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A councillor's workbook on scrutiny

This workbook has been designed to provide councillors with insights and information on the 'overview and scrutiny' function of councils to support them in their role as councillor.

Councillor development

26 Sep 2023

Scrutiny in government

Introduction

The Local Government Act (2000) introduced a new political governance system for councils in England and Wales, requiring them to have a separate 'executive' in the form of a leader, or elected mayor, and cabinet. To provide a counterweight to this, the Act also introduced the concept of 'overview and scrutiny,' whereby every council with an executive governance structure is required to have an overview and scrutiny committee. This enables the rest of the council to scrutinise the decisions and policies of the executive, issuing reports and recommendations informed by evidence and understanding of the needs of local communities.

Then, the Localism Act (2011) gave councils the option of converting to a committee system form of governance. Councils that have chosen this option are not required to have a separate overview and scrutiny committee, although they may choose to do so. It is still expected that

scrutiny will take place within committees to identify where improvements need to be made, and arrangements for scrutiny of community safety partnerships and health are still required.

This has been supplemented by **statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny** (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overview-and-scrutiny-statutory-guidance-for-councils-and-combined-authorities>), which is intended to ensure that local authorities are aware of the purpose of overview and scrutiny and how to conduct it effectively. Section 1 of the guidance includes a number of policies and practices authorities should adopt or should consider adopting when deciding how to conduct their overview and scrutiny functions.

Whichever governance system a council operates, scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that local government remains transparent, accountable, and open— resulting in improved public policies, services and outcomes.

As a councillor, you have been elected by your local community because they believe that you will represent them, and ensure that the council provides the services they need, to the standard they expect. One of your primary roles in overview and scrutiny is providing constructive challenge to achieve better outcomes for residents. Scrutiny achieves this by questioning cabinet or committee members, officers, and other council partners to gain further knowledge around an issue and make effective, evidenced-based recommendations.

Your role also provides an important opportunity for all councillors to be involved in policy development as part of the ‘overview’ aspect of overview and scrutiny and to enable councillors to ensure the interests of their communities are considered.

Whether or not you are directly involved in the scrutiny function, it is important that you understand how scrutiny works and the benefits that it can bring. This workbook will:

- explain what scrutiny is and how it works in practice.
- describe the scrutiny review process.
- look at who is involved in scrutiny.
- give an overview of useful skills for carrying out scrutiny.

Throughout this workbook you will encounter different types of information, and suggested actions, indicated by the symbols shown below:



Guidance

- this icon indicates guidance such as definitions, quotations and research



Challenges

- this icon indicates questions asking you to reflect on your role or approach



Case studies

- this icon indicates examples of approaches used in different settings



Hints and tips

- this icon indicates best practice advice



Useful links

- this icon indicates sources of additional information

Powers of scrutiny

The principal power of a scrutiny committee 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 has statutory powers to scrutinise decisions the executive is planning to take, those it is planning to implement, and those that have already been taken / implemented.

When undertaking scrutiny, 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.

Generally, a scrutiny committee has the legal power to require that:

- information relating to business transacted at decision-making meetings, individual councillor decisions, or decisions delegated to officers under executive arrangements, is made available in the form of written reports to enable their scrutiny, and to require attendance by relevant officers and cabinet members at committee meetings
- the cabinet responds to its recommendations within a set timeframe.

Scrutiny also has powers relating to certain external partners.

Details of several topic-specific guides which might be of relevance to you in your role are listed at the end of this workbook.

More information can be found on the **Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) website (<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/publication-category/practical-guidance/>)**.

Effective scrutiny

For scrutiny to be effective it needs to act and be seen as a 'critical friend,' identifying where decisions could be improved and how to prevent mistakes being made or repeated. Scrutiny is, by its nature, political; that is, it is driven by politicians whose insights are a fundamental part of scrutiny's work to review decisions which are themselves political and may be politically contentious. However, the focus should be on forward thinking and enabling positive outcomes, rather than apportioning blame and focusing on the negatives or political point-scoring. The challenge for you, as a scrutiny councillor, is to use your political skills and understanding of the needs of local people to shape the discussions, while not acting in a party-political manner or using the discussions to further party-political objectives.

More information can be found in the **Good Scrutiny Guide** (<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/?publication=the-good-scrutiny-guide>) published by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

Keeping your focus on this will help to foster positive and constructive relationships between scrutiny, the executive and officers.

Successful scrutiny relies on the following conditions:

- while everyone in a council has a role to play in creating an environment conducive to effective scrutiny, the process should be led and owned by councillors.



Establishing a strong organisational culture

(extracted from the statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny in local and combined authorities, paragraphs 11a, b, c, d, j)

Local and combined authorities can establish a strong organisational culture by:

- recognising scrutiny's legal and democratic legitimacy
- ensuring that all councillors and officers recognise and appreciate the importance and legitimacy the scrutiny function is afforded by the law – it was created to act as a check and balance on the executive and is a statutory requirement for all authorities operating executive arrangements and for combined authorities.

Councillors have a unique legitimacy derived from their being democratically elected. The insights that they can bring by having this close connection to local people are part of what gives scrutiny its value. These insights include:

- identifying a clear role and focus
- local and combined authorities should take steps to ensure scrutiny has a clear role and focus within the organisation,

that is, a niche within which it can clearly demonstrate it adds value – therefore, prioritisation is necessary to ensure the scrutiny function concentrates on delivering work that is of genuine value and relevance to the work of the wider organisation – this is one of the most challenging parts of scrutiny, and a critical element to get right if it is to be recognised as a strategic function of the local or combined authority

- local and combined authorities should ensure a clear division of responsibilities between the scrutiny function and the audit function – while it is appropriate for scrutiny to pay due regard to the authority's financial position, this will need to happen in the context of the formal audit role – the authority's Section 151 officer should advise scrutiny on how to manage this dynamic
- while scrutiny has no role in the investigation or oversight of the authority's whistleblowing arrangements, the findings of independent whistleblowing investigations might be of interest to scrutiny committees as they consider their wider implications– councillors should always follow their local or combined authority's constitution and associated monitoring officers' directions on the matter (see further guidance on whistleblowing)
- ensuring early and regular engagement between the executive and scrutiny
- local and combined authorities should ensure early and regular discussions take place between scrutiny and the executive, especially regarding the latter's future work programme
- local and combined authorities should, though, be mindful of their distinct roles, in particular:
 - the executive should not try to exercise control over the work of the scrutiny committee – this could be direct, for example, by purporting to 'order' scrutiny to look at, or not look at, certain issues, or indirect, for

example, through the use of the whip or as a tool of political patronage, and the committee itself should remember its statutory purpose when carrying out its work— all councillors and officers should consider the role the scrutiny committee plays to be that of a ‘critical friend’ not a de facto ‘opposition’ –scrutiny chairs have a particular role to play in establishing the profile and nature of their committee (**see chapter 4**)

