

Wirral Council

Scrutiny Review Good Practice Guidance

Introduction

The new arrangements for scrutiny introduced in May 2013, aim to:

- Shift the emphasis towards policy development and looking forward
- Develop a work programme informed by the corporate plan and business performance
- Engage non-Executive members more meaningfully with opportunities to influence through 'pre-decision' scrutiny
- Deliver scrutiny outside formal meetings, in the community and away from the Town Hall

Scrutiny Reviews based on a task and finish approach provide a key mechanism for making this happen, providing Members with the opportunity to work in small, informal groups to examine policy and service delivery in greater depth. Whilst the approach needs to be flexible and tailored to the work in question, the following guidelines are intended to support consistency and good practice for Scrutiny Review Panels.

Panel Membership and Chairs

- Membership will usually be drawn from the Policy and Performance Committee. However, there is an opportunity for any non-Executive Member to sit on a panel where they have a specific interest or knowledge.
- Membership will be agreed at meetings of the Policy and Performance Committee. Where this is not possible, a request for volunteers will be coordinated by the Scrutiny Support Team on behalf of the Chair of the Committee.
- There is no limit to the number of Members involved in a Scrutiny Review Panel. The size of the Group will vary depending on its purpose.
- Panels will require an identified Chair to lead the review, chair meetings and report on progress to the Policy and Performance Committee.
- The Chair will be determined by the Committee or, where this is not possible, by agreement of the Review Panel at the initial scoping meeting.
- When a review continues into a new municipal year the Membership of the panel should remain the same for the purpose of continuity.

Meetings and Participation

- The first meeting of the Panel will be to develop the scope of the review. The scope document needs to be endorsed by all Members of the Panel prior to any evidence gathering and should be shared with the relevant portfolio holder.
- The number of meetings will depend on the scope and methodology. Meetings will continue until the task is complete.
- Meetings will be scheduled to fit in with Members availability unless evidence gathering can only be achieved at specific times.
- Members of the Panel will endeavour to attend all meetings scheduled as part of the review. Deputies should not be used for Task and Finish Groups.
- Confidentiality should be maintained throughout the evidence gathering process and findings should be used only for the purpose of the review and final report.

Outcome of the Scrutiny Review

- On completion of its work, the Panel will produce a report with recommendations for the relevant Policy and Performance Committee based on the findings of the Scrutiny Review. If approved by Committee, this will be referred to Cabinet.
- As part of the sign-off for this report, the Panel will be expected to meet with the senior accountable officer and the relevant portfolio holder.
- In developing recommendations, the Scrutiny Review Panel should give consideration to specifying what arrangements should be put in place for these to be reviewed and how desired outcomes will be measured.

Officer Support for Scrutiny

- A dedicated Scrutiny Support Officer will provide the key point of liaison in support of the Chair and the Panel.
- The Scrutiny Support Officer will arrange meetings, prepare papers and coordinate the involvement of people to provide evidence including Council Officers and external witnesses.
- The Support Officer will make a note of all meetings and evidence gathering sessions and circulate these to all participants to ensure their accuracy and any secure any additional information as required.
- Officers providing evidence to the Task and Finish Group will make themselves available to attend meetings and provide information as requested by Members and Scrutiny Officers in a timely fashion.