

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
16 JULY 2009

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY SELF EVALUATION

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Commission of the forthcoming exercise to complete the Centre for Public Scrutiny's self evaluation for Overview and Scrutiny in local authorities.

2 SUGGESTED ACTION

That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission:

- 2.1 **Notes the forthcoming exercise to complete the Centre for Public Scrutiny's self evaluation for Overview and Scrutiny in local authorities.**

3 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Centre for Public Scrutiny's Annual review of Local Authorities for 2008 states that 23% of responding Councils had completed the self-evaluation. The self-evaluation will be used to inform decisions about how Overview and Scrutiny in Bracknell Forest might be improved.

Background Papers

Centre for Public Scrutiny – Self Evaluation Framework for Local Authorities

Contact for further information

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Centre for Public Scrutiny – Self Evaluation Framework for Local Authorities

Introduction to the self evaluation framework

This self-evaluation framework is a mechanism for all local authorities to demonstrate the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny and to identify areas for improvement.

It can be used by any individual or group and does not presuppose an existing level of achievement. Rather, within a given set of principles, it requires the "evaluator" to:

- demonstrate evidence of achievement,
- identify areas for improvement,
- and highlight potential barriers to improvement

Once completed, the framework will provide a clear picture of how overview and scrutiny operates in an authority. This can then be used to:

- communicate the potential of scrutiny to local communities
- encourage involvement in the process of those being scrutinised
- build confidence of those undertaking scrutiny activities
- demonstrate scrutiny's value to auditors and inspectors

Completion of the framework will also produce an explicit set of priorities for improvement planning.

USING THE SELF EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The framework has been designed for use according the needs of each authority.

It does not presuppose any current level of achievement and can be applied to any type of local authority, operating under any of the four options for political management as set out in the Local Government Act 2000.

It is up to individual councils to decide how to use this framework, however, authorities might like to consider some of the following suggestions:

- use the framework as a survey sent to key stakeholders and use results to develop an action plan
- hold a workshop with key stakeholders to complete the framework, using the results to develop an action plan
- contract external consultants to undertake the evaluation and produce recommendations

The framework is in four sections, reflecting the principles set out CfPS' [Good Scrutiny Guide](#). For each principle there is a set of key questions with prompts to help complete an evaluation

table.

Once the questions have been answered the authority will have identified a series of areas for improvement which can then be built in to an improvement plan.

Critical friend challenge

Answer each of the numbered questions below under three headings:

- Evidence of what we do well
- How can we improve?
- What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?

The bulleted points under each numbered question can be used, as required, to provide more detailed evidence.

1.1 Does scrutiny provide an effective challenge to the Executive?

- what opportunities are available for scrutiny members to question cabinet members and challenge the executive?
- how does scrutiny provide an effective mechanism for the executive to demonstrate public accountability?
- how do you ensure that challenge is "constructive, robust and purposeful"?
- what evidence is there that scrutiny is able to operate independently of the executive?

1.2 How does scrutiny have an impact on the work of the executive?

- can you provide an example where challenge to the executive has led to a better decision than would otherwise have been taken?
- can you provide evidence of where scrutiny has had a direct impact on the work of the executive?
- has a cabinet member had a change of mind on a decision due to scrutiny?

1.3 How does scrutiny routinely challenge the authority's corporate strategy and budget?

- is there evidence of questioning financial priorities and how they meet corporate objectives?
- how can you demonstrate that monitoring and questioning performance has provided effective challenge?

1.4 Are external partners involved in o&s and how are they included?

- are external partners used to provide challenge?
- can you provide examples where partnerships and partner organisations have been the subject of scrutiny?
- is there a process for external involvement in scrutiny? Have you developed a scheme as outline in [Local Government Act 2003](#)?
- are arrangements in place to support and encourage external challenge?

1.5. Does scrutiny work effectively with the executive and senior management?

- do you have an agreed way of working with executive and senior management?
- could you describe those relationships confidently and provide an example if them working in practice?
- are there examples to demonstrate improved outcomes as a result of these relationships in use?

Reflecting the public voice

Answer each of the numbered questions below under three headings:

- Evidence of what we do well
- How can we improve?
- What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?

The bulleted points under each numbered question can be used, as required, to provide more detailed evidence.

2.1. How is the work of scrutiny informed by the public?

- is there evidence of an ongoing dialogue with the public and its diverse communities?
- what evidence is there to show how diverse/different public expectations have been managed?
- Is there evidence to show where the scrutiny work programme has been influenced by suggestions from both public and partner organisations?

2.2. How does scrutiny make itself accessible to the public?

- what mechanisms are in place to enable/encourage the public to become involved in the work of scrutiny?
- how can you demonstrate that they have been effective?
- how are the outcomes of scrutiny communicated?
- what evidence is there to show how the public has been engaged in the meetings and work of scrutiny?

