



WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN ATTENDING AN OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETING

This guide is split into guidance for observers and guidance for external witnesses:

GUIDANCE FOR OBSERVERS:

Where and when are the meetings held?

Meetings usually take place at 7.30pm in the Council Chamber in Easthampstead House, Bracknell. A map showing the location of Easthampstead House can be found on page 7.

Occasionally, alternative times and venues may be used, for an up-to-date schedule of meetings please visit our website or contact us (details on page 6).

Who will be there?

Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny panels (and the Commission) is made up of elected councillors from all political parties on the Council and a number of community representatives. An Overview and Scrutiny Officer will also be present to provide advice and a Democratic Services officer will take minutes at the meeting. Other officers with an interest in one or more of the topics on the agenda may also be present.

As overview and scrutiny meetings are open to the public (unless otherwise stated – i.e. confidential matters are being discussed), members of the public are welcome to attend and the press and media may also be present.

Meetings may involve contributions from a wide range of sources, including members, officers, NHS employees, education representatives, local businesses, voluntary groups, specialists and other members of the public.

What happens when I arrive to attend a meeting?

If you are attending the meeting as an observer you will be greeted by one of the Overview and Scrutiny Officers who will show you to the public seating area and provide you with a copy of the agenda (if available).

How will the meeting room be set out?

Please see page 5 for details of the typical room layout.

GUIDANCE FOR EXTERNAL WITNESSES:

If an Overview and Scrutiny panel (or the Overview and Scrutiny Commission) decides that they would like to invite you to come along to one of their meetings as a witness, a member of the Overview and Scrutiny team will contact you informally about the process. There is no obligation for people from outside the Council to attend (except for certain health authority staff under legislation concerning local authorities' scrutiny of the National Health Service), but by attending you will be making a valuable contribution in helping the members of the panel (or the Commission) to gain an accurate view of the issue/s being discussed. You can nominate another person to come on your behalf if they are fully briefed on the issue. Occasionally, organisations, rather than an individual, are invited to give evidence. In this case, it is up to you to decide who would be most appropriate to attend.

Where and when are the meetings held?

An Overview and Scrutiny Officer will contact you beforehand and provide details of the date, time and location of the meeting. If you agree to come along you will be sent a formal invitation confirming these details.

Meetings usually take place at 7.30pm in the Council Chamber in Easthampstead House, Bracknell. A map showing the location of Easthampstead House can be found on page 7. Occasionally, alternative times and venues may be used, but you will be informed accordingly beforehand.

How can I prepare for the meeting?

The formal invitation will contain details of the relevant inquiry (including any notes of previous evidence sessions) and the way Overview and Scrutiny works at the Council. You will also be provided with an outline of the likely questions to be asked of you or issues to be discussed.

If you have been asked to give a presentation, an Overview and Scrutiny Officer will discuss with you beforehand the style and length of your presentation and any special equipment you may require (for example, an overhead projector or PowerPoint facilities). If you haven't been asked to give a presentation but feel that

it would be beneficial, please contact an Overview and Scrutiny Officer who will make any necessary arrangements (equipment etc).

You will be informed of any documents that the councillors wish to have produced for them. Councillors will usually find it helpful if you can prepare a brief paper setting out some of the key facts and issues. Please consult with the Democratic Services Officer co-ordinating the meeting about arrangements for copying and distribution. If you have any further information that you think will aid the inquiry then please send it to one of our Overview and Scrutiny Officers (see page 6) who will make sure that it is put on the agenda or circulated to councillors prior to the meeting. If you have any special requirements please contact one of our Overview and Scrutiny Officers (see page 6).

Who will be there?

Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny panels (and the Commission) is made up of elected councillors from all political parties on the Council and a number of community representatives. An Overview and Scrutiny Officer will also be present to provide advice and a Democratic Services Officer will take minutes at the meeting. Other officers with an interest in one or more of the topics on the agenda may also be present.

