

An introduction to effective scrutiny

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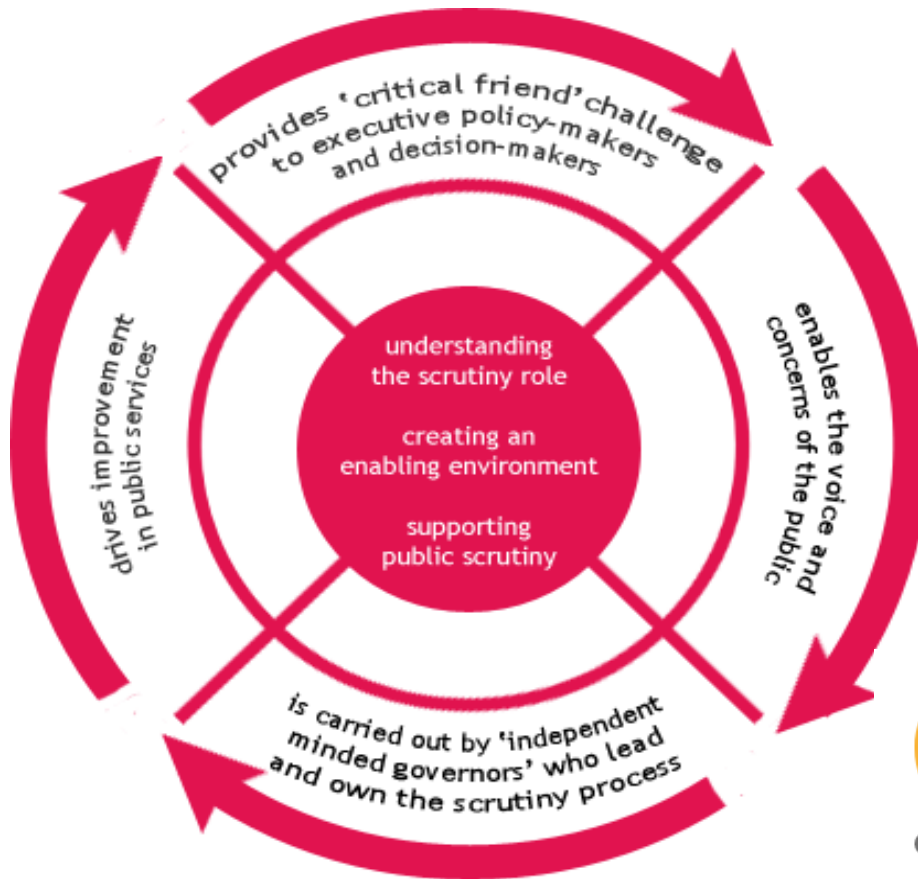
Cllr Victoria Cusworth - Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, and Former Chair of Improving Lives Scrutiny Commission, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Background to the role of Overview and Scrutiny (O&S)

- Local Government Act 2000
 - Establishment of Executives / Cabinets
 - Statutory Power and Duties
 - Each Authority has developed its own structures and ways of doing things

 - 2019 statutory guidance
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The 4 principles of effective scrutiny



Scrutiny Roles Exercise

Which are legitimate roles for overview and scrutiny and which are not?

Holding the executive or other decision-makers to account

Monitoring & reviewing key performance indicators

Reviewing key plans and strategies

Contributing to policy development in key areas






Scrutiny roles exercise

Which are legitimate roles for overview and scrutiny and which are not?

Which are legitimate roles for overview and scrutiny and which are not?	Resolving individual ward issues	Monitoring and reviewing the executive's Forward Plan	Reviewing the effectiveness of the governance arrangements of the council
Engaging and involving members of the public	Undertaking in-depth investigations into key policy/service issues	Examining progress against key corporate priorities	Monitoring and reviewing the council's budget
Reviewing individual planning decisions	Overtaking executive decisions	Providing an avenue for party political opposition to the controlling party/parties	Reviewing the council's work in a specific area or neighbourhood
Reviewing the work of key partner organisations	Proposing the Council budget	Undertaking in-depth investigations into key issues proposed by executive member/s	Scrutiny of council owned companies

Scrutiny roles exercise

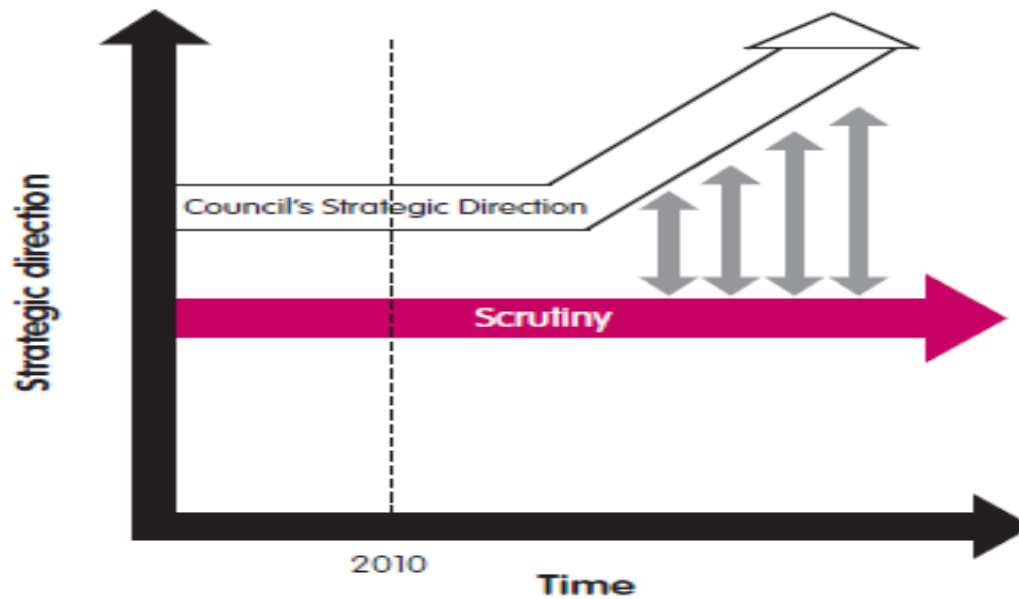
Which are legitimate roles for overview and scrutiny and which are not?

