data base of individuals and organisations previously involved in the O&S process  Continue to contact the Council's data base of consultees regarding suggestions for future Scrutiny Review  A press release from the Chair of O&S is issued annually inviting the public to put	January 2014 and on-going          January 2014 subsequent years	The current form inviting the public to suggest ideas for future Scrutiny Review has been noted as best practice. At each meeting of the O&S Committee and Scrutiny Panels, this form is given to all public attendees  A survey via Survey Monkey is produced annually and circulated to all those on the database, inviting them to put forward a suggestion for future Scrutiny Review  Press coverage of the O&S work programme was given in 2012/2013. The

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		forward suggestions for future Scrutiny Review		Chair was interviewed regarding the O&S Work programme for 2013/2014
O&S work programme to be less reactive	The O&S work programme has clear links to the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan and/or performance information	Scrutiny Reviews clearly identifies links to the Council. Cabinet Members inform the work programme event of their priorities	Continuing - June 2013 and subsequent years	Four O&S Work Programming events held. Event for 2014 scheduled for 27 March 2014.
<b>Principle Two: Scrutiny work and evidence gathering</b>				
Effective challenge to Cabinet Members to report progress against priorities	Cabinet provides a thorough and considered response to all O&S recommendations within two meetings	The Scrutiny Officer ensures that the rigorous O&S monitoring regime is adhered to and it is reported to the O&S twice a year, with action being taken if it is not adhered to	O&S Committee Meetings – twice a year	O&S Monitoring Work Programme has been in place since 2010. It ensures accepted O&S recommendations are monitored
	Cabinet Members always attend O&S meetings if requested or provide a substitute who is sufficiently briefed on the issues to enable them to answer questions  Cabinet Members to provide further details of their priorities, mid-year	The Scrutiny Officer provides induction on O&S protocols and expectations to every new member to Overview and Scrutiny  Cabinet is given the opportunity to provide an update on their priorities, mid-year	On-going – annually as required  11 November 2013, and subsequent years	Cabinet attended the O&S work-programming event and reported on their priorities and challenges for the year  The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Members have been invited to attend the meeting of the O&S Committee on 11 November 2013 to provide an update on Cabinet's priorities
	O&S provides effective challenge and input to the budget process on an annual basis	This is achieved through the annual Reporting and Monitoring Working Group meetings that scrutinises proposals in detail and recommends key proposals for the O&S Committee to consider each year and monitors the implementation of the budget proposals approximately six months after implementation	January 2014 and subsequent years	The Reporting and Monitoring Working Group has met for the past three years and has identified around 3-4 issues from the draft general fund budget that it feels warrants scrutiny input
	Cabinet provides a thorough and considered response to 100% of O&S's concerns regarding the monthly performance management	O&S undertakes performance management scrutiny at each O&S Scrutiny Committee meeting	Continuing from 9 September 2013 meeting and each subsequent	The relevant Cabinet Member and Director to attend the meeting of O&S to provide a response to the Committee's queries and concerns regarding specific performance

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O&S Monitoring Regime	reports		meeting of O&S	measures
	The O&S Monitoring Regime clearly evidences the progress of the implementation of O&S recommendations	A robust O&S Monitoring Work Programme is produced and updated  The Monitoring Regime to be communicated to all Scrutiny Panels at commencement of each Review	June 2013 and subsequent meetings (twice annually)  June/July 2013 and as new Scrutiny Panels are convened	O&S Monitoring Work Programme is published on the O&S webpage and circulated to the O&S Committee  Scrutiny Officer to apprise each Panel of the O&S monitoring regime at each scoping meeting
<b>Principle Three: Outcomes and impact</b>				
Demonstrable outcomes after Scrutiny Reviews	Measurable recommendations (SMART) with details of the impact formally reported to O&S	Rigorous Monitoring system used to examine the implementation of accepted O&S recommendations  All O&S Review reports have clear Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timeline (SMART) recommendations  Clear Action Plan at the end of each Scrutiny Review and the subsequent periodic monitoring of that Plan by the O&S Committee to guarantee tangible outcomes are delivered	June 2014 (as Scrutiny Reviews complete)	A number of previous Scrutiny Reviews have made a real difference, including Customer Services, Communications, Homelessness, Rough Sleepers, Independent Living for Older People, Hate Crime Reporting
Appropriate Reviews conducted following the 5-D Appreciative Inquiry methodology	Enhanced Scrutiny's Policy and Development role.	The Review operates flexibly with a proactive focus to achieve the outcome together, as opposed to having a holding to account focus.	June 2014 (as Scrutiny Reviews complete)	The Appreciate Inquiry methodology has been used previously for Reviews and details were documented in the CfPS publication "A guide to using Appreciative Inquiry to add value to the Overview and Scrutiny process"
<b>Principle Four: Accountability</b>				
Effective way of working with the Cabinet and Senior Management	All Cabinet Members attend the O&S Work Programming event each year and advise O&S of their priorities and challenges for the year; which in turn informs the O&S work programme.  Number of Call In Hearings is	O&S has a standing item on Cabinet agenda <i>Issues arising from Overview and Scrutiny</i>  Cabinet and Senior Management Team attend the O&S Work Programming event	June 2013 and subsequent years  Annual report 2012/13 and	O&S Toolkit is produced, updated and published on the O&S webpage