As overview and scrutiny meetings are an important means of democratic accountability and are open to the public (unless otherwise stated – i.e. confidential matters are being discussed), members of the public are welcome to attend and the press and media may also be present.

Meetings may involve contributions from a wide range of sources, including members, officers, NHS employees, education representatives, local businesses, voluntary groups, specialists and other members of the public.

What happens when I arrive to attend a meeting?

The Chairman will introduce himself/herself to you before the start of the meeting. One of the Overview and Scrutiny Officers will show you to your seat and provide you with a copy of the agenda.

How will the meeting room be set out?

Please see page 5 for details of the typical room layout.

What happens at the meetings?

At the beginning of the meeting there will be a number of procedural items of business that the Chairman will address, such as approving the minutes of the last meeting and taking apologies from absent members etc. Whilst these are formal

meetings of the Council, the structure tends to be much more informal, with free and open discussion.

If there is any information that you do not wish to give in public, you should make this clear to the chairman prior to the meeting. The Council is able to conduct some of its business in private provided that the information in question falls within a number of set criteria such as personal information or financial or business details. These categories are set out by statute – further details are available on request. If a meeting (or part of a meeting) is to be conducted in private, this is known as ‘Part II’; the public and press will be asked to leave and, whilst minutes will be produced, they will only be made available on a restricted basis.

What happens when I give evidence?

We will ensure that all witnesses are treated with courtesy and respect and that all questions to witnesses are made in an orderly manner as directed by the Chair of the meeting.

When it comes to your agenda item, the Chairman will introduce you to those present and ask you to introduce yourself, including a brief introduction to your work and how you are connected with the issue under discussion. Once all introductions have been completed, the meeting will open out into a question and answer session.

You should try to be honest and open in your responses and to volunteer relevant information and views, even if not specifically asked by the panel/commission. If there is factual information available to back up any views which you may have, it will be helpful to refer to this, either directly or by stating the source of the information. You should try to be as precise as possible in your responses. If you do not know the answer to a question simply say so and if appropriate send us the information after the meeting. Also if you are only able to give an estimate, for example of costs involved in a project or about timescales, explain that it is only an estimate and not a definitive amount. Explain if there are factors or assumptions which may have a significant impact on any figures or estimates given.

If you are attending on behalf of an organisation, you should make it clear whether any views expressed are personal views or those of the organisation.

What happens next?

