



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Committee Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 6th July 2006

Title: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Report of: Head of Overview and Scrutiny and Emergency Planning and
Head of Policy and Performance

Report reference: OS09/06 & PPP31/06

Summary:

This report presents some options for communications support to the Overview and Scrutiny function

Recommendations:

The Committee is asked to approve the suggestions presented in section 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 of the report.

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

Overview and Scrutiny Communications Plan

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out ways in which the work of the City Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees can be promoted to audiences including the local media to increase participation and interest.

2. Background

- 2.1 An independent evaluation, by Dr Stephanie Snape, reviewed the overview and scrutiny arrangements at Carlisle City Council in order to identify key achievements, remaining challenges and to provide recommendations for further improvement.

- 2.2 The 'Snape Report' highlighted two key areas for improvement:

- Enhance Community Engagement
- Achieve greater media exposure

- 2.3 In particular, the subsequent action plan suggested:

- Better publicity of the work of O&S;
- More effective partner and public participation and contribution to the O&S agenda and process;
- Development of a number of attractive scrutiny web pages on the Council website (to include an electronic form for raising issues for O&S to consider in their work programmes);
- Production of a range of information leaflets on O&S, tailored to different audiences;
- Including a regular O&S column in Focus and Staff Focus;
- Production of an O&S newsletter to be distributed to partners and at libraries, council offices (and other locations);
- O&S road shows at supermarkets and shopping centres;
- Co-option of partner, user and community representatives on task finish groups;
- Stakeholder analysis to determine which partners/public to invite to provide oral evidence and/or written evidence;
- Expansion in the use of expert witnesses, drawn from universities, consultancies and national user/lobbying groups; and
- Development of a Press Relations and Communications Strategy.

3. What next?

- 3.1 The Snape report made a number of suggestions for Carlisle but not all were considered appropriate at this time. For example, Overview and Scrutiny roadshows at supermarkets and shopping centres was discounted on the basis of cost and appropriateness. What is important is that we are creative and realistic about the opportunities available. In

presenting the following suggestions for discussion officers have tried to bear this in mind.

- 3.2 Agenda setting** – at this stage there is time for officers from Overview and Scrutiny and from Communications to meet together with the chair of the committee to agree items which maybe of interest to the media. Where items were identified then a press release could be issued in advance of the meeting to advise the media. This gives the media an opportunity to cover the report in advance of the meeting, set up any meetings they may feel are necessary and attend the meeting if they wish to. In covering the item in advance of the meeting in the local media also provides valuable notice of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting taking place.

The recent discussions about Cumbria Strategic Waste Partnership and the Primary Care Trust consultation may have generated more media interest in the committees considering these items, if this proactive approach was in place.

It maybe sensible for the Committee to consider scheduling the media items at the beginning of the agenda and including a short break after the item. The break would enable the media representative to do further interviews if necessary. The Committee needs to give careful thought to this suggestion in view of the sometimes lengthy agendas being considered by the Committee and potential for disruption that this might create.

- 3.3 Press releases** - press releases could be issued in advance of the meetings to advise the media newsworthy items, included in this would be the contact details of the speakers and chair. Press releases will not be released in advance of every meeting – their issue has to based upon a decision about what is newsworthy. However, each Committee could expect a maximum of three to four press releases for each Committee every Civic Year. There is scope to issue a press release on behalf of the Chair in circumstances where the discussion at the agenda setting stage decides that this is appropriate.

The issue of press releases is still no guarantee that a reporter will attend the meeting because breaking news on the day will determine the media's priorities.

- 3.4 Web Pages** – the Overview and Scrutiny Committee web pages have been updated in line with the Snape recommendations and will hopefully promote a better understanding of the work of the scrutiny committees in Carlisle. These pages will continue to be updated over the next 12 months to provide a web page for each scrutiny committee, with links to subject reviews, work programmes and reports.

- 3.5 Community involvement in Overview and Scrutiny** – Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee have already agreed to hold meetings

in venues away from the Civic Centre. A recent meeting of Community Overview and Scrutiny, for example, was held at The Boathouse, Talkin Tarn. These opportunities need to be promoted more proactively so that the meetings can fully exploit the potential for community engagement.

In practice this will mean organising publicity well in advance of the meeting. Officers in liaison with the chairs of each committee will discuss and decide the timing and frequency of external meetings, but it is suggested that one outside meeting for each committee should be enough to measure the effectiveness of the initiative in the first year. is held externally. Officers from Scrutiny and Communications will agree what is appropriate in each case.

- 3.6 O&S Newsletter** - Dr Snape in her report said that a newsletter is not considered appropriate or cost effective. However, we may wish to consider this at a later date. In the meantime, members may wish to consider the idea of including items about the work of the scrutiny committees in the Council's Focus magazine in the "At your Service" section, particularly when subject review work is ongoing.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1** The suggested actions in paragraphs 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 will ensure that Overview and Scrutiny Committees are engaged more effectively with the media and that opportunities to promote the work of Overview and Scrutiny are fully embraced. Members are to consider and approve the suggestions made in the report.