- the chair of the scrutiny committee should determine the nature and extent of an executive member’s participation in a scrutiny committee meeting, and in any informal scrutiny task group meeting
- managing disagreement
- effective scrutiny involves looking at issues that can be politically contentious – it is, therefore, inevitable that, at times, an executive will disagree with the findings or recommendations of a scrutiny committee
- it is the job of both the executive and scrutiny to work together to reduce the risk of this happening, and local and combined authorities should take steps to predict, identify and act on disagreement
- ensuring scrutiny members are supported in having an independent mindset
- formal committee meetings provide a vital opportunity for scrutiny members to question the executive and officers. Inevitably, some committee members will come from the same political party as a member they are scrutinising and might well have a long-standing personal, or familial, relationship with them
- scrutiny members should bear in mind, however, that adopting an independent mind-set is fundamental to carrying out their work effectively— in practice, this is likely to require scrutiny chairs working proactively to identify any potentially contentious issues and plan how to manage them.

- There is accompanying guidance in the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny's publication: **Overview and scrutiny in combined authorities – a plain English guide** (<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CfGS-CA-Scrutiny-Guidance-2nd-Edition-SINGLE-PAGES.pdf>).

In addition, the process of scrutiny can be aided by:

Effective work programming

Work programming is the planning stage of scrutiny, where subjects for detailed consideration are identified. It is most effective when there are clear criteria for the selection of subjects and agenda items. This is covered in more detail later in the workbook.

Positive attitude of the council executive and council officers

Scrutiny works well when the council's executive and officers view it in a positive light and as an opportunity to improve council performance. Scrutiny's effectiveness will be reduced if the executive experiences it as aggressively critical, which will lead to defensive behaviour and make it difficult for scrutiny to influence change.

Similarly, scrutiny will be more effective where council officers provide information and assistance proactively and when required.



What is effective scrutiny?

Fundamentally, all scrutiny work must add value— it must make a positive contribution to the lives of local people and scrutiny committee members must be very clear about how their work will do this. When scrutiny is conducted properly it is constructive and focuses on the priorities of local people, which feeds into the priorities of the council and its partners.

Good scrutiny:

- tackles priority issues of direct relevance to local people
- tackles issues where, through the unique perspective of councillors, it can add the most value.
- is informed by high quality evidence.
- is about talking to a wide range of people, drawing them together and building consensus.
- is about challenging the accepted ways of doing things and acting as a champion for developing a culture of improvement in the local area.

Adding value

The purpose of scrutiny is to improve the lives of local people through improved public services. It is important to be able to demonstrate that scrutiny work adds value and makes a difference to local people.

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:

- high-quality recommendations are accepted and implemented by the executive
- understanding how those recommendations lead to positive outcomes for local people.



The COVID Step Back Review

Councillor David Andrews – Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny, Hertfordshire County Council

The COVID Step Back Review was an opportunity to scrutinise Hertfordshire's response to the pandemic. The prospect of trying to unpick one of the most impactful events in modern history provided several challenges, with the most obvious being scale. We based our approach to this scrutiny on a Centre for Governance and Scrutiny webinar hosted in May 2020 which advised scrutineers to concentrate on a key service or service to ensure much more focus and stronger recommendations.

My vice chairmen and I agreed to narrow our focus to examine how the county council's services have responded to COVID-19, specifically adult care services and the council's resources directorate which includes both finance and communications.

Our key lines of enquiry for this scrutiny were to identify lessons learned and establish how innovations developed as part of the council's response to the pandemic can be adapted to improve services. We conducted the review which enabled our voluntary sector colleagues to participate fully. It also meant we could hear from our director of public health around his other pressing commitments.

Being able to hold these meetings throughout the pandemic has ensured that the quality of our scrutiny has not suffered despite the significant changes to our working practices.

Over a one-day scrutiny, five county councillors heard evidence from officers from local authorities, the chair of the Community Reassurance Cell of the Local Resilience Forum and chief executives from community and voluntary sector organisations. The latter had been instrumental in ensuring services were maintained to our most vulnerable residents. One commented:

"It was an honour to be asked to present evidence to this important review and to contribute to the report the impact that Hertfordshire charities made working together as part of Operation Sustain should not be underestimated." Simon Aulton, Chief Executive Officer – Community Action Dacorum

Councillors recognised that services and staff continued to work in challenging circumstances. They were particularly impressed with the quality of partnership working and identified some notable innovations. Members commended that the approach taken by the authority in its work with the voluntary and community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector was based on trust and mutual respect and was instrumental in maintaining vital services to our most vulnerable residents.

Councillors were also impressed by the way officers redesigned services and how approaches were modified in real time. What I noted most during the review were the formidable challenges associated with ensuring the wellbeing of our most vulnerable residents. I was impressed with the efforts, pace and adaptability shown by all our witnesses.

Officers of local authorities and the NHS have worked determinedly to safeguard residents and the enormous effort and achievements of the voluntary sector was impressive to hear.

The review made five recommendations all of which are being implemented by the authority and its partners:

- that the authority maintains and builds on existing and new partnerships for agile working and clear evidence of this is shared at Impact of Scrutiny Advisory Committee
- that adult care services, children's services and public health look at creating opportunities for greater joint working with the community and voluntary sector; in addition, adult care services, children's services and public health reviewexisting funding allocation processes to engender co-operation rather than competition in the

voluntary and community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector

- that the authority revisits its resilience planning in light of the pandemic to prepare for future sustained emergencies and clear evidence of this is shared at Impact of Scrutiny Advisory Committee (ISAC)
- that the council identifies how the innovative and more agile practices developed during the pandemic can be built into Shaping Our Future and specific service initiatives
- that Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) ensures that the Communication Strategy maintains multiple approaches to reach all residents so that no group is left behind or marginalised.

Evidence was presented at the Impact of Scrutiny Advisory Committee (ISAC) six months after the review.

