Prioritising Topics For Scrutiny

Most authorities have a checklist or filtering system to decide which items should go on the scrutiny work programme. Below are some initial suggestions. Please feel free to add your own.

Section 1 contains some initial questions which should be asked of each proposed topic.

Sections 2-4 are filters which can be scored 1-5: the items with the highest tally taking precedence.

1. General questions to be asked at the outset

- does this issue have a potential impact for one or more section(s) of the population?
- is the issue strategic and significant?
- is there a clear objective for scrutinising this topic?
- is there evidence to support the need for scrutiny?
- what do we hope to achieve?
- what are the likely benefits to the council and its customers?
- are you likely to achieve a desired outcome?
- what are the potential risks?
- are there adequate resources available to do the activity well?
- is the Scrutiny activity timely?

2. Public interest

- issue identified by Members through surgeries and other contact with constituents
- user dissatisfaction with service (e.g. complaints)
- market surveys/citizens panels
- issue covered in local media

3. Internal council priority

- council corporate priority area
- high level of budgetary commitment to the service/policy area (as percentage of total expenditure)
- pattern of budgetary overspends
- poor performing service (evidence from performance indicators/benchmarking)

4. External Factors

- central government priority area
- new government guidance or legislation
- issues raised by External Audit Management Letters/External audit reports
- key reports or new evidence provided by external organisations on key issue

Criteria to Reject items

- issue being examined elsewhere - e.g. by the cabinet, working group, officer group, other body
- issue dealt with less than 2 years ago
- new legislation or guidance expected within the next year
- no scope for scrutiny to add value/ make a difference
- the objective cannot be achieved in the specified timescale