



**REGENERATION, ENVIRONMENT,
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY
SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

28 JULY 2004

**AGENDA
ITEM**

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE SCRUTINY 2004/5

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr A Andrew – (Regeneration)
Cllr M Longhi - (Environment)
Cllr M G Pitt - (Housing and Community Safety)

Summary of report:

This report is going to all scrutiny meetings in this cycle. It is based on some work by scrutiny chairs and vice chairs last year, and summarises their thoughts on approaches to scrutiny to provide general background for new scrutiny members and help inform the selection of work programmes for 2004/5.

Background papers:

Summary of outcomes from the sessions with chairs and vice chairs of overview and scrutiny committees on 19 June and 8 July 2003.

Reason for scrutiny

To inform the selection of topics/projects/activities to scrutinise in 2004/5, eg:

- The approach to be taken in scrutinising issues
- The engagement of non-council members and officers in the process
- The use of performance indicators and other information
- The involvement in the budget setting and monitoring process
- Meeting formats, venues and inclusion
- What support is required (people, time, assets, budget)
- The branding and positioning of the function.
- Any other issues.

Signed

Executive Director: Carole Evans

Date: 15 July 2004

Resource and legal considerations

Any changes to the process may require changes to the Council's Constitution. A review of the Constitution is currently being undertaken.

Citizen impact

Successful scrutiny will contribute to improving the Council's performance and service delivery to service users and other stakeholders.

Environment impact

Successful scrutiny can assist in shaping policy changes to make environmental improvements.

Performance management

Scrutiny is an important and integral part of the Council's performance management framework, and can challenge, review and advise on service delivery, council activity and policy and improve results.

Equality Implications

All citizens with a relevant interest in a matter will have the ability to contribute to the deliberations of a scrutiny panel, when considering a "call in". Scrutiny members can engage with a wide range of service users, partners and other organisations to maximise the benefit of scrutiny.

Consultation

Two sessions were held in 2003 to which all chairs and vice chairs of scrutiny committees were invited. Further sessions are planned for this year.

Contact Officer

Carole Evans – Executive Director

Tel. 01922 652910

evansc@walsall.gov.uk

1. OUTCOMES

1.1 Common Ground

Last year, scrutiny chairs and vice chairs agreed a “ten point plan” identifying how the overall business would be conducted, as follows:

We will

1. Behave in a non-adversarial way, without blame and with mutual respect.
2. Accept responsibility for our actions, behaviour, subject area and decisions.
3. Take difficult decisions, don't fudge and see them through.
4. Act in a supportive and challenging way to solve problems.
5. Not divulge confidential information.
6. Be proactive, positive, and look forward not back.
7. Purposefully involve stakeholders in a way that helps us to learn and be informed.
8. Be clear about officer and member roles and work in an environment of trust, understanding and mutual respect.
9. Deliver improved performance.
10. Share views and communicate effectively with one another.

1.2 Good Scrutiny

1.2.1 The debate revealed a number of common themes around what good scrutiny would look like. There was general agreement that the scrutiny process should make a real difference to delivering better council services and therefore higher levels of customer satisfaction. Key issues are identified below.

1.2.2 The Centre for public scrutiny have published ‘the good scrutiny guide’ a pocket guide for public scrutineers (appendix 1) for information.

1.2.3 Deciding what to scrutinise

It was considered that the selection of what to scrutinise and the development of a robust focussed work programme was key to ensuring overview and scrutiny was successful. Members requested clear and concise information outlining the issues that were happening in services to enable them to make an informed selection at the start of the year, whilst leaving room to tackle topical issues as they arose during the year. Key issues identified were:

- Select a few things and do them thoroughly and well rather than superficially examine many things.
- Monitor themes and performance.
- Ensure Cabinet use scrutiny by (for example) commissioning them to look at issues in detail as a working party.
- Identify worst first or where performance is deteriorating.
- Tackle some “quick hits”.
- Identify areas where savings could be made, income generated or increased value for money secured.
- Choose strategic, current important issues and see them through – which may take a number of months or more to complete;

- Don't duplicate work already been done by other bodies (eg: audit, inspection, best value etc)
- Use a checklist to decide if something should be scrutinised (see example at **Appendix 2**)
- Have a clear focussed work programme with a clear purpose of intention;
- Make a difference to service delivery and customer satisfaction

1.2.4 Approach to adopt

Considerable debate took place on the approach to be undertaken by overview and scrutiny. It was considered vital to position the function as a high priority and a valuable element of council mainstream activity. It was considered important to maximise engagement in the process and ensure activity made a difference and participation was seen to be rewarding and worthwhile, focussing on improving service delivery and customer satisfaction. Key issues raised were:

- Be proactive – look at issues and make recommendations before formal decisions were made by Cabinet;
- Take a varied not standard approach dependent on the matter being examined;
- Engage in good two-way dialogue with a range of parties;
- Ensure overview and scrutiny has a high profile and is valued;
- Ensure the process is rewarding and meaningful for all participants;
- Ensure it is embedded with and linked to other council processes;
- Examine problems objectively with a view to finding solutions and improvements;
- Joint working with two or more overview and scrutiny committees on joint issues.
- Use “select committee” approach if appropriate (eg: full day sessions)
- Be non-partisan in approach.
- Ensure members are well informed and briefed;
- Involve all relevant people from within the council and outside (eg: experts, observatories, academics, students, young people, best in class organisations, stakeholders, partners, national interest groups etc.);

1.3 Scrutiny and Performance

1.3.1 It was considered that overview and scrutiny had a major part to play in the performance management framework of the Council. In particular, by reviewing progress against plans and targets, challenging and appraising where performance was deteriorating or not increasing rapidly enough, and focussing on customer satisfaction and service delivery. Key issues identified were:

- Establish close links with best value performance plans and reviews.
- Be constructive in criticism and support improvement in a practical way.
- Group performance indicators into themes and prioritise which ones really evidence changes in performance and demonstrate the Council's overall operational and strategic health.
- Establish sub groups to look at different themes throughout the year.
- Use the integrated planning framework.
- Identify where we currently are in terms of performance league tables and focus on areas that are the councils overall priorities and objectives.

