



Paper for Discussion: Committee Openness

Agenda Item 8

This paper invites members of the committee to consider options for increasing committee openness.

Issue

1. At present one of SACN's 3 meetings each year is an open meeting, which comprises the normal business of the day taking place in open session followed by a Question and Answer session.
2. Members agreed to revisit the issue of committee openness (February 2003 meeting; SACN/03/01/min) after the experience of the (then) next open meeting which was in June 2003.
3. This paper invites the members of the committee to discuss options for increasing committee openness with additional open meetings.

Background

4. SACN is required to comply with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. The five commitments of the Code of Practice are:
 - Supply facts and analysis with major policy decisions;
 - Open up internal guidelines about departments dealings with the public;
 - Supply reasons with administrative decisions;
 - Provide information under the Citizen's Charter about public services, what they cost, targets, performance, complaints and redress;
 - Respond to requests for information.
5. At the establishment of SACN, a code of practice was agreed regarding the openness of committee meetings *Working practices for SACN (SACN/01/02a, section 4)*. This code notes that SACN would operate from a presumption of openness in accordance with Government policy on transparency in working procedures. The proceedings should be as open as possible and should maintain high levels of transparency during routine business.
6. There are some exceptions in the Code of Practice on Access to Government to this general principle of openness. A relevant example would be for the review of confidential information, for example, scientific results prior to their publication in the scientific literature.

Suggested Open Meeting Format

7. Meetings to take place only at either the FSA or DoH. Places for open meetings to be advertised on the SACN, FSA and DoH websites. Numbers would be restricted.
8. Open meetings with confidential information would be termed "reserved business" and considered in a "closed" meeting after the Q and A session. Reserved business follows the Code of Practice on Access to Government information and includes
 - Unpublished data

- Draft guidelines
- Commercially confidential information, which cannot be disclosed for legal reasons
- Confidential patient information or personal information about named individuals

For discussion

9. The committee are asked to consider the following;

Move to two open meetings per year including reserved time for 'restricted' items as necessary.

Move to all open meetings (apart from Horizon scanning and Subgroups) again with reserved time as necessary.

No change.