Further reading:[Scrutiny frontiers 2020/21 – experiences from the scrutiny frontline | Centre for Governance and Scrutiny \(CfGS\) \(https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CfGS-Scrutiny-Frontiers-2021-v2-SINGLE-PAGES-002-1.pdf\)](https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CfGS-Scrutiny-Frontiers-2021-v2-SINGLE-PAGES-002-1.pdf)



Being cost-effective

Scrutiny committees need to work effectively with limited resources. They can do this by:

carrying out work more efficiently – for example, holding single-topic committee meetings, so that a group of councillors can speak to a large number of witnesses in a round-table format

targeted and effective work programming – having processes in place to plan and prioritise effectively so that scrutiny's work adds value— this will better enable resources to be planned and used more cost-effectively and to time reviews to be to achieve greatest impact

providing officer support more efficiently – for example, by thinking more carefully about what support scrutiny committee members want and need from officers and what skillsets officers have and require

circulating information – providing information to councillors prior to meetings – councillors and officers can work together to limit the volume of material councillors are sent to material that is relevant and useful to them.

Work programming

The role of scrutiny is to achieve positive outcomes for local people by undertaking a thorough, targeted examination of the council's service provision and procedures. However, it is not possible to examine every service in detail, so it is important for the scrutiny committee to prioritise and plan its workload. Some councils do this at the beginning of each year, and some do it on an ongoing basis.

Planned scrutiny

Work programming is the process for determining which topics scrutiny will look at over the coming year, either at committee meetings or in task and finish groups. This involves evaluating several factors to decide which topics are to be investigated and when. The process will typically involve long-listing and then shortlisting topics before making a final decision.

Responsive scrutiny

The priorities for scrutiny need to be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis. This makes sure scrutiny can be flexible and responsive to high priority issues or policy changes that occur throughout the year.



The scrutiny topic selection process

Each council has its own method for selecting topics for scrutiny; in some councils there may be a very structured selection process, while in others it may be more informal. Whatever level of detail is involved, the general process should include the following activities.

Identify issues

You can identify potential issues by:

- consulting with a range of stakeholders, both internal and external to the council – this would include all elected members and senior officers, as well as relevant outside bodies
- looking at corporate priorities, business plans and the forward plan of the council (and the council's neighbouring councils)
- considering events and decisions in the council's calendar that could require an input from scrutiny, such as setting budgets.
- reviewing council performance information and identifying any follow-up work required to previous scrutiny work.
- conducting work to engage with local people, for example, through surgeries, local media, opinion surveys and online forums.

Prioritise topics

Identify and prioritise potential scrutiny topics, considering the resources they would require and the level of impact they could achieve.

Plan scrutiny work

Decide which scrutiny topics to review and include them in the work programme for consideration and updating at each scrutiny meeting.

Review and evaluate

Review progress and evaluate outcomes to demonstrate the value added by scrutiny.



Criteria for prioritising scrutiny topics

The following criteria provide a useful guide for identifying which topics are suitable for scrutiny to review, and prioritising them.

Topics are suitable for scrutiny when:

- scrutiny could have an impact and add value
- the topic is of high local importance and reflects the concerns of local people
- the resources are available that would be required to conduct the review, in terms of manpower and budget
- it avoids work duplication elsewhere
- the issue is one that the committee can realistically influence
- the issue is related to an area where the council, or one of its partners, is not performing well
- the issue is relevant to all or large parts of the local area
- the review would be in the council's interests.

Topics are not suitable for scrutiny when:

- the issue is already being addressed elsewhere and change is imminent
- the topic would be better addressed elsewhere (and will be referred there)

- scrutiny involvement would have limited or no impact upon outcomes
- the topic may be 'sub judice' or prejudicial to the council's interest
- the topic is too broad to make a review realistic
- they do not relate to executive matters, for example, planning or licensing decisions
- new legislation or guidance relating to the topic is expected within the next year
- the topic area is currently subject to inspection or has recently undergone substantial change.

Defining scrutiny topics

For every item on the work programme / new referral, answers to the following questions should be made clear:

- What is the issue / activity / project under consideration?
- What is scrutiny being asked to do?
- What are the reasons for / expected benefits of involving scrutiny in the matter?
- Is there a specific deadline for the piece of work?

Challenge 1 – Prioritising topics

Consider the issues that are important to the people you represent in your ward.

List the five issues you think are the most important, then put them in order of priority; make a note of your reasoning.

Think about how you would translate these into strategic issues which might be appropriate for scrutiny. Here is an example:

The issue

Several residents have been complaining that the trees in the local area are not being pruned regularly enough, becoming a hazard, and presenting a potential danger to the public. Complaints include difficulty in walking on the pavement, damage to tall vehicles, trip hazards from tree roots and gardens being overshadowed by trees.

Strategic considerations

The council needs to consider how it allocates its environmental services' resources so that it can be efficient while also meeting the needs of residents.

It can look at:

- how services are procured, commissioned, and contracted
- which are the most hazardous streets and where the biggest improvements can be made
- prioritising and planning a programme of work for tree pruning.

Having done so, consider how you would translate this into the scope for a scrutiny committee review.

How scrutiny works

Committees usually conduct the ongoing formal business of scrutiny. Scrutiny work is also conducted in smaller, informal 'task and finish' groups, which are not covered in legislation. These are time-limited bodies established by scrutiny committees to gather evidence and produce recommendations on a specific subject.

The overview and scrutiny committee

Councils that operate under executive governance arrangements are required by law to have an overview and scrutiny committee. This must be composed to reflect the political proportions of the council as a whole.

Councils using a committee system of governance are not required by law to create an overview and scrutiny committee, but they may do so if they wish. However, it is a requirement that they make arrangements for scrutiny of health (where applicable) and community safety partnerships.

Members of the council's executive **may not** sit on the overview and scrutiny committee; where there are deputy or assistant cabinet members, they may sit on scrutiny committees, since the executive's decision-making powers cannot be delegated to them. However, to avoid a conflict of interests it is good practice for assistants to be assigned to committees that do not reflect their portfolios.

Challenge 2 – Scrutiny in your council

There is no prescribed structure for implementing scrutiny in a council – there may be one overview and scrutiny committee, or several committees and sub-committees. Find out how scrutiny is implemented in your council.

