



# A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO SCRUTINY

Overview & Scrutiny Team  
Policy, Performance, Partnerships & Communications

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Research shows that councils that achieve an “excellent” corporate performance rating do so not just because they have an excellent executive but also because they have an effective scrutiny function.

All Councillors have a role to play in improving the performance of the authority as well as engaging with our service users and partners. Effective scrutiny can and has helped to deliver the Council’s priorities.

This guidance is intended to assist elected Members, officers and others to understand scrutiny in Haringey. It provides clarification of roles and procedures in order to ensure a consistent and rigorous approach to scrutiny work within the authority.

It defines how scrutiny works in Haringey and what should be achieved through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and scrutiny review panels.

Our scrutiny function does not stand still and is continually developing. Our arrangements have been revised to ensure that the work of scrutiny is focussed on helping the Council and its partners achieve the aims and objectives of Haringey’s Sustainable Community Strategy.

## 2. AIMS FOR SCRUTINY

Effective scrutiny should:-

- Help to improve the local public services
- Help the Council and its partners deliver services which are sensitive to local needs by involving local people
- Ensure decision making is clear, transparent and accountable.

Some of the roles for scrutiny are:

- Providing a 'critical friend' challenge to the Council's Cabinet
- Undertaking policy review
- Have a positive impact on local public services
- Helping the local strategic partnership to achieve the objectives of the Sustainable Community Strategy
- Reviewing health services, including the health impact of policies and practices
- Engaging public, partners and the media.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and scrutiny review panels, as well as making suggestions for improvements, should also celebrate success and acknowledge good practice and high performance.

### **3. UNDERSTANDING SCRUTINY**

#### **3.1 What is Overview and Scrutiny?**

Under the Local Government Act 2000, local authorities were required to set up overview and scrutiny committees. The role of these is to scrutinise the decisions or actions taken by local Councils or partner organisations or, indeed, assess any matter that affects people living in the locality. They also have specific powers to scrutinise NHS services including a specific obligation for them to be consulted on any significant changes that are proposed to local services.

In this context, the primary role of Overview and Scrutiny is to hold local decision makers to account and to help improve local service provision. As such, Overview and Scrutiny has a number of distinct functions:

- reviewing and challenging the decisions taken by the Council and its partners
- undertaking investigations in to services or policy areas which are of interest or concern to people in Haringey
- making evidence based recommendations to improve services provided by the Council and partner organisations

Given these roles, it is clear that Overview and Scrutiny plays an important role in local democracy by:

- enhancing local accountability
- improving transparency of decision making
- enabling councillors to represent the views of constituents.

#### **3.2 What is effective scrutiny?**

Effective scrutiny is important in order to ensure that local public services are held to account and are run efficiently and in the interests of local people. The Centre for Public Scrutiny has suggested that there are four principles for effective scrutiny. These are that it:

- provides a 'critical friend' challenge to policy and decision makers
- reflects the voice and concerns of a community
- is carried out by 'independent minded governors' who lead and own the scrutiny process
- makes an impact on local service delivery in order to improve outcomes.

Haringey Overview & Scrutiny Committee aims to operate within these principles in order to deliver an effective public service scrutiny function for the local community.

### 3.3 How scrutiny operates in Haringey

Haringey has one over-arching Overview and Scrutiny Committee which is made up of seven councillors and six co-opted members (3 parent governors, 2 church representatives and 1 representative from the Haringey LINK). Councillors are proportional to the political balance of the Council and are confirmed at the Annual Meeting of Full Council.

The work of the committee is supported by a number of time limited 'task and finish' review panels which are set up to investigate particular service or policy areas. Such panels involve other non-executive Councillors and are chaired by members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertakes a number of key roles, which support the support the scrutiny process in Haringey. These roles and component actions are summarised below:

- Holding the Executive to account;
  - Questioning the Leader and Cabinet Members on issues within their portfolio area
  - Call-in of decisions taken by Cabinet
  - Reviewing council performance, including the Local Area Agreement targets and making suggestions for improvement
  - Scrutinising the activities of partner agencies which support the Local Area Agreements.
- Policy review and development;
  - Reviewing or assessing policies and strategies developed by the Council or the wider strategic partnership.
  - Commission in-depth reviews of local services or policy areas taking into account the evidence base and the views of the public and making recommendations for improvement.
- Consulting and involving local people;
  - Examining and responding to referrals on health and social care issues from the Local Involvement Network
  - Operation of Councillor Call for Action where members can refer any persistent problem that affects their ward

### 3.3 The further development of scrutiny

Scrutiny has developed considerably since it was set up. The following provides an overview of the main recent developments Overview & Scrutiny;

- **Statutory Scrutiny Officer;** The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 requires all local authorities in England to designate a specific individual as its statutory scrutiny officer. This part of the Act came into operation on 1 April 2010. The functions of this role are to:
  - promote the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
  - provide support to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Members
  - provide support and guidance on the functions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to other Members of the Council, including the Executive and officers.

