QUESTIONING AT O&S COMMITTEE /TASK & FINISH GROUP MEETINGS

One of the most important skills associated with scrutiny is around questioning, whether at an O&S Committee meeting or as part of a smaller task group.

Question types

Closed: requires a brief factual answer and closes off discussion for example, *"What is your name?"*

Open: requires more than a 'yes' or 'no' answer and stimulates further discussion on the issue, for example, *"How do you think your proposals will contribute to improving this service?"*

Fact-finding questions: Seek verifiable data such as who, what, where, when, how much. Used to gather information about the situation. eg: "How much have we spent on this service this year?"   "Who was consulted before the changes were implemented?"
Opinion finding questions: Ask for subjective information that gets at opinions, values or beliefs. They will help you understand views. eg: "Do you think people understand the services available?"   "How do you feel the consultation went?"
Tell me more questions: Can help find out more about what the witnesses are saying. They will encourage the speaker to provide more details. eg: "You mentioned costs a moment ago – can you be more specific"   "Explain that in more detail for us"
Best/least questions: Help you understand potential opportunities in the present situation. They help to test the limits of participant's needs and wants eg: "What is the best thing about the service we offer?"   "What is the worst thing about the way we publicise our services?"
Third party questions:

Can help people express sensitive information and help uncover thoughts in an indirect manner

eg: "Some people say it takes too long to get a response from our services. How does that sound to you?"
"There is some concern that not enough has been done to address this problem. Can you relate to that concern?"

Crystal ball questions:

Can help to remove obstacles from a person's mind and let you explore their true wishes.

eg: "If time and money were no object, what sort of computer system would you design for the department?"

Questioning dos and don'ts

To make the best use of the time available for a witness it is important to think about not only the type of question but also the way in which it is asked. The following suggests some issues to think about:-

DO	DON'T
Ask clear concise questions covering a single issue	Ask rambling, ambiguous questions that cover a number of issues
Ask challenging questions that will stimulate thought	Ask questions that don't provide opportunity for thought
Ask reasonable questions based on what witnesses will know about	Ask questions about issues not in the witnesses' knowledge
Ask honest relevant questions	Ask "trick" questions designed to confuse them
Ask a question	Make a statement

Preparation for O&S Committee meetings and planning a questioning strategy

To derive most benefit from O&S Committee meetings, preparation is very important, including the consideration of the key lines of enquiry for each item on the agenda.

The O&S Committees will endeavour to:
1. Establish what it want to achieves from its questioning before the meeting

2. Consider what information it wants and then build questions around obtaining it, structuring questions into blocks
3. Obtain agreement in advance as to how it is going to do it and split up questions among Board Members
4. Build questions on the preceding answers
5. Use probing questions to elicit more information or clarification
6. Ensure that questions are engaging
7. Follow up with supplementary questions where necessary

How to question effectively can be represented by a questioning funnel:
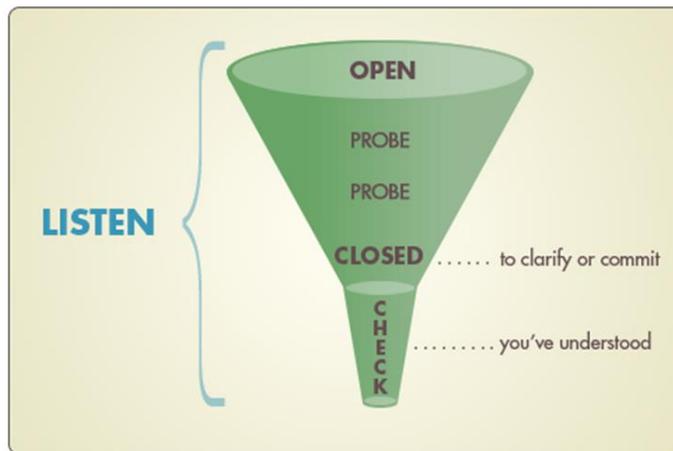
That is the O&S Committee:
- Establishes what it wants to achieve from the questioning before the meeting
- Uses open questions at first to get the broad picture
- Builds questions on the preceding answers
- Uses probing questions to elicit more information
- Uses closed questions to supply clarification