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	reported in the O&S Annual Report.  The Cabinet Member, or their representative, always attends and provides the requested information when asked to attend meetings of the O&S Committee	The relevant Cabinet member is invited to attend the specific meeting of O&S	subsequent annual reports  Contact made at least one month prior to the meeting of O&S	Emails are sent on behalf of the Chair to the relevant Cabinet Member, inviting them to attend a future meeting of O&S, containing details of the purpose of their required attendance
Effective challenge to Cabinet Members to report progress against priorities	Cabinet provides a considered response to all O&S recommendations within two meetings			
	The rigorous O&S monitoring regime is adhered  O&S monitoring regime reported to the O&S Committee twice annually	June 2013 and onwards  June 2013/November 2013/June 2014/November 2014 and onwards	Monitoring work programme is communicated with all Councillors and published on the O&S webpage	
Effective pre-decision scrutiny	Cabinet is given the opportunity to provide an update on their priorities, mid-year	November 2013	The Leader of the Council has confirmed that Cabinet will attend the meeting of the O&S Committee on 11 November 2013	During 2012/13 three pieces on in-depth pre-decision scrutiny were undertaken
Demonstrable rationale of accepted and implemented O&S recommendations	Evidence of scrutiny recommendations shaping policy and making a difference	An Action Plan for completion following the conclusion of each Review will be compiled and completed	June 2014 onwards	Action Plan will be drafted by June 2013
<b>Enables the voice and concerns of the public and its communities</b>				
Champions of value of Overview and Scrutiny as a vehicle for public accountability (promoting public understanding of the Scrutiny role)	1 positive press release on O&S activity reported in 2013/2014, increasing to :-  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 in 2014/2015</li> <li>3 in subsequent years</li> </ul>	Original use of communications with the public and Community Groups promoting the Scrutiny role, for example, Annual report, Review Reports with a covering statement from the Chair using the Overview and Scrutiny Media Protocol  "Testimonials" to be published in the	Promotion of O&S Annual report – June 2013	O&S Media Protocol to be completed following the publication of each Scrutiny Review/Annual report and issued via the Corporate Communications Team.

