

The Practical Guides Series

This is the sixth 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 5: A Guide for Witnesses attending Scrutiny Committees

Scrutiny Website:

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

Council website:

www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk

Vale of Glamorgan Council



a practical guide to

Scrutiny for OFFICERS



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 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

Contact details for Democratic and Scrutiny Services officers

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The Role of the Democratic and Scrutiny Services officer also includes (in respect of matters other than those relating to service and performance management issues):

- Providing an independent support capacity and research service
- Proposing potential research and/or investigative projects or reviews arising out of Cabinet and/or scrutiny reports or new initiatives / legislation
- Producing analysis and research findings, improvement options, reports and presentations for Scrutiny Committees
- Overseeing, facilitating and undertaking specific projects on behalf of Scrutiny Committees

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 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

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

On an annual basis the Scrutiny Committees' Work Programmes are reviewed and developed for the following year. This usually takes place during February / March of each year. The programme remains under review throughout the year and issues may be added or removed due to changes in priorities, urgent or important issues arising or other factors that require a change in the programme. The Work Programme usually consists of:

- Monitoring performance of service areas within the Committees' remit
- Monitoring and reviewing Service Plans
- Monitoring of the Revenue and Capital budget of service areas on a monthly basis
- Considering and making recommendations on the Council's Budget proposals
- Undertaking Scrutiny reviews as agreed by the Committee
- Establishing Task and Finish Groups to undertake time limited review work as and when appropriate

Staffing and Support

Specific support for Scrutiny Committees is provided by the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Team in the Resources Directorate. 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 recommendations and expertise in their field.

Role of the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer:-

- Inform you of the date, time and place of all meetings that you have been requested to attend (including agenda conferences)
- Advise you as and when information will be required by the Scrutiny Committee and on the format required
- Send minutes of the meetings for your approval within five working days of the meeting, once approved all minutes will be available on the website
- Provide advice and assistance on Constitutional matters and scrutiny procedures and protocols.

Who can attend Scrutiny Committee meetings?

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

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, can also be invited to attend Scrutiny Committees to assist Scrutiny Committee Members in their work by giving evidence and taking part in the discussion and consideration of topics.

Room layout at Scrutiny Meetings

Room layout is horseshoe shaped with Scrutiny Members and support officers sitting around the horseshoe and witnesses sitting at a separate table. Any officer being formally invited to attend the meeting will be classed as a witness and invited to address the Committee as required.

- Considering emerging strategies from the Corporate Plan and Community Strategy
- Receiving information and Briefing Reports from officers
- Call in - Each and every decision of the Cabinet can be subject to challenge by a Member. The process for this is known as "Call-in", full details of which can be found in the Council's Constitution on the website.

Officers' Role

Council officers directly support their relevant Scrutiny Committees by providing advice and guidance prior to and during meetings, and assisting Committees in choosing topics for their work programmes.

Senior officers may also be called upon to provide expert input in their professional capacity in respect of any written reports or presentations and, if necessary, to explain their reasons for making a specific decision. Specific support provided by Democratic and Scrutiny Services detailed later in the guide

Officers' Attendance at Meetings

Officers will be expected to:

- Positively support the scrutiny process and provide information as requested in line with the Scrutiny Committees' agreed work programmes

- Attend agenda conferences
- Provide reports or presentations at least ten working days prior to the meeting to the relevant Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer electronically
- Provide any written material in a clear and easy to read format, in line with corporate guidelines and using the agreed electronic template
- Ensure written reports are concise and factually accurate and address any specific questions that have been requested
- Ensure any abbreviated terms are explained in full and avoid the use of jargon
- Give evidence in various formats such as written documentation, a presentation or a verbal update to Members. Where a report has been circulated to Members in advance, it will only be necessary to focus on the salient points during the meeting.
- Assist the Committee in considering suggestions for review for its work programme.

Agenda Conferences

Officers will be required to attend agenda conferences where they are presenting reports to Committee in order that due consideration can be given to the make up of agendas by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the relevant Committee. It is expected that all reports are available at the Agenda Conference for discussion. Agenda Conferences usually take place 4/5 days prior to dispatch

Meetings

All Scrutiny meetings are open to the public unless confidential matters are being discussed. Members of the public, which could include service users, may also be invited to attend Scrutiny Committees to assist Committees in their work by the giving of evidence and or taking part in the discussion and consideration of topics.

Agendas and Minutes of Scrutiny Meetings

Dates and times of all meetings, agendas, minutes and reports from Scrutiny Reviews and Task and Finish Groups are available by following the links on the Council's website:

www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/our_council/council/minutes,_agendas__reports.aspx

Agendas are available at least 5 clear days prior to the meeting. Hard copies are available for public inspection at the Civic Offices.

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 6.00 p.m. unless otherwise advised. Dates, venues and times are available on the Council's website:

www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/our_council/council/minutes,_agendas__reports.aspx