Calling in decisions of the executive (or other decision-makers)	Resolving local ward issues 	Monitoring and reviewing the executive's Forward Plan	Reviewing the effectiveness of the governance arrangements of the council
Engaging and involving members of the public	Undertaking in-depth investigations into key policy/service issues	Examining progress against key corporate priorities	Monitoring and reviewing the council's budget
Reviewing local planning decisions 	Overturning executive decisions 	Providing a platform for party political opposition to the controlling parties 	Reviewing the council's work in a specific area or neighbourhood
Reviewing the work of key partner organisations	Proposing the Council budget 	Undertaking in-depth investigations into key issues proposed by executive member/s	Scrutiny of council owned companies

Why is scrutiny important?

“all members and officers should 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” – MHCLG Statutory Guidance, 2019

Mind the Gap



Source: New Leadership Foundation

Key skills for scrutiny

- Work programming
 - Questioning skills and active listening
 - In-depth reviews
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Setting the work programme

Are you looking at the right topics?

- where would you get ideas for topics to scrutinise?

Write in the chat!

Prioritisation Criteria

- Potential impact for significant section(s) of the population
 - Matter of general public concern
 - Key deliverable of a strategic and/or partnership action plan
 - Key performance area where the council needs to improve
 - Legislative requirement
 - Corporate/service group priority (corporate plan issues)
 - Member gut instinct (member interest/skills)
 - Can add value to the topic area
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Prioritising a Work Programme: Some useful 'filtering' questions

- Is the topic already part of a separate review process?
 - Does scrutiny have sufficient resources and time to tackle the topic?
 - Is the topic of significant public concern?
 - Will the topic support the achievement of corporate priorities?
 - Can scrutiny 'make a difference' by addressing this topic?
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Questioning skills



Developing key lines of enquiry

- Ask “what is the overall purpose of this item”
 - Ensure all questions link to that overall purpose – have a questioning strategy
 - Requires preparation and a degree of ‘stage-management’
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- CFIGS: Questions are your roadmap



Different types of question

Closed questions

Requiring short, factual answers (e.g. “yes” or “no”)

Open questions

Deliberately seeks longer answers

Probing questions

Seeks further information in an investigative way

Clarifying questions

Seeks to clarify a fact or opinion

Opinion finding

Asks for an opinion

Probing questions – to gather info

Who?

When?

What?

Where?

Why?

How?

Powerful questions

1. Is there another way of thinking about this?
 2. Who would take responsibility?
 3. What might some of the alternatives be?
 4. How might you approach this in a different way?
 5. What other things do you need to be aware of?
 6. I wonder what would happen if we tried something different?
 7. How might this fit with everything else?
 8. Can you talk me through your thinking?
 9. How can you make a schedule that meets the deadline?
 10. Who do you need on board? And how to get them on board?
 11. What would success look like?
 12. What will you do next?
 13. If you were to flex your leadership style what might be the benefits?
 14. If you could change one thing, what would it be?
 15. What might get in the way?
 16. Who might get in the way?
- Zoom

Source: New Leadership Foundation

Asking the right questions – other top tips

- Draft questions in advance, when reading the papers
 - Share the questions you want to ask with fellow committee members
 - Assign questions in advance
 - Tell the witnesses in advance
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■ Active listening



Uses body language



Builds trust



Broadens your perspective



Increases understanding



Adds value



Helps form recommendations



Suspend judgement, use action
learning/
coaching techniques

In-depth Reviews



HOW will we scrutinise this?

Different methods of conducting scrutiny

Reports

**Task
Groups**

Deep dive

Site visit

Private/informal
meetings

Peer review

Interviews

**Focus
groups**

Surveys

Scoping for successful scrutiny

- What evidence would you seek to gather?
 - What witnesses would you want to speak to?
 - How would you ensure the perspective of the **public** was taken into account?
 - What method of scrutiny would you select?
 - Timescales etc
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Ten steps towards an effective scrutiny review

1. be sure that the subject is significant
 2. project plan the investigation
 3. determine the nature of Member involvement
 4. engage partners, public and local media
 5. gather evidence and primary written evidence
 6. get the witness package right
 7. gather oral evidence
 8. adopt other methods
 9. prepare draft report and disseminate
 10. follow up
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Evidence based recommendations

Is the recommendation SMART?

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Timely

Date of meeting	Item	Recommendations Or Action	Who is the recommendation to? (e.g. Cabinet)	Response or review date

What next?

<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/> - centre for governance and scrutiny

<https://local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership/leadership-essentials>

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