

Agenda Item 22.

TITLE	Government Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 19 June 2019
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Overview and Scrutiny is one of the checks and balances which ensure that the Council and its partners make and implement effective decisions. It is a key element in the decision making process which ensures transparency and accountability. Scrutiny also enables the voice of residents and community groups to be heard more effectively as part of that decision making process.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is recommended to consider the Government's Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny and to assess the implications for Wokingham Borough Council.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Government has published updated Statutory Guidance on the operation of Overview and Scrutiny in local government. The Statutory Guidance is appended to the report.

The Statutory Guidance highlights the key elements that contribute to effective Scrutiny including organisational culture, resourcing, access to information and training and support for Members.

The report asks Members to consider the Government's guidance and discuss any suggestions which may strengthen the operation of Overview and Scrutiny at the Council.

Background

The Government's updated Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny was published in May 2019. The guidance followed on from the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee's inquiry into Overview and Scrutiny in 2017.

The aim of the guidance is to ensure that local authorities are aware of the purpose of Scrutiny, what effective Scrutiny looks like, how to conduct Scrutiny effectively and the benefits it can deliver for the Council and local communities.

As Statutory Guidance, the Council must have regard to it when exercising its functions. This means that the guidance should be followed unless there is a good reason not to.

Analysis of Issues

The Statutory Guidance emphasises the importance of organisational culture in the development of effective Overview and Scrutiny. This relates to the whole Council and requires a commitment from senior Members and Officers to encourage Scrutiny which may be challenging and potentially difficult.

The guidance also covers a range of other factors, including:

- Prioritisation – Scrutiny needs to be focussed with a carefully prioritised work programme;
- Engagement - between the Executive and Scrutiny on order to establish the “critical friend” role and ensure that Scrutiny is adding value;
- Communication – ensuring that the Scrutiny function is understood and supported both inside and outside the organisation;
- Resourcing – including Officer time and budget for training and external expertise;
- Members – including support for the Chairmen and general/specific training for Scrutiny Members;
- Information – effective Scrutiny requires the availability of relevant information in a timely manner.

Members are requested to consider the Statutory Guidance and consider any issues which could lead to improvements in the delivery of Overview and Scrutiny at the Council.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council continues to face severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of reductions to public sector funding and growing pressures in our statutory services. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions of approximately £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	NA	NA	NA
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	NA	NA	NA
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	NA	NA	NA

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
Overview and Scrutiny impacts on all Council services and the work of key partners

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
None

List of Background Papers
Government Statutory Guidance

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