

# Manchester City Council Overview and Scrutiny Committees An Introductory Guide

## Why do I need to know about Overview and Scrutiny Committees?

- The Overview and Scrutiny Committees are an opportunity for your organisation to bear witness for your service users/ members/ clients about key issues – e.g. the impact of welfare reform, changes in service provision, changes in environmental policy
- You are able to get issues that are important to you on the agenda with Councillors
- You can raise the profile and demonstrate strength of feeling about an issue with Councillors and Senior Officers
- You can find out what Councillors, officers and other stakeholders are thinking on specific issues and build a relationship with them, with potential for collaboration in the future.
- Overview and Scrutiny Committees can be a valuable part of your organisation's campaigning and communications.

## Examples of how voluntary and community groups have been involved with Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- Giving evidence to the Health Scrutiny Committee on the impact of the closure of day care centres for adults in the city: after hearing from a wide range of relevant stakeholders including a number of voluntary sector groups, the Committee referred this decision back to the Executive Group. In the end the original decision was upheld but it raised the profile of the issue and generated public and media interest.
- A range of voluntary and community sector groups presented evidence to the Communities Scrutiny Committee on the equalities impact of welfare reform. This provided an opportunity for groups to speak out on behalf of their clients as to the systemic impact of multiple changes of national and local policy and the effects this is having on some of the most marginalised groups, at a time when there is a growing strength of political and media narratives blaming the poor for being poor.

## What are Overview and Scrutiny Committees?

Overview and Scrutiny committees were established within Local Authorities (LAs) following the implementation of the Local Government Act in 2000. Following the Act, Local Authorities created separate Executive (decision makers) and Scrutiny functions within the Councils. Scrutiny Committees, in theory, hold decision-makers accountable. Their role is to scrutinise the working of the executive and to make recommendations to the Council.

The scrutiny function now covers more than just Council Services, it includes public services delivered by external organisations, outside of Council control including those from

- a) The Manchester Partnership - this is a multi-agency strategic group made up of Council, NHS, private and voluntary sector groups who work together.
- b) Health and Social Care - such as commissioners and providers of publicly funded healthcare and social care and policies arising from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies

## **What does this look like in Manchester?**

Manchester City Council has a Leader of the Council, currently Sir Richard Leese, and an Executive - a group of Councillors who have a brief around a specific topic (similar to the Prime Minister's Cabinet). The Executive group in the Council make and implement strategic decisions and set priorities.

- To see who the current Executive is, click [here](#)
- To see minutes from Executive meetings click [here](#)

Manchester currently has six Scrutiny Committees: Communities, Economy, Finance, Health, Neighbourhoods, Young People and Children.

## **Who is on the Overview and Scrutiny Committees?**

It depends on the individual committee. It will always include Councillors but can involve a range of others. The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee in Manchester also covers social care.

## **What Powers do Scrutiny Committees have?**

There is considerable debate as to the strength of Overview and Scrutiny Committee. They cannot generally prevent Executive decisions from happening, nor can they force people to follow their suggestions. They have been accused by some of lacking teeth and not having enough strength to hold the executive function to account. However, as noted above there are a range of ways in which they can be used, to shine a spotlight on key issues, demonstrate public feeling, and ensure councillors are aware of evidence.

Committees are able to investigate any issue which affects the local area, or the area's inhabitants, whether or not it is the direct responsibility of the Council's Executive. They cannot make others act on their suggestions. However, the Council's Executive, relevant partners and NHS bodies must consider and respond to what has been recommended.

They can ask for reports and for senior managers/officers to attend meetings to present evidence and answer questions, they have powers to hold both commissioners and providers to account. This means that both private sector and voluntary and community group providers could be called to give evidence to them.

## **How do I find out what the Committees will be scrutinising/ have scrutinised?**

Details can be found [here](#)

Some items are scheduled a long time in advance; some items are added to agendas shortly before the actual meetings. All meetings are open to the public.

## **How can I give evidence to a scrutiny Committee?**

Members of the public may make representations to any of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees on any substantive item on the agenda, provided that they have asked the Chair of the Committee if they can speak. Contact details are below.

## **How can I suggest Items to be scrutinised?**

Contact the relevant scrutiny Chair.

## **Contact details for the Scrutiny Team:**

Phone 0161 234 3011      Email: [info@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:info@manchester.gov.uk)