The Council appointed Stuart Young, Assistant Chief Executive for People, Organisation and Development to fulfil this role.

Part of the driver for the establishment of a statutory scrutiny officer role was to ensure that local authorities develop dedicated resources for scrutiny or where the government felt that there was evidence that scrutiny recommendations were not being taken seriously. That has not been the case at Haringey where there has always been a dedicated team tasked with supporting the scrutiny function and a strong track record of scrutiny recommendations being agreed by the Council's Cabinet.

- **Scrutiny of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships;** New powers came into force in 2010 that gave local authority overview and scrutiny committees specific powers to scrutinise crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRPs). These provided a framework for the development of a closer relationship between CDRPs and scrutiny.

The new provisions meant that scrutiny of crime and disorder was now no longer a matter of choice but a requirement for local authorities. It required every local authority to have a committee with the power to review or scrutinise crime and disorder matters.

There was already a long history of scrutiny of crime and community safety issues in Haringey which has enabled the development of good practice and working relationships. In particular, significant contributions to policy development had been made through reviews on anti social behaviour, CCTV and street prostitution. In recognition of this, the statutory guidance on scrutiny of CDRPs that was issued by the Home Office uses Haringey as an example of good practice.

- **Comprehensive Area Assessment;** 2009/10 saw the first results from the new public sector performance framework, the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). This framework incorporated an assessment of both the Council and partner organisations performance in meeting shared local priorities for Haringey.

There has been a developing relationship between CAA and overview and scrutiny, where the local self assessment process has been useful in guiding and informing the selection of in depth scrutiny reviews. Similarly, the in depth scrutiny reviews have provided useful evidence to include within the CAA self assessment process.

It has been announced that the CAA process will be abolished and is unlikely to be replaced by another centrally administered inspection process. Although the new coalition government is still finalising plans for the relationship between central and local government, it looks likely that local accountability will be extended through requirements for greater transparency and openness, such as, for example, the publication of local authority spending on-line.

- **Scrutiny Lead roles for partnership theme boards;** To help the Council and its partners achieve objectives set out in the Local Area Agreement, Councillors on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are aligned to a specific theme board within the local strategic partnership.

Each Councillor on the Committee is aligned to a theme board and has a role to:

- Chair "task and finish" reviews on topics which fall under the board
- Build a strong working relationship with board members
- Promote the role of Overview and Scrutiny among board members
- Attend the quarterly board meetings
- Develop an overview of the LAA targets within the theme board: performance and actions taken in respect of exception reporting.

Councillors are required to feed back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on areas within the theme board:

- Where possible scrutiny involvement could add value
- Other key issues within the remit of the board which the committee should be made aware.

### 3.4 How are the community involved in scrutiny?

Scrutiny has a particular responsibility to the community, whether through challenging decisions on behalf of service users or through detailed investigation of the concerns of residents. Overview and Scrutiny therefore aims to ensure that its processes and outcomes reflect local needs.

Local parent governor, church and Local Involvement Network representatives are co-opted on to the Committee. Local people who have particular knowledge or experience of services can also be co-opted onto “task and finish” reviews.

Service user input is an integral part of all “task and finish” reviews. This is undertaken through involving local community groups, service user organisations or local residents when gathering evidence for in-depth reviews. A range of different means are used, as appropriate to the topic under consideration.

Scrutiny in Haringey aims to be as inclusive as possible and members of the public are able to submit their views on a particular topic for consideration and inclusion. Members of the public may also suggest topics for scrutiny review through the website.

All scrutiny meetings of both the over-arching Committee and panels are held in public. Members of the public are able to attend these meetings and listen to what is being discussed.