Scrutiny meetings

Scrutiny committee meetings are formal and public. The council's constitution must have rules of procedure for overview and scrutiny committees. They provide a forum where councillors can:

- discuss written information they have received, from the council and external bodies.
- hear evidence from witnesses, which could include other councillors, council officers, experts, representatives from other organisations and members of the public
- question witnesses to gain a better understanding of the issues.

- draw conclusions from their discussions and the evidence examined, in the form of an outcome.

The purpose of scrutiny is to provide recommendations for improvement, so it is important, when planning the meeting agenda, to be clear what the outcome of the meeting should be.

Task and finish groups

Task and finish groups are informal, usually small and time-limited bodies comprised of councillors and, often, co-optees brought in from outside the council for their specific skills and experiences. A parent committee establishes them to undertake a discrete piece of scrutiny work, and report back to that committee with their findings and recommendations.

Most councils make provision for task and finish groups in their constitution. The following rules of thumb have been developed by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS):

- membership should be defined and agreed by the group's parent committee.
- the parent committee should also decide on who should chair.
- while party whips may nominate other councillors to sit on groups, the ultimate decision rests with the committee and the committee chair.
- as far as possible, membership should loosely reflect the political proportionality of the authority (the only caveat being that attempts are usually made to involve smaller parties where they otherwise would not be entitled to a seat)
- members of the group (and even the chair) need not be drawn exclusively from the group's parent committee – any councillor can be nominated to participate.
- decision-making in the group (i.e., deciding on the wording of a final report and deciding on recommendations) should be undertaken through consensus rather than through a vote, given the fact that the membership may not directly reflect political proportionality.

In the interests of transparency and accountability, it is recommended that task and finish groups make minutes of their meetings and evidence-gathering sessions accessible to the public.

Further reading:[The Good Scrutiny Guide](https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CfPS-Good-Scrutiny-Guide-v4-WEB-SINGLE-PAGES.pdf) (<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CfPS-Good-Scrutiny-Guide-v4-WEB-SINGLE-PAGES.pdf>) (section 4.2.2.2 |Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS)



Effective scrutiny meetings

The role of the committee chair is critical in making sure the committee works as a team and fully understands the issues under discussion in scrutiny meetings.

The chair takes an active role in leading and directing the discussion and managing any disagreement between committee members. This is covered in more detail later in the workbook.

There are several ways that scrutiny meetings can be made more effective, although a council's ability to do all of these will be limited by the resources it has available.

Agenda

Have clear criteria for assessing agenda items so that items appear on the agenda only where there is value to be added from their discussion rather than inclusion of 'for information' papers.

Limit the number of agenda items to help keep meetings focused and easy to manage. Evidence from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) annual survey suggests that any more than three substantive items per meeting is detrimental to a meeting's effectiveness.

Preparation

Prioritise and plan any information you need to prepare or read before meetings—this is essential so that you can participate fully

in the discussion.

Manage agendas effectively and provide a short briefing with key sources of corporate information prior to meetings—this allows for more time to be spent on analysis and discussion.

Pre-meeting

Hold a pre-meeting to plan questions—this can help to ensure that meetings are more effective and use time well.

Objectives

Have clearly defined and agreed objectives and outcomes for the meeting –this means that:

- councillors can work towards a common target in their questioning and witnesses can be fully prepared
- discussions can be easily summarised at the end of the meeting and in the minutes, with a focus on actions, post-meeting communication and follow-up work
- findings and conclusions can be more easily converted into clear, concrete recommendations at the meeting.

Outcomes

Clarifying outcomes at the end of the meeting makes sure that agenda items are concluded with certainty and there are no ‘repeat items’ at the next meeting.

It also makes it possible to monitor progress on outcomes and commitments at the following meeting.



Addressing local inequalities

**Councillor Roisin Cavanagh – Chair of the
Economic Inequalities Working Party and Place
Scrutiny Board, Calderdale Council**

In Calderdale, we have increasingly tried to make sure that our scrutiny work is informed by different people and organisations; so, recently we have heard from the National Farmers Union, Calderdale's Youth Council, and a peer of the realm, amongst many others.

But the most important people for us to listen to are the people we serve – Calderdale residents. So, when we saw local and national evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted in a very unequal way, we decided to listen to what local people had to tell us about their experiences. I chaired a cross-party group of four councillors to discover the Calderdale experience.

Our primary aim was to listen to young people, women, disabled people, people from minority communities and people on low incomes or in insecure employment to understand their lived experience during the pandemic, focusing on the impact on their economic situation. Our aim was to feed into the council's recovery plan by preparing and amplifying the voices of people who might not normally be heard. We felt it important that – as elected representatives – we were the ones who should listen to what people had to tell us.

We arranged 17 focus groups where we talked with small groups who had direct experience themselves or were frontline workers providing services to the people we identified. We supplemented the rich data from the focus groups using SurveyMonkey to ask Calderdale residents 25 questions about how the pandemic impacted their; education, training, and employment; overall financial stability; experiences of accessing financial support; as well as anything else they wanted to tell us. We expected to get around 50 responses but were blown away to get over 350 replies. All our work has been done under the current restrictions through Zoom or other electronic means.

Here are a few things people said.

“We are trying to live more frugally, but despite efforts, the fact that I had to shield and have online deliveries has pushed up even basic shopping bills by approximately £30 a week.”

“I become anxious when technology goes wrong, or I can’t understand it. I put off using the food banks for ages but eventually just had to ask for help. Calder Community Cares was amazing when I spoke to them— very helpful caring and the food we receive has been good.”

“The pandemic has cut our household income in half. My boyfriend and I moved back in with his parents as he lost his job, and we could no longer make ends meet. “

We concluded that:

- COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities and created new challenges for those already struggling and new issues for certain groups such as young people
- intersectionality means some vulnerable groups, particularly BAME people and people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds are facing a double disadvantage around their financial stability
- the digital divide has demonstrated that increasing digital literacy and access to equipment and data should be considered as important as providing basic utilities, essential for modern life in 2021
- disabled people and families of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) have experienced increasing challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic
- the ability for women from different backgrounds to work, earn more money and access career progression has been detrimentally impacted through ‘lockdown’ where they have provided most of the home schooling and caring work
- it is essential support is provided for parts of the community hardest hit as part of our recovery plan.

What did we learn from our approach?

- Speaking directly to people in the community, and those working in the voluntary, community and social enterprise and public sectors, provides a good picture of the impact of COVID-19 on communities from different perspectives.
- People in communities are willing to speak about their experience if they feel it makes a difference, in particular informing the policies and practice of the council.
- Having a project plan, and a good working relationship and ongoing community between scrutiny officers and councillors leads to ‘good work.’