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		annual report  Log of press coverage to be produced		
Public engagement and attendance at O&S meetings and process	Direct involvement of the public in the O&S process and consideration of O&S issues: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meetings of O&amp;S</li> <li>O&amp;S Work Programme</li> </ul>	A dedicated Overview and Scrutiny page on the Council's website has been produced and fully operationally since early 2009	June 2013 and on-going	Information for co-optees is available. Around nine suggestions were received from the public on issues for scrutiny during 2010/2011, one of which was included in the Work Programme 2010/2011, for the O&S Work Programme 2012/2013 there were more than twenty suggestions and the O&S Work Programme was totally influenced by public suggestions.
	Hits on the O&S Webpage: in 2011/12, increasing to:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>65 for 2013/2014</li> <li>90 for 2014/2015 and subsequent years</li> </ul>	Database of all individuals and Groups previously attended meetings/involved in O&S previously to be sent a copy of the O&S Newsletter, highlighting the work and outcomes of O&S	July 2013 onwards	Scrutiny Officer held discussions with ICT. Data detailing the hits on the website will be produced on an annual and monthly basis – June 2013 onwards  There have been 703 views on the website since its inception, of which 525 were unique page views
	Public participation/observing at O&S Committee/Scrutiny Panel meetings:- 10 during 201/2013, increasing to:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15 for 2013/14</li> <li>20 for 2014/15 and subsequent years</li> </ul>	Data base of all individuals and Groups previously attended meetings/involved in O&S previously is compiled	June 2014 and subsequent years	Database currently compiled and will be further developed.
Representation and engagement with diverse Communities	Clear sample of diverse communities engaged in the O&S process	An Equality Impact Assessment (Screening) is undertaken shortly after the scope for each O&S Review  An Equality Impact for the Overview and Scrutiny function to be produced and monitored on a regular basis	Commenced in April 2012 – on-going	Relevant community organisations have been asked to provide an input into previous O&S Reviews.  The Review - Commissioning Framework with the Community and Voluntary Sector has a number of co-opted Members who are experts in this field. Witnesses

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		Scrutiny Officer trained on E-FECT  Use existing contacts/links, where appropriate, to ensure equality and diversity and community cohesion is embedded within Scrutiny activity		representing diverse communities have provided evidence to this Review.  All EIAs for Scrutiny Reviews are publicly available.  Scrutiny Officer, trained and uses E-FECT
	Promoting public understanding of the Scrutiny role	High profile of Scrutiny is promoted	June 2013 and on-going	“spreading the word of O&S” through various activities and events::  E Newsletter – 3 times a year Regular press releases Public Participation in the O&S process leaflets available on:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The O&amp;S Webpage</li> <li>• CAB website</li> <li>• One Stop Shop</li> <li>• Every O&amp;S Committee/ Scrutiny Panel meeting</li> </ul>
Effective way of working with the Cabinet and Senior Management	Clear communications with Cabinet:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• O&amp;S’s recommendations are given due consideration by Cabinet, and a detailed response provided to the O&amp;S Committee immediately following the Cabinet meeting</li> <li>• Cabinet continues to report to O&amp;S on the implementation of accepted recommendations as per the schedule identified in the O&amp;S Monitoring Work Programme.</li> </ul>	O&S has a standing item on Cabinet agenda <i>Issues arising from Overview and Scrutiny</i>  Cabinet and Senior Management invited to attend annual O&S Work Programming event  Rigorous Overview and Monitoring Work Programme  Senior Management Teams assists O&S in its work	December 2010 onwards	The steps to attain this objective have been in place for some time
Effective use of O&S	O&S meetings conclude on time with	Chair and Scrutiny Officer to have dialogue	March 2011	Items that are for noting are not discussed



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Committee meeting time	all agenda items discussed, with effective meeting management. (Timed agenda produced for each O&S Committee meeting)  No discussion takes place on 'to note' items	regarding the circulation of 'to note' information and the setting of an overarching criteria for agenda items		at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – A protocol is in place
Inclusion of non-Executives, not Members of the O&S Committee, in the O&S process	At least one non-Executive, who is not a Member of the O&S Committee, included on the membership of Scrutiny Panels.	O&S Inclusion of Non-Executive in the O&S Process Protocol produced.  Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of the Chair, contacts all Non-Executives, when Scrutiny Reviews are set up, encouraging Non-Executive participation	On-going	All O&S Reviews have had at least one non-Executive, who is not a Member of the O&S Committee, included on the membership of the Scrutiny Panel
<b>Principle Four: Drives improvement in public services</b>				
Promote Community well-being and improve quality of life	One effective scrutiny of external services Review to take place each Municipal year		June 2013 onwards	A number of external scrutiny reviews have taken place e.g. contaminated water incident in Northamptonshire, partnership working with WNDC, homelessness, rough sleepers and serious acquisitive crime, violent crime and community safety
Engage in joint scrutiny with other Authorities on Reviews of common interest where economies of scale would be beneficial	Where appropriate, one joint Scrutiny Review to take place per Municipal year	Discussion regarding the feasibility of joint Scrutiny Reviews takes place at the scoping stage of each Review	June 2013 and on-going	Joint Scrutiny Reviews have been undertaken previously