### 3.5 The Role of the Scrutiny Member includes:

- Helping to improve performance by challenging performance data, audit and inspection reports.
- Supporting the delivery of local strategic objectives by monitoring progress towards achieving targets.
- Reviewing and scrutinising Cabinet decisions.
- Reviewing, developing and scrutinising policy, strategies and procedures.
- Contributing to community engagement by seeking to involve the public and stakeholders in scrutiny reviews.
- Reviewing the plans and performance of external organisations which impact on the Council’s functions.

### 3.6 The Role of the Chair involves:

- Providing leadership and direction

- Supporting encouraging and engaging with all Members of the Committee/Panels and support officers
- Prioritising (with the Committee/Panel) their programme of work
- Co-ordinating work with the other Scrutiny Chairs and sharing good practice
- Developing a constructive 'critical friend' relationship with Corporate Cabinet Members/Deputies.

## 4. HOW SCRUTINY WORK IS PROGRAMMED

### 4.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work plan

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's powers to scrutinise are very wide. The process is led by Members and it is up to the Committee to decide what items it would like to include in its work programme and how it intends to carry out scrutiny exercises through the year. Each year, it sets a programme of work which includes the following:

- Performance reports
- Issues arising out of internal and external assessment or audit which would be of interest to scrutiny members. This could include items identified in self assessment reports or matters about which an external assessor has expressed concern
- Issues on which the Haringey Strategic Partnership, the Cabinet or officers would like the Committee's views or support
- Reports on forthcoming strategies and policies
- Progress reports on implementing previous scrutiny recommendations which had been accepted by the Cabinet or appropriate Executive body. Once again these reports could be used to demonstrate the Council's willingness to improve and so should be given a higher profile than at present.

A typical Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda might consist of:

- A Cabinet Member Question Session (Two Cabinet Members attending or the Leader of the Council)
- Performance reports
- Issues for information
- A report following up a past review or a final in-depth report from a commissioned task and finish scrutiny review panel.

There are four elements that form the work programme and are the basis for the issues chosen for the agenda at formal committee meetings. These are:

1. **The Cabinet's Priorities;** At the first ordinary meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the new municipal year the Leader outlines the Cabinet's priorities for the forthcoming municipal year and beyond, seeking the input of scrutiny in successfully progressing the key issues for the authority. This encourages the active participation of scrutiny in research and policy development.
2. **Performance Report;** The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also considers an annual report from the Chief Executive on the Council's Performance for the forthcoming municipal year against the Council's basket of key indicators. Performance is reviewed against key indicators. These indicators are used by the Audit Commission on the Comprehensive Assessment (CPA) and those included in Haringey's Local Public Service Agreement.
3. **The Annual Residents' Survey;** The Haringey Residents' Survey is undertaken each year to measure the satisfaction and perception of council services. The results are used by council departments and scrutiny to identify areas where services can be improved and to measure the effectiveness of initiatives undertaken throughout the previous year.

4. **Feasibility Reports;** Feasibility reports enable Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members to make informed decisions on which reviews to undertake and what they hoped to achieve from them. The information within them helps Members to choose worthwhile and effective topics for reviews. They are drafted by scrutiny officers, in consultation with the services concerned.

4.2 “Task and Finish” Scrutiny Reviews

In addition to the more structured work of the Committee, a number of “task and finish” Scrutiny Review Panels are commissioned each year, which look at chosen topics in-depth. Every year, a list of possible topics for more detailed scrutiny is generated from the following sources:

- Suggestions made by councillors, HSP theme boards, officers and members of the public
- Subjects identified by the Committee in previous years
- Issues of concern which have been identified during the year
- New legislation, white and green paper, statements of Government policy etc.
- Items identified from performance reports or one-off reports to the Committee
- Internal or external audit and/or inspection.

All suggestions are identified with Sustainable Community Strategy themes and priorities and linked to a HSP theme board. Theme Board chairs, Cabinet members and Departmental Directors are all involved in the development of the work programme. The Committee picks topics for in-depth review so each Overview and Scrutiny Committee member will initially chair at least one scrutiny review panel, plus they will also sit as a member on another panel as well as undertake budget scrutiny, which they will do as a Committee.

To be effective, it is essential that the following questions are addressed in each scrutiny review:

- How has the community been involved/ consulted on the service provision?
- What is provided?
- Why and for what purpose?
- Does it fulfil its purpose if not why not?
- What is the cost and is it cost- effective, i.e. does what is provided offer value for money?
- Are there any gaps or duplications in service provision?
- Are there any other improvements that could be made?
- What are the prospects for future improvement?
- What opportunities and obstacles exist to support partnership working?

