



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

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Background



“Overview and scrutiny committees were established in English and Welsh local authorities by the [Local Government Act 2000](#).

They were intended as a counterweight to the new executive structures created by that Act (elected mayors or leaders and cabinets).

Their role was to develop and review policy and make recommendations to the council

Today, the legislative provisions for overview and scrutiny committees for England can be found in the [Localism Act 2011](#)”

Purpose of Scrutiny



- The purpose of scrutiny is ultimately to improve the lives of local people through improved public services.
- To justify the resources allocated to scrutiny it is important to be able to demonstrate that scrutiny work adds value and makes a difference to local people
- Is to influence the policies and decisions made by the council and other organisations involved in delivering public services
- The scrutiny committee gathers evidence on issues affecting local people and makes recommendations based on its findings
- Scrutiny can investigate any issue which affects the local area or the area's inhabitants

Legal Powers



Generally, a scrutiny committee has the legal power to:

- require that the council makes information available to it, both in the form of written reports and by officer and cabinet member attendance at committee meetings
- require that the cabinet responds to its recommendations within a set time frame

Effective Scrutiny



- Before undertaking any scrutiny work it is important to think about not only scrutiny's legal powers but also about how to build a positive working relationship with those who are the subject of scrutiny's recommendations.
- This ensures a much higher chance of scrutiny's recommendations being implemented.
- Effective scrutiny work relies on scrutiny's 'soft' influencing power, as it has no formal power to compel anyone to make changes
- Developing the conditions necessary for working effectively with the council's executive and officers, and any other relevant partner organisations.

Work Programming



Programming is the planning stage of scrutiny, where there are clear criteria for the selection of subjects and agenda items

Scrutiny is seen as impartial and stays separate from party politics.

The challenge for scrutiny councilors is to use your political skills and understanding of the needs of local people to shape the discussions,

Officers should see scrutiny as an essential partner in improving services, where non-executive councilors can help them to better understand local people and make robust judgements about priorities

Adding Value



A scrutiny review is successful if it fulfils one or more of the following conditions:

- it meets the objectives set out by the scrutiny committee
- Feedback from the public shows that they think there has been the service improvement they desired
- the work has helped to achieve corporate or partnership priorities
- there is a return on investment, demonstrating scrutiny's impact and outcomes in financial terms.

The impact scrutiny has can be measured in two ways:

1. **Outputs** – quantitative expressions of the activities being reviewed, for example 'waste bin collections have increased to 10,000 every week'. These can be expressed in financial terms to show return on investment
2. **Outcomes** – what stakeholders experience as a result of the review, for example if the local community recognises an improvement. The council and its partners could also be stakeholders, for example where scrutiny recommendations relate to internal processes

Effective Scrutiny Involves



- Effective work programming Positive relationships
- Effective research and analysis.
- Effective meetings Specific recommendations
- Good monitoring and evaluation

Support for O & S



To ensure consistency of lead officer support for the Chair's Group and the committee, Executive Leadership Team support will be provided by the Executive Director of People & Change and substituted by the Executive Director of Finance & Assets

An ELT lead will:

- Provide a level of organisational oversight, which is missing from the current arrangements
- Will work with O&S Chairs Group to ensure that the agreed work-plan is comprehensive, deliverable and likely to add value
- Highlight any potential resourcing issues at the earliest opportunity
- Champion O & S internally?

Considerations



- 7 O & S meetings a year?
- 2 subjects per meeting?
- Resources
- O&S planning session ahead of the new year
- Subjects could be themed?
 - Horizon
 - VFM
 - Performance and risk
 - Council motions
 - Community issues
 - Financial
 - Policy development
 - Commissioned services
 - Corporate plan
 - Major projects/programmes
 - Free slots