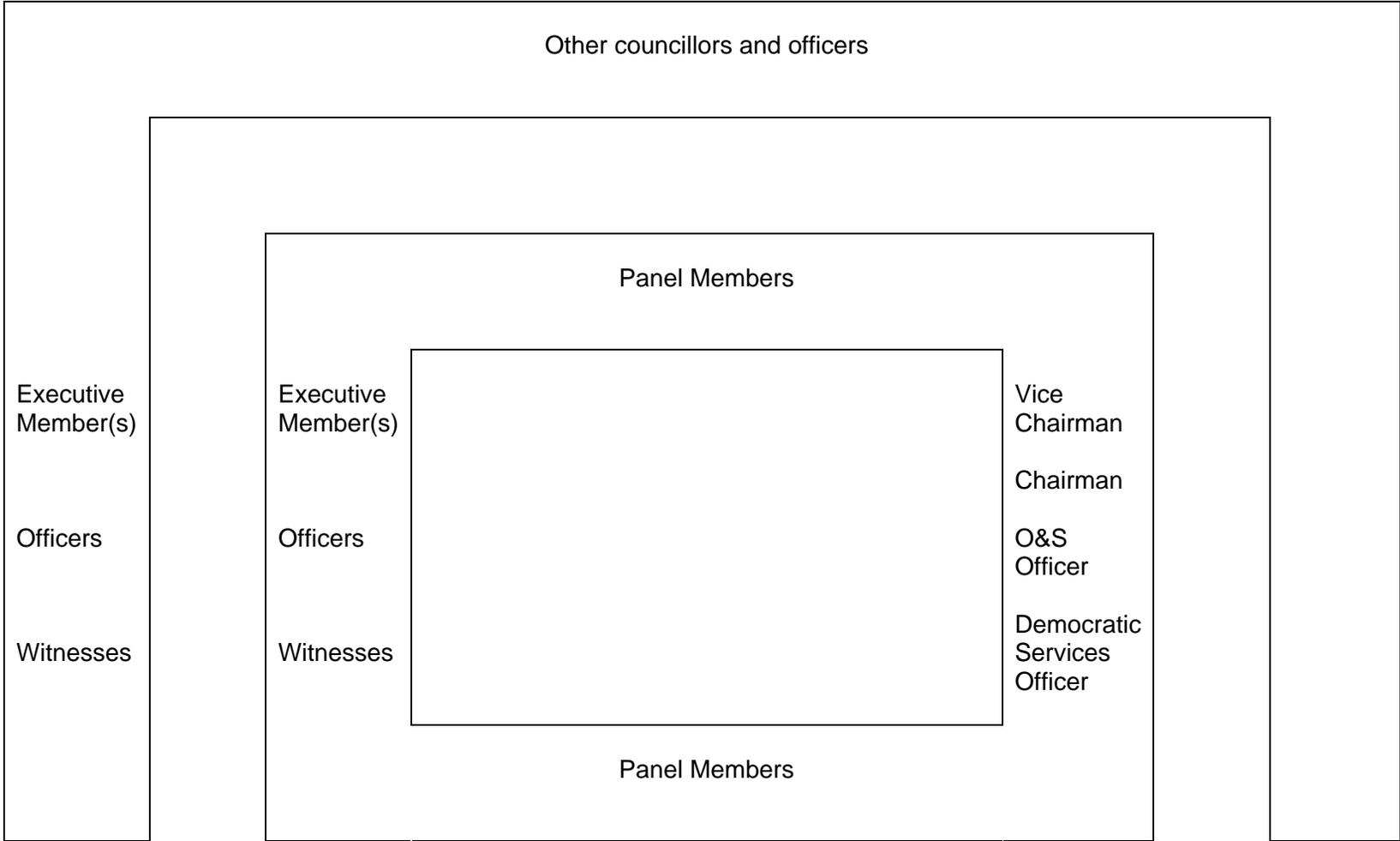
Following the meeting you will be thanked for attending. Notes of the discussion should be sent to you for factual checking. Please let an Overview and Scrutiny Officer know as soon as possible if you think that your views have not been accurately recorded.

If, after the meeting, you become aware that you have given incorrect or misleading information, for example by incorrectly quoting a figure, then let an Overview and Scrutiny Officer know as soon as possible so that the information can be corrected.

Following the proceedings, you will be written to (where appropriate) and informed of the outcome.

Once the panel/commission has finished the review, a report will usually be written to present a full picture of the inquiry and recommendations will be made. If the recommendations are accepted, scrutiny members will monitor progress on changed policies, procedures etc.

Seating for Press and Public



Layout of Council Chamber for Overview and Scrutiny Meetings

Contact Details

If you require any additional information, if there is something you want to tell us or if you would like to suggest a topic of inquiry or provide information on an existing inquiry, you can contact us in a number of ways:

Via our web pages: www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/scrutiny

Via email: overview.scrutiny@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Via telephone: 01344 352000

Via Fax: 01344 352324

Via post: Overview & Scrutiny Team
Chief Executive's Office
Bracknell Forest Council
Easthampstead House
Town Square
Bracknell
RG12 1AQ

Please find below details of the Overview & Scrutiny Team who form a part of the Chief Executive's Office:

HEAD OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

Richard Beaumont Richard.beaumont@bracknell-forest.gov.uk	Responsibilities: Management of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function, the O&S Commission and Health Scrutiny	01344 352283
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POLICY OFFICER (SCRUTINY)

Andrea Carr andrea.carr@bracknell-forest.gov.uk	Responsibilities: Support to the Overview and Scrutiny Panels (excluding Health Scrutiny)	01344 352122
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Location Map of Town Centre Offices