4.3 Criteria for prioritising scrutiny reviews topics

The following criterion are used to assess suggestions for “task and finish” scrutiny reviews:

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	Criteria	Yes	No
1.	Does the proposal relate to something that the Council has given priority to in its Community Strategy?		
2.	Has the topic been identified in the CAA Report & improvement plan or by any other external or internal audit or improvement plan?		

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3.	Does the issue have a demonstrably high public profile? (Identified through complaints, ward casework, local media etc.)			Formatted: Font: Not Bold
4.	Is it likely that the scrutiny review would achieve tangible outcomes, increase cost effectiveness or 'add value' in some other way?			Formatted: Font: Not Bold
5.	Would the likely outcomes of the scrutiny review have an impact on a substantial number of local people?			Formatted: Font: Not Bold
6.	Would the review duplicate work recently completed, currently in progress, or planned to take place in another review process in the near future?			Formatted: Font: Not Bold
7.	Would the scrutiny review be completed within 9 months?			Formatted: Font: Not Bold

## 5. PROJECT SELECTION AND PLANNING PROCEDURE.

Scrutiny Reviews need to be carefully planned and managed through their various stages. It is suggested that the following standardised approach be adopted for all scrutiny reviews:

### 5.1 Contents of Initial Scoping Report – Check list

No.	Issue	Information required
1.	Origins of Review	Who asked for the review and why, for instance it could have been asked for by the Cabinet as a result of an external inspection or because deficiencies in service provision had been identified
2.	The reviews Objectives and anticipated outcome.	This could be to improve the service currently provided, to consider changing current policy, to save resources or/and to make recommendations to outside bodies. This section of the scoping document should refer to VFM.
3	Lead Scrutiny Members	The scrutiny review chair and members
4.	Main Sources of evidence for Review	Current policies and provision, national guidance, expert witnesses, comparisons with other providers, interviews with users etc
5.	Involvement of Cabinet	The Members of the Cabinet responsible for the areas being reviewed, their expectation from the review and how they should be involved
6.	Research required	Besides looking at issues referred to in 5 are there any new studies or reports on review subject?
7.	Level of support Required	Scrutiny Office support, other Department's input who, for instance will write reports
8	Appointment of External Expert Advisor	What will this add to review, status of advisor, cost, can external challenge be better meet by several experts giving evidence.
9.	Cost	Is it possible to estimate cost of review, specifically whether outside help will be required? Can cost be met within budgetary provision?
10.	Time Span	How long is review expected to take and indications of number of review meetings which will be required etc.
11.	Who Implements Review	Is it Council, external partners, Health Authority etc.
12.	Who does it effect	This could be users, their carers, council officers' etc.
13.	Monitoring Arrangements	What follow up arrangements should there be to monitor the implementation of recommendations agreed by Cabinet and to see whether changes have desired effect.

A project plan is drawn up for each review, including a detailed timetable with relevant milestones.

### 5.2 Evidenced based recommendations:

Scrutiny Review recommendations should be evidence based. The ability to trace the decision back to the evidence will enable clearer understanding of how the recommendation has been formed and ensure credibility. Consensus is regarded as essential in order for the review to be effective in influencing decision makers. Particular attention is given to this in formulating recommendations and conclusions.

Recommendations from scrutiny reviews can be made to:

- Cabinet
- Full Council
- External bodies
- Health Trusts

The responsibility for implementing the recommendations lies with the Cabinet or other body that they were made to. Scrutiny will monitor recommendations to see if they are accepted and if so whether they have been implemented. Sometimes issues arise which do not merit a formal report/recommendations but which the Chair of the Committee considers worth raising with the Cabinet Member and the committee or panel may wish to receive feedback on how the issue is to be taken forward.

## 6. SUPPORT FOR SCRUTINY

Scrutiny is supported by the Scrutiny Manager and Scrutiny Support Officers. A budget is provided expert witness costs. In addition there is a Member Development Programme managed by the Strategic Manager (Member & Business Support) that ensures that all Councillors are given the right level of training/development to fulfil their duties. Members are also provided with training to support the health scrutiny function. The Scrutiny Manager also devises and delivers in-house training on the scrutiny function.

The Council team provide administrative and clerking support to the Committee.

Useful contacts:

To find out more about Overview and Scrutiny in Haringey Contact  
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