- Adopt a community/customer focus – examine what matters to service users.
- Ensure other stakeholders, partners, service users, interest groups etc have an opportunity to be involved – listen to those who can help make a difference.
- Identify good practice and celebrate successes.

1.4 Scrutiny in Action

1.4.1 It was agreed that some changes could be made to the way in which we approached scrutiny by adopting a different method of doing business and by including others within the process. Ideas put forward were:

1.4.2 Conduct of meetings.

- Do not always meet in committee rooms in the council house at 6pm
- Use alternative venues appropriate to the matter under review.
- Meet stakeholders and interested parties on their “own turf” at a time suitable to them.
- Co-opt others onto the committee for specific issues where others have expertise or views to share.
- Try to escape from traditional report mode by using presentations, discussions, focus groups, videos, surveys etc.
- Rethink the traditional cycle, perhaps a solid two day review on occasion is more appropriate.
- Change the layout of meeting rooms – current setting can be alienating to visitors
- Set the room up informally.
- Provide a briefing note on “what will happen” to visitors.
- Use sub groups to drill down into complex issues and report back.
- Explain the process at the start of meetings.
- Make more appropriate for the matter in hand.
- Be inclusive and more informal.

2.4.3 Preparation and involvement

- Get out and about outside meetings to do research
- Use sub groups and buddies/mentors to work on issues in detail
- Use research assistants and outside bodies for help
- Use citizens juries and mystery customers.
- Visit good practice sites or meet with others outside the meeting, reporting back

2.5 Scrutiny and Support

2.5.1 It was agreed that the overview and scrutiny function needed to be adequately supported by officers and that certain resources needed to be provided to ensure the process was as successful as possible. Officer support to the overview and scrutiny function will form part of the new corporate performance management team, and this area is currently being reviewed to provide the necessary support and delivery structures. Key issues identified were:

- Members to be inducted into the role of being an overview and scrutiny participant.
- Additional induction for chairs/vice chairs.
- Have regular events for chairs and vice chairs perhaps every 3-6 months with executive management team to review approach and activity.
- Training and development
- Working in pairs with buddies or mentors or mentors external to the Council.
- Shadow colleagues at other councils undertaking scrutiny to observe a scrutiny meeting.
- Regular briefing meetings with executive directors – chair and vice chair to be in attendance.
- Dedicated scrutiny officers including research assistants and clerical support.
- Proactive officer input.
- Visits to offices and council service delivery areas.
- Help to organise meetings in alternative venues.
- Participate in action learning sets.

2.6 Other practical changes

2.6.1 It was agreed that a number of practical changes would help to modernise scrutiny and effectively re-launch the process for the new financial year. Key issues identified were:

- Change the name – removing “committee” and reflecting the role and remit of the function.
- Use webcams, internet and new technology.
- Change report formats and place less reliance on written reports using presentations and discussion instead.

2.7 Work Programme

2.7.1 Following debate on the above issues, members are advised to determine a work programme of activity for their scrutiny panel for 2004/5.

SUGGESTED CHECKLIST FOR DETERMINING SCRUTINY THEMES AND TOPICS

CRITERIA	YES	NO
Is the service a relatively poor performer compared with other councils, providers or within the council?		
Has the quality of the service deteriorated from previous levels? (how much?)		
Is it considered that there is scope for improvement in the quality of service delivery? (why?)		
Are there alternative service delivery models to examine? (which ones?)		
Is it considered that significant savings could be made by undertaking this service differently?		
Is it considered that significant income generation opportunities are possible? (what/why?)		
Is a review already being undertaken by another body or has already been recently undertaken (eg: internal audit, external audit, external inspection, another overview and scrutiny committee, or a best value review?)		
Are the anticipated outcomes of our scrutiny likely to make a difference to improving service delivery or customer satisfaction? (in what way?)		
Is this a new policy with significant potential impact on service delivery or the operation of the council?		
Is this an area that would benefit from scrutiny prior to external inspection? (in what way?)		
Is this an issue of public concern?		
Is this an area of new legal requirements or regulation or a post-implementation review of a service or function?		
Is it the right time to scrutinise this? (why?)		
Will scrutiny make a positive difference? (how?)		
Has the service been subject of significant adverse comment in previous external audit or inspection reports?		

Ticks in the shaded boxes score “1”. Ticks in the unshaded boxes score “0”.
The higher the “score” – the higher the priority for scrutiny and inclusion on the annual Workplan.

REGENERATION, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2004/05

<u>KEY WORK AREAS</u>	<u>28 July 2004</u>	<u>4 August 2004</u>	<u>22 September 2004</u>	<u>2 November 2004</u>	<u>15 December 2004</u>	<u>26 January 2005</u>	<u>16 March 2005</u>	<u>26 April 2005</u>
Performance Indicators / Quarterly Performance reports				*		*		*
Service Planning consultation Budget consultation					*	*	*	
Best Value Reviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime & Disorder (section 17) • Planning • Markets • Business Sector • Progress of reviews 					*			
Issues referred by Executive								
Executive decisions called in								
<u>CPA Inspections and Improvement Plans</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing programme improvement plan • Environment CPA inspection 	*	*						
<u>Scrutiny & Performance Reviews</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Midyear scrutiny function • • • • • 				*				
Evaluation of working methods	*							*