

## **GUIDANCE FOR QUESTIONING OF WITNESSES ON CALL-INS BY THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The purpose of a Call-In is to ensure that there is an efficient and effective scrutiny of decisions. For this to be achieved not only must all relevant information be available for the Committee but Members in questioning witnesses should make the best use of the opportunity by focusing on the relevant issues.

Unless all relevant information is disclosed in an appropriate Cabinet report, then witnesses should endeavour to prepare for prior circulation to Members a statement of the relevant information. To assist witnesses Members should in calling-in a matter be as clear as possible as to the issues that they are concerned with. Members involved in the Call-In are consulted on the appropriate witnesses and Members may wish to advise them in advance of particular issues they wish to raise or documents which they wish to refer to.

### **Officer/Member Protocol**

The Protocol on relations between Members and officers stresses that for the effective conduct of business there must be mutual respect in all meetings and contact between Members and officers. In particular

- Members and officers should apply the rules of common courtesy to each other
- Members should be aware that officers are constrained in the response they may give to public comments by Members
- Members should not abuse officers and should not seek to undermine an officer's position by abuse, rudeness or ridicule.

This in no way reduces the Members' proper right and duty to criticise reports, actions and work of any department or section of the Council with the belief that such criticism is merited.

### **Call-In Protocol**

The Call-In Protocol confirms

- Questions must be courteous and relevant
- If an interviewee does not possess knowledge or information to answer a question then he or she must not be pressed
- At the conclusion of each interview the interviewee should be asked if there is anything he or she wishes to add/clarify and should be allowed to do so

## **General Advice on Questioning**

The following points should be borne in mind by Members in order that the debate and questioning can be focused and effective

- The purpose of the interview is to ask questions of interviewees and not to make statements. Interviewees are under no obligation to respond to statements not properly phrased as questions
- Little is gained by Members asking questions which are clearly already answered in either a report or statement already given
- Members are encouraged not to repeat questions asked either by other Members or indeed by the same Member
- The questions must be relevant to the concerns raised and should be aimed at gaining information which will assist enabling the Committee to make the appropriate decision
- The simpler and more direct that the question is then the more likely it is that an interviewee will answer directly
- If all relevant information has been obtained from a witness following questioning by other Members then Members can feel free to refrain from asking further questions as there is no obligation to ask questions.
- Purely rhetorical questions should be avoided
- If information has been obtained from one witness, there may be little point in asking the same questions of another witness