Co-optees

Council scrutiny functions have the opportunity to co-opt people from outside the council to sit either on scrutiny committees (as voting or non-voting co-optees) or on task and finish groups, to bring technical expertise / knowledge or personal insights relevant to the matter scrutinised.

The formal appointment of a co-optee onto an overview and scrutiny committee is provided for in the Local Government Act (2000). Task and finish groups may co-opt group members without restriction.

For councils responsible for education functions, there is a requirement for certain co-optees to be appointed to the relevant committee. The provisions in the 1996 Act apply to overview and scrutiny committees by virtue of Schedule 1 of the 2000 Act.

For most councils, this will be two diocesan representatives (one Church of England, one Catholic) and two parent governor representatives (one primary, one secondary, and both from maintained schools). Such co-optees have voting rights and are treated as opposition councillors for the purposes of political proportionality (in order to assure that the largest party retains an absolute majority at committee).

For task and finish groups, the parent committee chooses co-optees at the scoping stage.

Combined authorities

The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act (2016) requires that all combined authorities in England have their own overview and scrutiny committee.

Combined authorities have a significant part to play in big decisions around economic development, skills, and transport, as well as other areas such as health and social care. The scope and nature of these decisions mean that having robust scrutiny arrangements in place is particularly important.

In the English Devolution Accountability Framework, Government has set out its intention to develop a protocol on the relationship between the mayor / directly-elected leader, the institution, and its scrutiny function.

Further reading: [English Devolution Accountability Framework \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-accountability-framework\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-accountability-framework) | GOV.UK

The large areas covered by combined authorities means that there will be logistical difficulties in relation to getting councillors together for overview and scrutiny meetings. These meetings are additional to those held in individual local councils, so there will be an additional workload for some councillors too. This means that it is vital for combined authority overview and scrutiny committees to be extremely focused and targeted in their work.

In practice, combined authority overview and scrutiny committees work similarly to joint committees (see below) although some of the legal and practical issues are slightly different.

Further reading: [Overview and scrutiny in combined authorities – a plain English guide \(https://www.cfps.org.uk/?publication=overview-and-scrutiny-in-combined-authorities-a-plain-english-guide\)](https://www.cfps.org.uk/?publication=overview-and-scrutiny-in-combined-authorities-a-plain-english-guide) | Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS)

Scrutiny of services beyond the council

Many services affecting residents are delivered by partnerships or bodies beyond the boundaries of the local authority. Effective scrutiny of these services will require work with people from other bodies. This partnership-working is discussed later in this workbook.

Joint committees are committees that have representatives from two or more local authorities. In particular, they have an important role to play in health scrutiny.

Several considerations need to be considered for a joint scrutiny committee to work effectively:

- **logistics** – finding mutually convenient venues to ensure no one councillor or local authority loses out
- **work objectives** – gaining broad agreement on the committee's aims and objectives
- **political and personal opinions** – bringing together a larger number of people to sit on a committee makes it harder to find consensus and manage differences of opinion.

Scrutiny of partnership arrangements can also take place through informal joint work and information-sharing.

The scrutiny review process

Scrutiny reviews can take place before or after a decision has been made.



The scrutiny review process

Each council has its own process for conducting a scrutiny review, which will be influenced in part by the resources it has available. Here is a generic scrutiny review process.

Scope the review

A good scope will include:

- the topic of the review, and an explanation for why the topic is being framed in the way that it is
- the objectives of the review and its expected impacts and outcomes
- the strategic context
- the overall method (and why it's the right method for this topic currently)
- the key individuals and groups involved, and how they will be involved
- other key sources of research which will be used, how they will be analysed, by whom and when
- the timescale for the review – when meetings will happen, where, and who will be involved
- a communications plan relating to all the above
- a statement of the resources which will be necessary to deliver the above.

Gather evidence

To gather evidence well:

- undertake consultation through public meetings, surveys, workshops and focus groups
- conduct site visits
- source data and reports
- interview experts and witnesses
- collaborate with officers and councillors to research issues.

Evaluate evidence

To evaluate the evidence, consider all the evidence in the context of the scope of the review.

Further reading: **The Good Scrutiny Guide (<https://www.cfps.org.uk/?publication=the-good-scrutiny-guide>)** (Section 4.2.1)
|Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS)

Monitor

To monitor effectively:

- track progress of the changes being implemented
- evaluate and assess impact
- conduct further investigation and make additional recommendations if necessary.

Pre-decision scrutiny

Pre-decision scrutiny is planned during the work programming activity and could take place either immediately before, or a more significant amount of time before, a decision is made.

By challenging assumptions and assessing what risks might arise from the implementation of a decision, scrutiny provides the opportunity to influence policy and improve decisions and the design of solutions before they are finalised.

Councils are required to give at least 28 days' notice of a key decision through a forward plan, so this is a useful scrutiny tool for identifying pre-decision topics and should be a standing agenda item for the overview and scrutiny committee. The council's corporate plan can also be useful to identify work planned over the longer term which may benefit from scrutiny.

Pre-decision scrutiny that is conducted immediately before a decision is made will have obvious time limitations, so it is best focused on key questions around the decisions, implementation, risks and measures of success.

Scrutiny carried out several months before a decision is made will have more time and resources with which to delve into the fundamentals of the decision and propose alternative options. Pre-decision scrutiny can help the decision-making process by:

- **challenging assumptions and making evidence-gathering more robust** – for example, scrutiny can gather evidence and look at projections relating to the impact of the decision – financial,

- social, economic, environmental – and consider whether those projections and assumptions are objectively justified
- **developing realistic plans and targets** – scrutiny can help to develop challenging but realistic targets that will be impartial and focused on outcomes rather than outputs
 - **securing ownership and buy-in to the final decision** – engaging with scrutiny will help the executive to understand the expectations of the wider group of elected councillors and, by extension, the expectations of residents
 - **engaging with and satisfying the public** – scrutiny can help the council to understand local needs, through public engagement led by councillors in their community leadership role.

Post-decision scrutiny and call-in

Post-decision scrutiny takes place in response to decisions that have already been made.

