

CONSTITUTION AND ETHICS	AGENDA ITEM No. 4
12 OCTOBER 2020	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Fiona McMillan, Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Farooq, Cabinet Member for Digital Services and Transformation	
Contact Officer(s):	Fiona McMillan, Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer Paulina Ford, Senior Democratic Services Officer	Tel. 452508

CHAIRING OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer	Deadline date: <i>n/a</i>
<p>It is recommended that the Constitution and Ethics Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Notes the contents of the report, and 2. That Council should consider making Charing Skills training mandatory for scrutiny committee chairs. 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report is submitted to the Constitution and Ethics Committee following a request from Councillor Nick Sandford on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to review the current practice of how scrutiny committees are chaired, and what training is offered to chairman of scrutiny committees.

2.2 This report is for the Constitution and Ethics Committee to consider under its Terms of Reference No. 2.7.2.1 Authority to oversee the operation of the Council's Constitution and authority to make recommendations to Full Council as to amendments and improvements to the Council's Constitution (including the codes and protocols) subject to the receipt and consideration of a report prepared by the Monitoring Officer, with the exception of those matters under the remit of the Executive.

3. TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A
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4. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 Councillor Sandford has raised an issue with regard to the style of chairing at scrutiny committees. He has felt at times that on some committees the allowance of one question at a time has led to ineffective scrutiny of a topic. Concerns had been raised with the Monitoring Officer on how a meeting of the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee was chaired in December which has prompted this report to Constitution & Ethics Committee.

Councillor Sandford has advised that having attended on several occasions training on effective scrutiny that members must be able to ask a series of consecutive questions to each witness, in order to test the information presented, and elicit clarification or further information if required. The restriction of one question at a time does not allow for effective scrutiny and to follow a line of enquiry. Councillor Sandford has therefore requested that Council should consider making Chairing Skills training mandatory for all committee chairs. He feels that chairman of scrutiny committees in particular, have a position of great responsibility in the scrutiny process, and the Council pays them a substantial amount of additional members allowance for performing the function.

- 4.2 The Democratic Services team have contacted the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to seek guidance and information with regard to chairing of scrutiny committees. They have advised that there is no specific guidance to chairing scrutiny meetings and each chairman will adopt their own style. The best chairs are flexible, changing their approach depending on the meeting and the subject matter. For some non-contentious topics, they may adopt a very free flowing approach, for topics which are more complex and where there might be political tension the chairman might assert greater control. Following the style of Parliamentary Select Committee meetings good practice is to have a private meeting of the committee before the formal meeting where questioning tactics are discussed and agreed. This then allows the chairman to understand the intention and the line of questioning from the individual committee members and ensure that members are forensically following a line of questioning, and not just trying to monopolise committee time by asking random questions. The chair can then facilitate conversation about objectives ***before*** the meeting

All scrutiny committees at Peterborough do have pre meetings prior to the start of the main meeting, the purpose of which is to identify the line of questioning members of the committee wish to take. This ensures that the committee are prepared for the meeting and are working together as a team. However not all members of the committee attend these meetings, therefore making it difficult for the chairman to know the intention of the member asking the question and whether they have a key line of enquiry in line with the rest of the committees thinking..

- 4.3 All training sessions including the chairing skills one is offered to all Councillors at the beginning of the municipal year. Those who have not chaired before are specifically targeted. Some Vice Chairs also attend the training. The training is a generic chairing skills course and is not mandatory as some chairman have been chairman for some considerable time and have attended training in the past. New chairman do however attend the training when requested. The training is an in-house training course delivered by the Democratic Services team at no cost to the council.

The chairs training course does include a section on the chairing of scrutiny committees, however a suggestion might be that as part of this course it contains a further section providing guidance on questioning skills required for members of a scrutiny committee; in that they should forensically follow a line of questioning. This would then assist the chairman in understanding why follow up / supplementary questions should be allowed if the questioner has not felt that the question had been adequately answered.

- 4.4 Alternatively, The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny offer the following courses (see list below) which provide training for both scrutiny committee members and scrutiny chairman. They have also offered to provide one course covering elements from all of the courses listed below if preferred.

1. Chairing Skills and Scrutiny Leadership

Chairing a scrutiny committee is much more than leading the meeting through its agenda. It requires a set of skills, knowledge and understanding to get scrutiny working effectively. This module will help both new and experienced chairs and vice-chairs to learn the essential skills to support them in their crucial tasks. Can be provided as part of a wider package including coaching and mentoring support. Covers team building, understanding the role and purpose of scrutiny, focusing on outcomes, time management and elements of questioning skills.

2. Expert Chairing Skills for Scrutiny

The role of the Chair is pivotal in ensuring scrutiny has an impact.

This course is not only about how to run a meeting – it is a course about how to be an effective scrutiny leader, an advocate for transparency and inclusion in your authority and working effectively with the executive. All of which will give scrutiny a higher profile and improve the lives of local people.

Drawing on CfPS research and expert facilitation, delegates will learn the best way to approach scrutiny leadership, work programming and preparing for meetings. The course will help Chairs to get the most from their fellow members and their officer support.

3. Advanced Leading and Chairing Scrutiny

This focuses on developing the leadership, influencing and managing skills that effective scrutiny chairs and vice-chairs need to make the committee or task group effective. There is an element of practical case study tasks and understanding behaviours and culture.

5. CONSULTATION

5.1 None

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

6.1 It is for the committee to discuss the contents of the report and decide what further action if any should be taken.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

7.1 The recommendation has come at the request of Councillor Sandford.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1 To do nothing and continue with the current training options.

9. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

9.1 If the committee decide to put in place mandatory training for all scrutiny chairman through an external provider such as the Centre for Governance and Public Scrutiny, the cost to the council would be around £600 per course. During the current Covid period the Centre for Governance and Public Scrutiny are offering on-line training and development sessions via Zoom or Teams which would last around 1.5 hours and would accommodate up to 30 people per course.

Legal Implications

9.2 None

Equalities Implications

9.3 None

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

10.1 None

11. APPENDICES

11.1 *None*