

**ADVICE NOTES FOR WITNESSES (INCLUDING OFFICERS OF THE COUNCIL) ATTENDING THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

1. Scrutiny is part of the new political process that was introduced in 2000 as part of the government's modernisation programme for local authorities. The scrutiny process is undertaken by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and provides the opportunity for Councillors to examine the various functions of the Council and other public bodies, to ask questions about the Council's decisions and performance, to consider whether service improvements can be put in place and make recommendations to this effect. It also provides the opportunity for councillors to champion issues of local concern to residents that may involve other agencies.
2. Meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee start at 7.15pm and usually take place at the Council's main offices at Causeway House, Bocking End, Braintree CM7 9HB. Ample parking is available at Causeway House. A map of directions is attached. Sometimes meetings will take place at other venues if members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider that this may assist its work. Details of any alternative venues will be published in advance.
3. The Lead Scrutiny Officer will contact you a week prior to the Scrutiny Hearing to run through the proceedings and to check that you are comfortable with the arrangements.

On the night of the meeting, witnesses will be met on arrival at Causeway House by an officer from the Scrutiny Unit.

4. There will be reserved seats allocated for witnesses in the room where the meeting is to be held.
5. All meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are held in public session and are open to the press and public to attend. There is special seating provided for them at the back of the room.
6. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee meets in an informal atmosphere. It invites those who it believes can help with their investigation to come along to a Committee meeting to provide information or views about a particular issue. It will usually work through a list of questions prepared in advance. You will be notified well before the day of the meeting of the questions that the Committee would like to ask you so that you can come to the Committee well prepared.
7. On occasion, witnesses may be speaking to the full Committee of 12 Councillors and on other occasions just a small sub-group.
8. Any background information that you have previously provided by way of introduction or to aid the discussion will be circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting.
9. At the beginning of the meeting, there will be a number of formal items of business that the Chair will deal with first such as agreeing the minutes of the previous meeting and noting any apologies. Immediately after the item to approve the minutes, there is a public question time session (a standard item included on all Council Agenda) where any matters of Council business can be raised or other matters of local concern. However, you would not necessarily be expected to

respond to any questions from the public on the night that related to the subject under scrutiny. When the main item of business is reached the Chair will introduce you to the Committee and ask you to give a brief introduction to your work, how you are connected with the Committee's current topic of inquiry and any particular areas of specialisation that you might have.

**10.** Once the introductions have been completed, the meeting will open out into a question and answer session based on the terms of reference of the inquiry, the question plan and any supporting information you have asked to be distributed to Members.

**11.** You may not be the only witness present and the Chair will ask each witness in turn to talk to the Committee.

**12.** The Committee is anxious to ensure that participants feel able to attend and take part, and to make the scrutiny investigation a success. To this end, we will ensure that meetings:

**\* are as informal as possible**

**\* always seek to be constructive and not judgmental**

**\* always treat people with respect and listen to the things they wish to say.**

**13.** The meeting itself will be recorded and notes of the discussion will be taken. The tape recording will help us to take more detailed notes which will help in the production of a final report and can be used as a reference if any particular issues are raised after the meeting.

If you feel at any time that you might be discussing personal information, such as financial or personal details of yourself or a third party, or details of a business contract for example, you can ask for this part of the meeting to be conducted in private. The public and press will be asked to leave and whilst minutes will be produced they will only be available on a restricted basis.

**14.** If you want to make a PowerPoint presentation or use overhead projector slides, please check with the Scrutiny Unit well in advance of the meeting, especially if you need equipment to be set up beforehand.

**15.** The informal notes of the discussion will be prepared as soon as practical following the meeting and will be sent to you and any other witnesses present to correct. You will then be given 14 days to check the notes for any errors, omissions or factual inaccuracies and you can also add any supporting information by adding footnotes to the document. You will also have the opportunity to listen to the tapes of the meeting if you want to.

**16.** It is likely that most enquires will take place over a number of weeks and will culminate in the production of a final report which will draw on all the evidence obtained by the Committee. Members of the Committee fully appreciate the help they are given by a host of people during their inquiries and, as an important contributor to the enquiry, you will be sent a copy of the report.

17. In the event of any query, please contact

Steve Bore  
Scrutiny Manager  
Tel: (01376) 552525 Ext. 2003  
'e' mail: [stebo@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:stebo@braintree.gov.uk)

3/06/08