

Brighton & Hove City Council

For general release

Meeting: Overview and Scrutiny Organisation Committee
Date: 18 July 2005
Report of: Director, Strategy and Governance
Subject: Proposals for developing the role of Departmental scrutiny link officers

Ward(s) affected: All

1. Purpose of the report

1.1 To consider proposals for the practical involvement of Scrutiny Link Officers in moving scrutiny forward.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the ways of working with Scrutiny Link Officers set out below be discussed and approved.

3. Background

3.1 Following 11th April OSOC agreement on Moving Scrutiny Forward, named Scrutiny Link Officers have now been established as contacts/co-ordinators for each of the seven Council Directorates. (see table below)

3.2

The role agreed for the scrutiny link officer is:

- To serve as a contact point and co-ordinator for issues raised by Scrutiny concerning his/her Directorate,
- To be familiar with Scrutiny procedures and ensure that reports and replies from the Directorate comply with Scrutiny Procedures.

An extract from the Moving Scrutiny Forward report is included as an appendix to this report.

Departmental Scrutiny Link Officer	Job Title	Directorate
David Hawker:	Director, Children Families and Schools	Children Families and Schools
Pat Foster:	Assistant Director, Quality of Life and Green Spaces	Environment
Pam Montgomery:	Assistant Director, Housing	Housing and City Support
Christopher Masters: <i>(from July 2005)</i>	Head of Communications	Cultural Services
Ian Withers:	Head of Internal Audit	Finance & Property
Maggie Squire:	Head of Performance and Equalities	Strategy & Governance
Katie Ogden:	Head of Human Resources Management	Human Resources

4. Working with Scrutiny Link Officers

- 4.1 Many Council officers are unfamiliar with scrutiny and need to be more aware of the process and how it works in order to respond to matters raised by scrutiny members.
- 4.2 When scrutiny Members ask questions or call for a scrutiny activity, it can be difficult quickly to identify the relevant technical officers to provide initial information.
- 4.3 It is therefore intended that Scrutiny Link Officers will be scrutiny 'champions,' acting as two-way channels of information to contribute greatly to an efficient and effective scrutiny process.
- 4.4 Scrutiny Link Officers are not seen as the primary officer support for scrutiny activities. Unlike at decision-making committees, unless asked to do so, Scrutiny Link Officers would not normally be expected to propose a

course of action but to provide factual information as a basis for scrutiny discussion.

- 4.5 Primarily the Scrutiny Link Officer would usually attend - or arrange for a senior Departmental representative to attend - OSOC and the OSOC agenda planning meeting at which their service area is being discussed as part of OSOC's 'overview' or performance monitoring role. For each directorate this will be approximately once per year.
- 4.6 Working closely with the Scrutiny Support Officers, Scrutiny Link Officers can provide a valuable resource not only for the annual OSOC 'overview' meeting but also when necessary during other scrutiny activities as listed below, where there is an involvement by their own Department.

Scrutiny Activity	Role of Scrutiny Link Officer
Overview or performance monitoring (one Department per OSOC meeting, scheduled at the start of the year)	<p>Awareness of the overview process and OSOC's general aims/requirements.</p> <p>With the Head of Performance Team, help identify latest results from inspections, internal/external reviews, audits; where necessary comparative information with other local authorities; equalities information, customer satisfaction surveys, consultations relating to the service, complaints information, benchmarking and good practice examples</p>
Members' requests for information	<p>Awareness of OSOC's general aims/requirements.</p> <p>Help ascertain relevant departmental officers, background information, possibly other experts involved in the service, service users</p>
Requests for scrutiny	<p>Awareness of the request for scrutiny process and OSOC's general aims/requirements, help ensure scrutiny procedure is followed efficiently</p>

In-depth reviews	Awareness of the scrutiny process and OSOC's general aims/requirements, help bring forward timely and relevant information
Call-in	Awareness of the call-in process and OSOC's general aims/requirements. Help ascertain relevant departmental officers and initial background information. Scrutiny Link Officers
Development of Scrutiny	Assist OSOC become more proactive in developing its work programme. Help disseminate the role and added value of scrutiny across departments Provide officer feedback following scrutiny activities to improve the effectiveness of scrutiny (what worked well, what did not)
Monitoring scrutiny outcomes	Working with scrutiny support officers to report back on implementing agreed scrutiny recommendations

4.7 Scrutiny Link Officers would be in a position to help OSOC balance its complementary roles;

- Holding the executive to account/supporting the executive in its work
- Operating independently/taking into account the needs of the executive
- Reviewing internal plans, policies, service issues/turning to a more outward focus and reviewing external issues
- Generating shared ownership of scrutiny/recognising distinct party political priorities
- Operating collectively/working in new and different ways eg informally as sub-groups or individuals
- Working proactively/reactively across all council departments/services
- Listening to individuals/prioritising community and council-wide concerns

4.8 A scrutiny officer group meeting to develop the link role with scrutiny link officers has been arranged for 19th September.

EXTRACT FROM REPORT TO OSOC 11th APRIL 2005

6 Establishment of Link Officers

6.1 Under existing arrangements, where an item is called for scrutiny or Members ask questions, it is difficult to identify the relevant officers quickly. Most officers are also not used to dealing with scrutiny and a few see it as a distraction from real work. It is therefore proposed that, subject to TMT's agreement, a Link Officer scheme be established for each Directorate. The role of the Link Officer appointed at assistant director level or above would be:

- To serve as a contact point and co-ordinator for issues raised by Scrutiny concerning his/her Directorate,
- To be familiar with Scrutiny procedures and ensure that reports and replies from the Directorate comply with Scrutiny Procedures.

6.2 The Link officer scheme would play a key role in developing a higher degree of co-operation and trust between Scrutiny and the different services. It would also assist the Directorates in anticipating issues, supplying the necessary information quickly and thus avoiding unnecessary scrutiny or deferral of items.

The Scrutiny Link Officers would receive appropriate training and support to assist them in their roles and they would be expected to work closely with the Scrutiny Support Officers.

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<p>Financial implications</p> <p><i>Finance Officer consulted:</i></p>
<p>Legal implications</p> <p>There are no legal implications to be taken into account.</p> <p><i>Lawyer consulted: John Heys, 23rd June 2005</i></p>

<p>Corporate/Citywide implications</p> <p>The overview and scrutiny function aims to improving the way the Council works and thus any improvements to the function potentially support all the priorities of the Council and its work with its partners.</p>	<p>Risk assessment</p> <p>No risks have been identified which required a full risk assessment.</p>
<p>Sustainability implications</p> <p>None directly, but see comment in "Corporate/Citywide implications" above.</p>	<p>Equalities implications</p> <p>None directly, but see comment in "Corporate/Citywide implications" above.</p>
<p>Implications for the prevention of crime and disorder</p> <p>None directly, but see comment in "Corporate/Citywide implications" above.</p>	

<p>Background papers</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Contact Officer</p> <p><i>Mary van Beinum: 29 - 1062</i></p>