For decisions that have been made but not implemented, scrutiny has the power to 'call in' the decision and, having done so, may require the executive to reconsider the decision. This applies to 'key decisions,' which are predominantly decisions made by the executive, either as individuals or as a whole. Councils set their own definition of what is a key decision within the parameters set by national legislation: you can find your council's definition within its constitution. However, post-scrutiny could also be monitoring the effectiveness of a policy / decision that has been implemented, 12 months later.

'Call-in' provides an opportunity for challenge as a long stop, when other attempts to influence or challenge a decision have failed.

It is a tool that should be used in exceptional circumstances and is only one of a number of tools at scrutiny's disposal (such as pre-decision scrutiny) to influence decision-making. Each council will have its own rules, set out in its constitution, for how call-in operates.

Challenge 3 – The 'call-in' process at your council

The 'call-in' process, and the approach to managing call-in meetings, differs from council to council.

Look at the relevant part of your council's constitution and make a note here about how your council manages call-in.

Gathering evidence

There are several methods for using meetings to gather evidence, including scrutiny challenge panels (evidence gathering over one day), light touch reviews (a short series of meetings on a narrow topic) or full-length reviews (in-depth work over a period of months). Standing panels can be used to oversee an ongoing council process.

The important thing is to gather relevant information from both internal and external stakeholders such as members of the public so that you have all the available information when making decisions. This could include undertaking scrutiny days away from council premises, in a community venue. Careful consideration should be given to how best to encourage and enable members of the public and other stakeholders to contribute.

Sources of information

The information gathered during a scrutiny review, and where to find it, will depend on the topic under review. In the interests of efficiency, scrutiny councillors have a responsibility to actively seek out information for themselves, so, it is important that you are aware of what information is available and how to access it. Here are some examples of information that could be useful.

Information on performance, finance, and risk

Information on performance, finance, and risk can be found in:

- quarterly performance and finance reports
- programme and project management information
- risk registers

- complaints logs
- reports
- ombudsman reports
- internal reviews and action plans.

Strategic information

Strategic information can be found in:

- council service plans and strategies
- budget and policy frameworks
- external inspection reports
- corporate peer challenge reports and action plans
- departmental plans and strategies
- partnership plans and strategies
- cross-departmental strategies
- improvement plans
- information from benchmarking clubs.

Feedback

Feedback can be obtained from:

- consultations and residents' panels
- frontline staff.

Challenge 4 – Where to find information.

You will have direct access to much of the information you need through your council's website or internal computer systems. There is a benefit to reviewing raw data rather than a report prepared by an officer, because it allows you to use your unique perspective as an elected representative, with detailed knowledge of your ward, to make your own links and connections between performance issues.

Do you know where to find management information for your council?

Make a note of where your council makes this kind of information available.

Using evidence effectively

Using evidence effectively means looking at it alongside other sources of data, to see what themes emerge and whether different evidence sources disagree about services being provided on the ground. This process is called triangulation.

For example, customer complaints data and resident feedback can be compared with performance information, finance information and risk registers, to take a comprehensive view of the performance of a given service. While performance information may suggest that all targets are being met, the service may be overspending, and complaints data may demonstrate that the public are unhappy with the level of service being provided – an issue which has not been identified in the risk register as needing action. Making connections between information in this way allows judgements to be made about difficulties which can help to frame and focus solutions in a way that will be useful to officers delivering the service on the ground.

This should not prove particularly complex but there are several issues to consider in doing so:

- **how will different sources of evidence be weighed?** – not all evidence and information are of equal value – complex, quasi-scientific weighing exercises are not required, but having a general sense of what should be afforded more attention, and less, is necessary
- **how much evidence is needed in order to produce an accurate picture?** – there maybe a tendency to seek out increased information to establish the most 'comprehensive' picture possible, but this may be resource intensive, add little to the evidence gathering process and delay the achievement of improved outcomes – officers and councillors should discuss between them the most appropriate balance.

Further reading: [The Good Scrutiny Guide \(<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CfPS-Good-Scrutiny-Guide-v4-WEB-SINGLE-PAGES.pdf>\)](https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CfPS-Good-Scrutiny-Guide-v4-WEB-SINGLE-PAGES.pdf) (Sections 4.1.3 and 4.1.4) | Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS)

Making a recommendation

Recommendations are the way that scrutiny can have an impact. Making good recommendations, and monitoring them, makes it more likely that scrutiny's work will add value.

A good recommendation is:

- specific about the change recommended
- evidence-based and realistic
- focused on measurable outcomes
- addressed to a specific person or group
- realistic about financing requirements
- developed in partnership with the council's executive, officers and partners.

The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations (2012) require that the executive responds to recommendations within two months of them being made. If recommendations are made to a named partner organisation, however, they do not generally have a responsibility to formally respond, although they do have a responsibility to 'have regard to' the recommendations.

The response to a recommendation from a decision-maker should consist of:

- a clear commitment to delivering the measure within the timescale set out
- a commitment to be held to account on that delivery in six months or a year's time
- where it is not proposed that a recommendation be accepted, the provision of detailed, substantive reasons why not.

Scrutiny can help decision-makers to view recommendations in a positive light, and submit acceptable responses, by agreeing with the executive beforehand when and how recommendations will be made,

and what an acceptable response will look like.

Monitoring recommendations

It is scrutiny's responsibility to monitor and evaluate recommendations once they are implemented, even though it is not their responsibility to deliver the changes.

Tracking the progress of recommendations does not require a full scrutiny review, but a simple check that after six or 12 months they are being implemented and the outcomes detailed in the decision-maker's response are being fulfilled. Action can be taken if required; if everything is on track, scrutiny can trust the implementations are being made satisfactorily and move on.

Working with others

The effectiveness of the scrutiny committee relies on it establishing positive relationships with the council's executive, its officers and partner organisations.

The council's executive and officers

The responsibility for scrutiny working well is shared with the council's executive, which has a duty to ensure its councillors do not undermine or denigrate scrutiny.

The Local Government Act (2000) requires the council executive and officers to:

- attend meetings when required to do so – the word 'require' is not defined in the Act, but it can be assumed that it does not confer a choice as to whether or not to attend – the appropriate executive councillor will be held to account– a senior officer may support them, although it is sometimes appropriate for the officer who has the appropriate technical expertise to answer questions
- provide information, where required to do so – again, this must be complied with
- respond to recommendations.

