

The Practical Guides Series

This is the fifth in a series of 6 Practical Guides for Scrutiny

The remaining Guides are :-

Guide 1: A Practical Guide to Scrutiny

Guide 3: Members' Guide to Effective Performance Management

Guide 4: A Guide for Members of the Public on Scrutiny

Guide 5: A Guide for Witnesses

Guide 6: A Guide for Officers attending Scrutiny Committees

Vale of Glamorgan

Council



Members' Guide to Scrutiny



The aim of this leaflet is to provide Councillors with an overview of the role of scrutiny and its importance within the Council.

What is Scrutiny?

Cabinet and Scrutiny functions were created as a result of the Local Government Act 2000. The Cabinet makes most of the Council's decisions.

Scrutiny Committees consist of Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet. They can examine all functions and responsibilities of the Council, look at issues affecting the wider community and assist the Cabinet in improving and developing services.

Scrutiny enables Members to influence decisions that are taken by the Cabinet and to ensure that the views and needs of local people are taken into account.

What are the aims of Scrutiny?

- To help to improve the Council's performance
- To help the Council to deliver services which are sensitive to local needs by involving local people
- To ensure that decision making is clear, transparent and accountable
- To engage service users and the wider community in decision making

Scrutiny Website:

http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/our_council/scrutiny/more_about_scrutiny.aspx

Council Website:

www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk

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Why is Scrutiny important ?

- Holds decision makers to account
- Challenges and improves performance
- Supports the achievement of value for money
- Challenges the way things are done
- Influences decision makers with evidence based recommendations
- Brings in the evidence and views of stakeholders, users and citizens
- Undertakes pre/post scrutiny of Cabinet proposals

Scrutiny Committees, as well as making suggestions for improvements, acknowledge good practice and performance.

Scrutiny in the Vale:

There are five Scrutiny Committees in the Vale :-

- **Corporate Performance and Resources** deals with the internal working of the Council and its finances.
- **Environment and Regeneration** deals with Waste Management, Highway Maintenance, Planning (but not matters such as planning applications), Transportation and Economic Development
- **Homes and Safe Communities** deals with Council Housing and related maintenance, Private Sector Housing, Community Safety and Crime and Disorder (including Youth Offending Services) and Shared Regulatory Services functions
- **Learning and Culture** deals with School matters (which includes School Improvement, Post-16 Education, Community Education, Youth Services), the Library Service and Training.
- **Healthy Living and Social Care** deals with Adult Services, such as Care Homes, Children and Young People Services (e.g. Adoption Service) and Healthy Living and Leisure

Terms of reference

Details of the full Terms of Reference of each of the Scrutiny Committees and their procedure rules can be found in the Council's Constitution which is available on the Council's website: www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk.

The Work of Scrutiny Committees

The following are different types of work undertaken by Scrutiny Committees to ensure services improve and value for money is achieved.

Policy Review - Scrutiny of topics due to changes in legislation/government guidance or because a policy is in need of updating/reviewing locally. Undertaken in line with corporate priorities so as to add value to the work of the authority.

Performance Review - Scrutiny of specific service areas following consideration of the quarterly Corporate Performance Monitoring Reports. In addition issues can also be brought forward by Councillors either on under performing services in their local area or on an authority wide basis.

Service Plans - Scrutiny Committees consider the Service Plans for their relevant directorates and scrutinise whether they will help the Council achieve its corporate priorities and continue to develop and improve services.

When and Where are Scrutiny Committees held ?

Meetings are usually held at the Civic Offices but can also be held in venues such as schools, libraries and community centres to help engage service users and members of the public

Meetings are normally held every four weeks, the dates, venues and times of which are available on the Council's website:

http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/our_council/scrutiny/more_about_scrutiny/meetings.aspx
All meetings generally start at 6.00 pm unless otherwise advised.

Contact details for Democratic and Scrutiny Services officers are:

Democratic and Scrutiny Services Section
The Vale of Glamorgan Council
Civic Offices
Holton Road
Barry
CF63 4RU
E-Mail: www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk

Member Attendance at Meetings

Any Member of the Council who is not a member of the Committee, can attend Committee meetings and, with the leave of the Committee, may make comments. In some circumstances, the Cabinet Member may be requested to attend a meeting to advise on the rationale of the decision made at Cabinet. It has become custom and practice for Cabinet Members to attend some Scrutiny Committees in any event and, where necessary, provide the Committee with any relevant information.

Agendas and Minutes of Scrutiny Committee meetings

All agendas and minutes of Scrutiny Committees, as well as reports of any Task and Finish Groups or reviews, are available by following the links on the Council's website [http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/our_council/council/minutes,_agendas_and_reports/minutes,_agendas_and_reports.aspx]. Agendas are available at least 5 clear days prior to the meeting. Hard copies are also available for public inspection at the Civic Offices.

Local Scrutiny - Consideration of a specific issue that is important to local people in their community, which may be an issue raised directly by a member of the public, Councillors or other organisations. It provides local people with the opportunity to get involved in the decision making process by looking at specific topics that are important to them in their community.

Call-in - Each and every decision of the Cabinet can be subject to challenge by a Councillor. The process for governing this is known as 'Call-in'.

