

An officer guide to scrutiny

How might I be involved?

Scrutiny is member led but the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny relies on the support of officers from across the council. Whilst some dedicated support is provided by Democratic Services, the in-depth information, expertise and experience in relation to services can only be provided by officers responsible for those services. If you work in a service area which is subject to scrutiny you may be asked to contribute in one or more of the following ways;

Attending meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Often the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S) will request written information and will ask an officer to come and present it to members. You will be informed of this request in advance, what the content should focus on and the deadlines by which it needs to be produced. If invited to attend the meeting you will be asked to make a short introduction and members of the committee will have the opportunity to ask you questions about the matter(s) under discussion.

Report using the template for Cabinet reports – this is relevant where the author is asking O&S to formerly note a report, agree some recommendations or comment on a report which is going to Cabinet. The report should spell out in the summary why the report is being brought to the committee e.g. endorsing or commenting on the recommendations being made to Cabinet.

A template is available on the intranet and on the shared directory.

Discussion paper format – in this case the author is presenting some information to O&S but not asking for any recommendations to be agreed. The information is presented under four main headings:

1. Why has this come to scrutiny
2. Summary of the issue
3. Summary of the evidence / information
4. Possible next steps for the committee

The aim is for the discussion paper to be brief and summarise the information in an easily readable form e.g. use of bullet points / tables, etc.

A template is available on the library drive on the intranet and shared directory.

Being involved in scrutiny task groups

There are a variety of ways in which you could be involved in scrutiny tasks groups and these are set out in detail in the scrutiny task group guide (Appendix 4). Generally these meetings will be less formal and reports will also be more informal.

Keeping members informed

On occasions, officers will be asked or will deem it necessary to provide members with information to respond to members' queries or to help build their understanding and awareness of a particular issue.

Briefing notes – provide information on a particular matter and can be circulated by email or in paper copy. Briefing notes do not form part of the formal O&S agenda and would therefore not be discussed.

A template is available on the library drive on the intranet and shared directory.

Member Seminars and Briefings – member seminars can be used or briefings arranged to communicate with members on a particular issue. Nine 'Member Seminars' are scheduled throughout the year, they are allocated on a first come basis and it is the responsibility of the organiser to make all arrangements and communicate these to members. Please refer to the intranet for more information. Any additional member briefings should also be listed in the Corporate Diary.

Being called to account

A petition may be submitted requiring an officer to be 'called to account'. The grounds for such a petition must relate to the officer's duties and not be personal.

Officers who can be called to account in this way include the Head of Paid Service, the statutory Finance and Monitoring Officers, the Executive Directors and the Directors. If such a petition is received the officer and any other officer O&S considers appropriate will be required to attend a meeting of O&S to answer questions. The O&S meeting will be in public and the organiser of the petition will be invited unless confidential information would be revealed. Any report or recommendations arising from it will be communicated to the petition organiser and placed on the Council's website.