With some planning and consideration, scrutiny can make it easier for the executive and officers to engage with scrutiny; therefore, making it more likely that they will accept and implement recommendations. The scrutiny committee can do this by:

- being clear about why topics have been chosen for scrutiny review and demonstrating, where possible, how they fit with the executive's priorities
- making invitations to scrutiny committee meetings far enough in advance that people are more likely to have availability, informed by a well-planned scrutiny work programme
- being clear about the purpose of committee meetings and why people are being invited to attend
- where possible, sharing scrutiny reports and recommendations in draft form; this makes sure there are no surprises for anyone, and allows the executive to highlight where it feels recommendations may require alteration for practical reasons
- involving the executive and officers in discussion and dialogue as the work programme is put together
- making sure the executive's viewpoint is fully understood and reflected in scrutiny review reports.

Several councils have developed a protocol to manage the scrutiny/executive relationship, in line with a suggestion in the 2019 statutory guidance. The process of discussions to inform the drafting of the protocol can be as valuable as the document itself. More tips on the relationship between scrutiny and the executive can be found in section 2.1.1 of **The Good Scrutiny Guide** (<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CfPS-Good-Scrutiny-Guide-v4-WEB-SINGLE-PAGES.pdf>).

Scrutiny officer

The statutory scrutiny officer has the responsibility for promoting the role of overview and scrutiny, supporting overview and scrutiny committees and their members, and providing support and advice to officers and councillors about overview and scrutiny committees.

They will not necessarily have the word ‘scrutiny’ in their job title; similarly, someone with the job title ‘scrutiny officer’ will not necessarily be the council’s statutory scrutiny officer.

District councils do not have a duty to designate a statutory scrutiny officer.

Scrutiny and partner organisations

Councils often collaborate with partner organisations to deliver services. These could be in the private, public or voluntary sectors and include:

- contractors
- organisations with whom the council has jointly commissioned services
- organisations that the council funds to deliver certain services by means of grant funding or service level agreements
- trading companies.

It is likely that many services a council delivers, and therefore any scrutiny review, will involve a partner organisation in some way. Scrutiny has statutory powers to investigate the work some of a council’s partners.

Health

The aim of health scrutiny committees is to ensure that the needs of local people are considered in the commissioning, delivery, and development of health services, and to hold relevant NHS bodies and health service providers to account. They may investigate any health-related issue in their area and have an obligation to invite interested parties when they choose to conduct such investigations.

When they make recommendations to local NHS bodies, scrutiny committees have the right to require a response within 28 days. Scrutiny can conduct investigations on its own initiative, or at the suggestion of the local Healthwatch.

Community safety

Under the Police and Justice Act (2006), a committee of the council designated as a community safety scrutiny committee has the power to

ask local community safety partners for information, request that those partners attend meetings (given reasonable notice) and require that those partners consider recommendations submitted to them.

Flood risk management

Scrutiny committees have a formal role regarding flood risk management, which allows for the review and scrutiny of such functions carried out by upper tier authorities.

Other partners

Scrutiny has some loose legal powers in relation to partner organisations working with the council to deliver public services. In real terms, though, it does not have any more rights than a private citizen, so it is important to foster positive working relationships with partners for scrutiny to achieve its objectives.

Scrutiny can, however, ask these partners to attend meetings, request information from them and require them to 'have regard to' their recommendations. There is no legal definition for 'having regard to,' but some councils have defined it through scrutiny/partner protocols.

Contracted-out and commissioned services

Scrutiny of these services is not specifically provided for in legislation. However, scrutiny has a general responsibility to hold to account those people who commission services and manage contracts. This requires discussion and liaison with council officers in 'client-side' positions who are responsible for managing the relationship with contractors and providers.

Scrutiny is beneficial in this context because its perspective is informed by listening to and understanding the experiences of local people, thereby measuring services in terms of value to the community.



Partners

Other councils, public, community or private sector bodies might be the council's partners for some activity and service delivery. Understanding what drives them and considering how scrutiny work might add value to their work will be productive. These organisations will have their own accountability and governance systems.

Contracted partners – the council may contract with the other organisations on a more traditional basis. It is more common now for contracts to have written into them provisions requiring that the contractor respond to scrutiny requests.

The Good Scrutiny Guide (<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/?publication=the-good-scrutiny-guide>) | Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS)

Other ‘scrutineers’

In addition to councils' own internal audit functions, there are other organisations that have an involvement in the oversight, regulation, inspection, and review of distinct public policy areas. It is important that organisations work together in the interest of streamlining governance with a view to sharing the limited resources available to scrutiny and to avoid duplication of effort.

Joint working includes activities such as sharing information, conducting informal background research, and working on a formal joint task force or committee.

Other relevant bodies include:

Local government

- other tiers of government
- local neighbourhood and area structures
- the Local Government Association (LGA), which conducts corporate peer challenges at the request of councils
- external audit.

The functions of audit and scrutiny should complement each other, and it is important to understand their distinct roles.

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) publication—[Audit committees and scrutiny committees – working together](https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CfGS-Audit-and-scrutiny-v2.pdf) (<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CfGS-Audit-and-scrutiny-v2.pdf>)—provides a guide to how councillors who are members of audit and scrutiny committees can work together more closely. The guide suggests practical ways for these councillors, and the officers supporting them, to share information and work together better to ensure robust financial and governance oversight.

Social care and health

Social care and health organisations include:

- Ofsted (children's social care)
- Care Quality Commission (adult social care)
- local Healthwatch
- NHS regulation organisations.

Education

Educational organisations include:

- Ofsted
- school governing bodies.

Policing

Policing organisations include:

- police and crime panels
- police and crime commissioners.

Fire and rescue

Fire and rescue organisations include:

- fire and rescue authorities.

Useful skills

Questioning techniques

Questioning is a crucial component of ‘critical friend’ challenge and an important part of good public scrutiny. The key to successful questioning is balancing the need to get answers with the need to build strong relationships. This can be achieved by a combination of good preparation, and clarity of scrutiny objectives. Knowing what questions to ask and when to ask them, and understanding which style is appropriate for different situations is essential.

Questioning is best conducted after some preliminary evidence-gathering and research has been undertaken, so that questions can be targeted on the appropriate issues and the appropriate witnesses can be identified for questioning.



Selecting witnesses for questioning

Committee members can ask themselves these questions when selecting witnesses for questioning:

- How will speaking to this witness help to achieve scrutiny’s objectives?
- Will this witness be willing to help?
- Can this evidence be acquired from anywhere else?
- Will it be necessary to balance this witness’s views with the views of others, as part of the wider evidence gathering?