Budget Scrutiny - Scrutiny plays an important role in holding the Cabinet to account and scrutinising the Budget Strategy to assess whether it will support the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities. It also has a role in budget and financial monitoring identifying issues for more in-depth analysis. Scrutiny also helps in exploring cost efficiencies and ensuring that value for money is provided in all service areas.

Annual Report - Scrutiny Committees usually meet every four weeks and, each year, present to Full Council an Annual Report on their achievements and work undertaken.

The Role of a Scrutiny Member

Members should:

- Contribute to discussions on possible topics for scrutiny review.
- Discuss and decide the clear remit for any reviews and how each will be undertaken
- Prepare for meetings and visits (read briefing papers, prepare questions for witnesses etc)
- Ask probing questions rather than make statements when hearing evidence
- Participate as fully in scrutiny activities as time commitments allow (attending site visits, taking part in activities outside formal meetings such as focus groups or working parties)
- Make recommendations based on deliberations and information received
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of individuals and organisations invited to attend
- Treat witnesses, officers and other Members with courtesy and consideration
- Take part in training and development activities as provided.

Submitting requests for reviews

Any member of the public, outside organisation or a Member themselves can request that a service or issue be considered by a Scrutiny Committee for review or further consideration. Appropriate forms are available from the Democratic and Scrutiny Services section of the Council's website. [http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/our_council/council/scrutiny/more_about_scrutiny.aspx] On receipt, suggestions will be considered in accordance with the approved process and, if deemed appropriate, reported to the Scrutiny Committee in order that the Committee can confirm acceptance for a review to be undertaken.

Calling Witnesses

Committees can request the attendance of witnesses on a particular topic and may ask for written evidence or for the person to attend the meeting in order for questions to be asked. Views and experiences of witnesses can be invaluable in providing the necessary evidence for the Committee in order that every aspect can be considered. Scrutiny Committees may appoint Task and Finish Groups to undertake review work and these meetings may or may not be open to the public. It is important to note that the Committees should focus their work on scrutiny issues and outcomes that could make the most difference to people of the Vale of Glamorgan.

Service Directors and senior officers can be called upon to provide input e.g. during preparation of Scrutiny Committees' Work Programmes and in presenting written reports and recommendations.

Public Involvement

Scrutiny provides the opportunity for the public to become involved in the Council's activities. Members of the public can speak at Scrutiny Committees on items on the agenda with some exceptions. Alternatively, written representations can also be submitted (Please refer to the public participation guide and procedure at [<http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/Our%20Council/Scrutiny/Guidance/Scrutiny-Public-Participation-Guide.pdf>] for details on how to register to speak or submit written representations. Members of the public, including service users, are able to submit suggested topics for scrutiny review and can be invited to attend Scrutiny Committees to assist the Committees by giving evidence and taking part in the discussion and consideration of topics.

Who can attend Scrutiny Meetings?

All Scrutiny meetings are open to the public unless confidential matters are being discussed. On agendas, these items will be referred to as "PART II" matters.

Example of questions Members may wish to bear in mind when undertaking the Role of Scrutiny

- What are the main outcomes / benefits for residents?
- To what extent are service users' expectations and needs being met?
- Are we delivering value for money?
- What evidence is there to support the approach?
- What are we trying to achieve and how will this be measured?
- What can we improve?
- To what extent is the service meeting any statutory obligations or national standards and targets?
- Are Local Performance Indicators relevant, helpful and meaningful?
- Have users of the service been consulted?
- Have other stakeholders / partners been consulted?
- Does the service or issue under scrutiny have regard for sustainability?
- Does the service or issue under scrutiny present any opportunities for promoting community safety?
- Have equal opportunities been considered?

The Role of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of a Scrutiny Committee

It is expected that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman will work together as a leadership team to promote the overall development of scrutiny as well as having responsibility for their own Committee. These responsibilities include :-

- Chairing and managing meetings
- Prioritising Committee work
- Working with appropriate officers to decide on the business to be undertaken at each meeting and the methods to be employed and, together with the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer, to agree the agenda
- Co-ordinating work with other Scrutiny Committees and Chairmen.
- Ensuring the remit and timescales for each review topic is clear, taking into account resources and workload.
- Ensuring all Members are engaged and have the opportunity to contribute and be heard.
- Keeping Members focussed on the topic.
- Assisting with developing the skills and knowledge of Committee Members.
- Promoting the role of scrutiny within and outside the Council.

Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen Group

The Group usually meets on a bi-monthly basis and acts as an important forum where new initiatives and procedures can be discussed.

Scrutinising External Organisations

Scrutiny Committees can also look at matters related to the wellbeing of the whole of the Vale and its residents by scrutinising external organisations. The key difference between examining the work of other organisations is that the Committee can invite, but not require, representatives to attend a meeting to answer questions, submit evidence, to help with their investigation and deliberations. The Committee can also review the overall benefit to the public from the services provided by other organisations in a similar way as it reviews the work of the Council.

The Role of Officers

Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officers and directly support their relevant Scrutiny Committees by providing advice and guidance during meetings, assisting Committees in choosing topics and undertaking research for their work programmes.