2.3. How does scrutiny communicate?

- are mechanisms in place to ensure that all members and officers are aware of and understand scrutiny?
- how do you ensure that opportunities for communicating scrutiny are identified and used, including corporate arrangements for media and public relations?
- do you have any specific arrangements for communicating with partnerships and partner organisations?

2.4 How does scrutiny make itself relevant to the public and other organisations outside local government?

Leading and owning the process

Answer each of the numbered questions below under three headings:

- Evidence of what we do well
- How can we improve?
- What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?

The bulleted points under each numbered question can be used, as required, to provide more detailed evidence.

3.1. Does scrutiny operate with political impartiality?

- are you able to demonstrate that the whip is not used?
- is it possible to demonstrate political consensus?
- how have executive members been involved in championing the value and potential of scrutiny?

3.2. Does scrutiny have ownership of its own work programme?

- how have members been involved in developing the work programme?
- do members regularly monitor and evaluate the progress of work programmes?
- can you provide evidence to show how conflicting views in regard to the work programme have been resolved by scrutiny members?
- do scrutiny members set goals for what they want to achieve?

3.3. Do scrutiny members consider that they have a worthwhile and fulfilling role?

- do Members have an opportunity to communicate their views on the development and operation of overview and scrutiny?
- are the views of Members canvassed/collected and evaluated?
- is scrutiny seen as an attractive political career?
- is the scrutiny role seen as one that makes an important contribution to the good management of the authority and quality of life in the community?

3.4. Is there a constructive working partnership with officers including support arrangements for scrutiny?

- can you provide evidence to show that there are arrangements to enable discussion and consensus between scrutiny, the executive and officers?
- how have officers been involved in championing the value and potential of scrutiny?
- what training and development has been provided with a view to improving scrutiny?

HOW ARE THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR SCRUTINY SUPPORT EVALUATED FOR EFFECTIVENESS AND APPROPRIATENESS?

MAKING AN IMPACT

Answer each of the numbered questions below under three headings:

- Evidence of what we do well

- How can we improve?
 - What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?
- The bulleted points under each numbered question can be used, as required, to provide more detailed evidence.

4.1. How is the scrutiny workload co-ordinated and integrated in to corporate processes?

- are you able to use the forward plan to programme the work of scrutiny?
- Is the forward plan fit for purpose?
- what evidence is there that scrutiny contributes to the delivery of corporate priorities?
- can scrutiny demonstrate an involvement and impact in setting performance objectives?
- what evidence is there to show that scrutiny involvement has identified the need to realign resource allocation or objectives?

4.2. What evidence is there to show that scrutiny has contributed to improvement?

- what evidence is there to show that changes have been brought about as a result of scrutiny activity?
- what arrangements are in place to ensure that recommendations and actions arising from scrutiny are acted upon?
- how does scrutiny monitor routinely the implementation of its recommendations?

4.3. How well is information required by scrutiny managed?

- how effective are the arrangements for planning and scoping reviews?
- what arrangements have been made to ensure that scrutiny members receive accurate, timely and appropriate information?
- how does scrutiny record, monitor and evaluate its own proceedings?

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR SCRUTINY

This page contains text sourced from the [IDeA website](#)

The indicators below were suggested as part of the work with our pilot group. They lack detailed definition at present but are a useful starting point to building a more robust set of measures. Further examples from local authorities are available at the bottom.

There is an emerging view amongst scrutiny officers that it is difficult to identify meaningful performance indicators for overview and scrutiny and that some of the indicators listed below (and the collection of them) add little value to the O& S function. Indeed there are cases where indicators and their associated targets have actually led to perverse or otherwise unintended outcomes. These views have been discussed in threads on the old forum [here](#) and [here](#).

Alternative suggestions include the use of case studies to demonstrate effective scrutiny and more descriptive statements of achievement of annual ambitions or challenges for scrutiny, usually to reflect national developments. But the information needs to be carefully targeted to the specific audience - whether they are officers, Members, the public, a peer review or a full scale audit or other inspection team.

As with the rest of our improvement pages please feel free to edit these, add your own, or create pages to provide definition.

Critical friend challenge:

- percentage of items on work programmes taken from the forward plan
- percentage of items on the cabinet agenda amended as a result of scrutiny intervention

Reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities

- the percentage of items on the work programme suggested by the public or in response to issues raised through surveys, comments or complaints
- number of visits to the authority's scrutiny web pages
- number of requests for scrutiny newsletter

Take the lead and own the scrutiny process

- the percentage of meetings attended by Members at which they were required
- percentage of Members who are enthusiastic about their role in scrutiny
- percentage of Members that have a fairly good awareness of the role of scrutiny and of their role as a panel member

Making an impact on service delivery

- the percentage of scrutiny recommendations approved by the executive
- the percentage of scrutiny recommendations implemented by the executive
- improvements identified by public/stakeholders as a result of scrutiny reviews