A pre-meeting can be a useful preparation tool to decide how to conduct the questioning, considering, for example:

- Who will ask the questions?
- How the questions will be organised?

- Will the chair call people to ask questions in a free format, or will the use of supplementary questions will be tightly defined?
- How will the committee work as a team?
- Which types of question to use for different witnesses?
- How to respond to a witness who is unhelpful or evasive?



Question types

Open questions

Open questions allow the witness to open up and to share all the information they have.

Encouraging the witness to elaborate early on will allow them to speak and will calm their nerves. This will help them to relax and can be helpful in ensuring the witness will answer further questions in a more helpful manner.

Useful words:

- how...?
- why...?
- when...?
- who...?
- what...?

Closed questions

Where a simple yes or no answer will suffice it is advisable to stick to closed questions (such as when checking a fact). Closed questions are harder to avoid and easier to challenge.

Useful phrases:

- Did you ...?
- Have you told.....?
- What I think I'm hearing is... Is that right?

Reflecting questions

These are used to clarify something which has been said, and/or to get the respondent to speak about a subject in more depth.

Useful phrases:

- You said that...
- You sound as if...
- I get the feeling that...

Extending questions

Extending questions invite the witness to offer more information, and to elaborate on what they have already said.

Useful phrases:

- How else could...?
- Could you tell me more about...?

Comparative questions

These can be used to compare situations (for example on a before and after basis).

Useful phrases:

- What has it been like since...?
- What difference has...?

Hypothetical questions

The use of hypothetical frameworks allows the witness to answer a question from a safer theoretical position and may encourage them to explore issues in more depth.

Useful words:

- If...
- Imagine...

Rephrasing or paraphrasing

Another technique that can be used to clarify something that has been said by the witness, it may also encourage the witness to elaborate on their previous answer and provide more detail.

Useful phrases:

- Are you saying that...?
- Let me see if I understand the problem completely...

Linking questions

Linking questions rely on active listening on the part of the scrutineer (see below). By linking previous responses offered by the witness to other issues the scrutineer can demonstrate that he has valued the witness's input. This technique may then encourage the witness to offer further explanation.

Useful phrases:

- You mentioned earlier that...
- How would you....?

Listening skills

Listening skills are an important part of the scrutineer's role and are closely linked with questioning. Active listening ensures the witness feels that they are being properly heard and understood, which can help to facilitate further questioning.

The basic principles of active listening are:

- **positive body language** – look attentive and show positive signs of encouragement; consider the body language of the witness to gain a fuller understanding of their response
- **check understanding** – use paraphrasing and repetition to check that you have understood the witness
- **take notes** – these can be referred to later or used to challenge the witness if an explanation has not been fully understood, or where a contradiction has appeared in the witnesses' statements.

Chairing scrutiny

The chair of a scrutiny committee should seek to provide, through strong leadership, a good environment for the constructive challenge of decision-makers. They should foster discussion and encourage all concerned stakeholders to be involved in the process, while ensuring that all opinions are expressed in a constructive manner that contributes

to the intended outcomes of the process. Statutory guidance says the chair should possess the ability to lead and build a sense of teamwork and consensus among committee members.

The chair is also responsible for ensuring that the scrutiny process – within and outside the context of formal committee meetings – is managed in a way that creates a fair and balanced environment, keeping the scrutiny process free from political point scoring and allowing for the effective scrutiny of all evidence that is produced.

The chair also has a role in ensuring that the constitution, including the member code of conduct and committee procedure rules are complied with.

In summary, the chair needs to ensure that all work being delivered by the committee, or panel:

- makes a positive impact on services and outcomes
- promotes good practice
- challenges underperformance
- acts as a catalyst for change
- deals, where appropriate, with relevant partnership issues.

Final summary

It is important that all levels of government are scrutinised and held accountable for the decisions they make and the impact they have on local communities. In local government, the scrutiny function ensures that decisions made by the council executive are transparent and robust, and focused on improving public services.

Being an effective councillor and representing the needs of your community, require a commitment to promoting scrutiny and ensuring that it takes place. It is a tool which you can use to make sure your local community's needs are reflected in the decisions made by the council – a unique perspective afforded to you by being a councillor.

Effective scrutiny involves:

- **effective work programming** – planning ahead, selecting appropriate topics, allocating time and resources, scoping, and

- planning activities
- **positive and constructive relationships** – fostered through effective communication with the council's executive, officers, partners, and other scrutineers
 - **involvement** – ensuring that residents and local businesses participate in the wider process of scrutiny to ensure that both council decisions are informed by local needs and the transparency of scrutiny
 - **effective research and analysis** – examining raw data and prepared reports, using appropriate questioning techniques, and selecting appropriate witnesses
 - **effective meetings** – preparing the meeting and the invitees, communicating in advance and afterwards, staying on topic, summarising, and confirming decisions
 - **specific recommendations** – stating what needs to change, associated time scales, who needs to be involved and how it should be implemented
 - **good monitoring and evaluation** – ensuring that recommendations are being implemented and measuring success in terms of outcomes.

Appendix – sources of further information and support

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) has published a series of practice guides and skills briefings.

Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) publications

- **The Good Scrutiny Guide** (<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/?publication=the-good-scrutiny-guide>)
- **Audit committees and scrutiny committees – working together** (<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/?publication=audit-committees-and-scrutiny-committees-working-together>)
- **Scrutiny of children's services – a short guide** (<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/?publication=scrutiny-of-childrens-services-a-short-guide>)
- **Health scrutiny – a short guide** (<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/?publication=health-scrutiny-a-short-guide>)

- **Scrutiny and work programming** (<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/?publication=scrutiny-and-work-programming>)
- **The use of call-in – guidance for English authorities** (<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/?publication=the-use-of-call-in-guidance-for-english-authorities>)
- **Scrutiny frontiers 2020/21 – experiences from the scrutiny frontline** (<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CfGS-Scrutiny-Frontiers-2021-v2-SINGLE-PAGES-002-1.pdf>)

LGA publications

We continue to publish a wide range of resources for councillors, including our series of **councillor workbooks** (<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/councillor-and-officer-development/councillor-workbooks>). For example, our **councillor workbook on finance scrutiny** (<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/councillor-workbook-scrutiny-finance>) is designed to provide councillors with an understanding of the principles and practicalities of scrutinising the financial affairs of their council.



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