

## The Practical Guides Series

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

The remaining Guides are :-

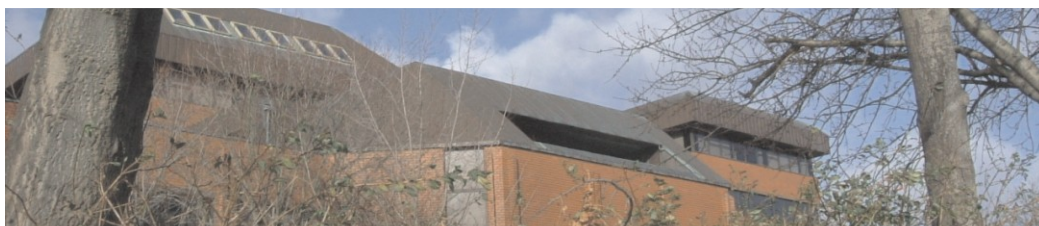
- Guide 1: A Practical Guide to Scrutiny
- Guide 2: Members' Guide to Scrutiny
- Guide 3: Members' Guide to Effective Performance Management
- Guide 4: A Guide for Members of the Public on Scrutiny
- Guide 6: A Guide for Officers attending Scrutiny Committees

A practical guide to Scrutiny

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# Vale of Glamorgan

Council



a practical guide to

# Scrutiny

for  
WITNESSES



VALE of GLAMORGAN



## **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 Council's main decision making group, namely 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.

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For more information on how Scrutiny works at the Vale of Glamorgan Council please contact:-

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

*or*

The Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer who  
supports the relevant Committee:-

### 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 all 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

### What should I expect?

As a witness to a Scrutiny Committee it will be important that you feel at ease. You will have been asked to attend in order that your views can be known but you are not obliged to attend. The process is about obtaining your views and experiences on matters in order that the Committee can make informed recommendations on evidence received.

### How should I prepare?

The following easy steps should ensure that your time is used at the meeting to maximum effect :-

- Read all the papers you have been sent for the Committee meeting. This will ensure that you have knowledge of the key concerns or developments being explored by the Committee.
- Prepare a list of information you would like to provide to the Committee but you will not need to prepare a presentation unless the Committee has specifically requested one or it has been agreed with you beforehand that a presentation will be the best format.
- As time for oral evidence may be limited, all witnesses will be invited to submit written evidence beforehand. This will help to make the meeting itself more productive, as

## **A practical guide to Scrutiny**

Scrutiny Services Officer who invited you to attend the meeting to let them know your views of the experience or complete the feedback form available on the Council's website. This will assist in refining the approach taken to inviting future expert witnesses/guests to meetings.

A map, together with details of the venue, will be provided with the agenda.

### On arrival

On your arrival you will be greeted by the officer who asked you to attend the meeting. That officer or a colleague will escort you to the meeting room and introduce you to the Committee Chairman unless you arrive immediately prior to the meeting or during the meeting when other arrangements will be made to greet you.

### Expenses

As you would have been asked to attend a meeting, the Council would be prepared to pay reasonable travelling expenses. The Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer will be able to advise you on this issue.

### Feedback

The Council would be pleased to receive feedback on the Scrutiny process and requests that you contact the Democratic and

the Committee have the witnesses' statements in front of them. Written evidence should be restricted to any factual information you have to offer from which the Scrutiny Committee might be able to draw conclusions (or which could be put to other witnesses for their reactions).

- Committee Members may not be experts in your area and it is therefore requested that you try to avoid jargon or professional terminology when giving answers.
- Talk to officers supporting the Committee. They will be able to tell you the Committee's expectations of you and offer any further advice / guidance.
- Attending a Scrutiny Committee offers a good opportunity to present your organisation's knowledge and experiences directly to Members of the Council.
- If you are asked in advance to prepare a presentation, it will of course be up to you to decide what you say and how you say it. It would be appreciated if you would send an electronic copy of the presentation in advance of the meeting in order that the presentation and equipment can be set up for you prior to the meeting.

- Should you wish to distribute handouts with your presentation, they should also be forwarded in advance of the meeting unless you wish to bring the relevant amount of copies to the meeting with you on the day.

### Questions from Members

The questions that the Members may ask you will be designed in order that they can understand the issues and enable them to make appropriate recommendations. They will quite often look for facts, figures, professional advice, best practice from expert witnesses and for personal experiences from members of the public and service users.

### 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 Scrutiny reviews, are available by following the links on the Council's website. Agendas are available at least 5 clear days prior to the meeting. Hard copies are also available for public inspection at the Civic Offices.

[http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/our\\_council/scrutiny/more\\_about\\_scrutiny/meetings.aspx](http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/our_council/scrutiny/more_about_scrutiny/meetings.aspx)

### **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 and generally start at 6:00pm unless otherwise advised. Dates, venues and times are available on the Council's website:

[http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/our\\_council/scrutiny/more\\_about\\_scrutiny/meeting.aspx](http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/our_council/scrutiny/more_about_scrutiny/meeting.aspx)

### **Who can attend Scrutiny Committee meetings?**

All scrutiny meetings are open to the public unless confidential matters are being discussed.

### **Parking and travel arrangements**

If you are travelling by car to the Council's Civic Offices parking will be provided in the Council's car park. You should also let the officer who asked you to attend the meeting know that you will be requiring a parking space.