



Report to the Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH) Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date: 13 August 2019

Report of: Paddy May, PfSH Coordinator

Subject: A new role for PfSH Overview & Scrutiny

SUMMARY

At the 4th June PUSH Joint Committee, a report was considered that looked at a range of recommendations for the future operation of PUSH (as was). This was the meeting where it was agreed that the whole of the New Forest would be in the PUSH boundary and that as such PUSH should become PfSH (the Partnership for South Hampshire).

One of the recommendations of the report concerned the operation of the PfSH Overview & Scrutiny Function. Joint Committee asked that this be discussed at the next Overview and Scrutiny Meeting so that any decision about changes could be informed by the views of the actual Scrutiny function. The Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 26th June discussed the potential changes from the report to Joint Committee but with a limited number of members attending felt that this would be better discussed with more Members present. This report provides some background on what makes effective Scrutiny and also seeks to provide a mechanism to elicit the views of Scrutiny Members on the original proposals, related to Scrutiny, in the report to Joint Committee. These will then be fed into the Governance Review findings that will be reported back to Joint Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is RECOMMENDED that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

1. CONSIDERS how it wishes to respond to the issues raised in the report to Joint Committee and in particular:
 - a. Whether the time of actual meetings should change so that they are scheduled to take place during the day?
 - b. Whether the meetings should take place just before Joint Committee so that the views of Scrutiny can be fed into the Joint Committee decision making process?
 - c. What else could be done to improve the effectiveness of the Overview & Scrutiny Function?
 - d. Whether there are other things that can be done to encourage greater turn-out for meetings?
2. PROVIDES recommendations to the Joint Committee of any suggested changes to Overview and Scrutiny

Background

Role of Overview & Scrutiny

MHCLG published [Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities in May 2019](#). Whilst this is aimed at Local Authorities and Combined Authorities it is also valid for Joint Committees of Local Government such as PfSH. Overview and scrutiny committees were introduced in 2000 as part of the new Executive governance arrangements and the aim was:

"to ensure that members of an authority who were not part of the executive could hold the executive to account for the decisions and actions that affect their communities"

Overview and scrutiny committees have statutory powers to scrutinise decisions the executive (or Joint Committee):

- is planning to take;
- those it plans to implement, and;
- those that have already been taken/implemented.

The idea is that recommendations following scrutiny enable improvements to be made to policies and how they are implemented.

The guidance states that effective overview and scrutiny should:

- provide constructive 'critical friend' challenge;
- amplify the voices and concerns of the public;
- be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role; and
- drive improvement in public services.

The guidance also says that it is important that overview and scrutiny is led and owned by members, given their role in setting and maintaining the culture of an authority. The guidance also states that successful scrutiny needs to have a clear role and focus and concentrates on delivering work that is "of genuine value and relevance to work of the wider authority".

The report to Joint Committee

A report from David Williams, the Lead Chief Executive for PFSH was taken to the June Joint Committee on [The Review of PUSH and Business Plan 2019-20](#). This report included a section on the role of Overview and Scrutiny. The relevant extracts are shown in italics below:

Scrutiny

Currently a PUSH Overview and Scrutiny meeting takes place after the Joint Committee. The agenda for this meeting mirrors that of the Joint Committee and notes the items that have previously been decided at Joint Committee.

Attendance is usually around of 4-6 members and items are sometimes considered several months after the Joint Committee Meeting.

Apart from noting reports, the Committee occasionally makes a comment back to Joint Committee and this is included in the PUSH Coordinators Report. The effectiveness of the arrangements has been discussed recently at a scrutiny meeting. The only significant benefit that scrutiny Members in attendance identified was the ability to find out what was happening and for them to be able to ask questions that could be reported back to them.

Discussions with the Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services at Fareham BC have suggested that it would be possible to completely change the scrutiny arrangements. Possible changes could include:

- 1. Changing the times of the meetings*
- 2. Allowing people to dial in to meetings via a conference call phone*
- 3. Cancel all scheduled meetings and allowing Members to "call in" specific Joint Committee items and arrange an ad-hoc discussion (physical or via call) about that specific item.*

This would have the benefit of allowing the Scrutiny meeting to only focus on what matters to them and would allow for a more timely discussion. If this is deemed a sensible way forward, a discussion would need to be had with the new Scrutiny Chair in the new municipal year.

CONSIDERATION: Implement option 3.

When Joint Committee discussed this report they felt that it would be better for this issue to be discussed at Overview and Scrutiny who could consider whether improvements needed to be made and what changes could support these improvements.

Discussion at Overview & Scrutiny

The report to Joint Committee was discussed at the Overview & Scrutiny meeting on 26th June. The element of the report concerning Scrutiny was the subject of significant discussion. Some members felt that the views expressed in the report were a fair reflection whilst others felt that Joint Committee Scrutiny was effective and were able to give specific examples of where the PUSH Overview & Scrutiny meeting had worked well.

However there was limited Member attendance at the June Overview and Scrutiny meeting and so how to improve attendance was also discussed. Members felt that the start time of 6pm was a problem and that a meeting during the day could improve attendance.

Members of Scrutiny meeting did not support the proposal that there should be no scheduled meetings and that meetings would only be set up if Members decided to "call-in" a specific item that was due to be discussed at the Joint Committee. There was general support, however, for the proposal that rather than the Overview & Scrutiny meeting considering items after they had gone to Joint Committee, it would be better if the Overview & Scrutiny meeting considered items before they went to Joint Committee. This would enable the views of scrutiny to be fed into Joint Committee during the meeting.

There was some concern that with limited attendance at this meeting it was not appropriate for some of these fundamental changes to be made. On this basis it was suggested that a special day-time Overview & Scrutiny meeting should be set up to discuss these issues and agree on the proposals that will be fed back to Joint Committee.

Proposals and Issues for Discussion

Members of Overview and Scrutiny are asked to consider whether:

- a) They agree that meetings should be moved from 6pm in the evening to either a mid-morning or mid-afternoon slot. This will avoid the rush hour traffic and it is suggested will make attendance more attractive.
- b) In terms of the scheduling of the meetings that they should take place a few days before the Joint Committee meeting? This would enable a discussion of all the items that were due to be discussed at the Joint Committee and would enable the feedback from Overview & Scrutiny to be fed into the Joint Committee by the

PfSH Coordinator. The problem with this approach is that it will mean that there will be 1 more Overview & Scrutiny meeting per municipal year and that papers will only be available just before the meeting. The alternative would be to hold the meeting before the Joint Committee papers are published such that the authors of the paper could then reflect the discussion in the drafting of the paper.

- c) Are there further improvements that could be made to improve the effectiveness of Overview & Scrutiny? (Members attention is drawn to the MHCLG Guidance Document referred to in the Background)
- d) There are other things that need to be done to improve attendance at Overview & Scrutiny meetings?

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is RECOMMENDED that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

1. CONSIDERS how it wishes to respond to the issues raised in the report to Joint Committee and in particular:
 - a. Whether the time of actual meetings should change so that they are scheduled to take place during the day?
 - b. Whether the meetings should take place just before Joint Committee so that the views of Scrutiny can be fed into the Joint Committee decision making process?
 - c. What else could be done to improve the effectiveness of the Overview & Scrutiny Function?
 - d. Whether there are other things that can be done to encourage greater turn-out for meetings?
2. PROVIDES recommendations to the Joint Committee of any suggested changes to Overview and Scrutiny

Appendices: None

Reference Papers:

1. [MHCLG published Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities](#)
2. [Minutes of the PfSH Joint Committee 04 June 2019](#)

Any enquiries in respect of this report can be made to Paddy May, PfSH Coordinator on paddy.may@portsmouthcc.gov.uk