



Overview and Scrutiny Guide

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Bromsgrove
District Council
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Purpose of this Guide

The aim of this guide is to provide guidance to anyone involved or interested in the Overview and Scrutiny process operated at Bromsgrove District Council. This includes Members of the Council, officers, members of the public and partner organisations.

In brief, the purpose of scrutiny is to help ensure the Council is working effectively and efficiently. It is an important function in assisting the Council in providing excellent services for local residents.

Scrutiny is constantly evolving and Bromsgrove District Council is striving to continually improve in all areas, including its scrutiny process.

Bromsgrove District's approach to scrutiny is based on the Council's Constitution, specifically, Article 6 of the Constitution and the Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

Overview and Scrutiny

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the Council's political structure and plays a vital role in improving the services that the people of the District use, whether a resident, employed here or just visiting.

Scrutiny does not just look at the way the Council does things, it can look at anything which affects the lives of people within the District.

Where did Scrutiny come from?

The Local Government Act 2000 required Councils to set up new decision making processes which recognised two distinct roles: the Executive (known as the Cabinet at Bromsgrove District Council) and Scrutiny.

How does it link into the decision making process?

Bromsgrove District Council is led by the Cabinet which comprises 9 elected District Councillors who make executive decisions relating to Council matters which fall within the Council's agreed Budget and Policy Framework. The Forward Plan sets out the Key Decisions which will be taken (or delegated by the Cabinet) over a period of four months.

Those Councillors who are not part of the Cabinet are able to participate in "Overview and Scrutiny" - whereby the Council's policies and the proposed or actual decisions of the Cabinet can be examined in detail. Scrutiny is often described as the "critical friend".

The role is to monitor the Council's work and make recommendations on the way services are provided.

How does scrutiny work at Bromsgrove?

Following the Local Government Act 2000, Bromsgrove District Council set up 3 Scrutiny Committees to review and scrutinise decisions taken by the Cabinet. Following a review of the scrutiny arrangements in place, the Scrutiny Steering Board was set up in March 2006 as the overarching Board to oversee scrutiny work.

The Scrutiny Steering Board acts as a check on the Cabinet and its decisions and also plays a major part in the development of Council policy by carrying out in-depth investigations. The Board establishes Scrutiny Task Groups to carry out any in-depth scrutiny investigations which are time-limited.

Scrutiny Steering Board Arrangements

Role of the Board

The role of the Scrutiny Steering Board is to perform all overview and scrutiny functions on behalf of the Council in relation to any matter affecting the District and its inhabitants.

Scrutiny allows Councillors to review and scrutinise decisions, look at existing practices and make recommendations to help ensure the residents of Bromsgrove District receive the best possible services. The aim is to ensure scrutiny adds value to the Council's decision-making process and makes a positive contribution towards policy development.

The Scrutiny Steering Board is primarily concerned with working in partnership with the Cabinet and officers to improve the performance of the Council and deliver better outcomes for the District's people. In brief the Board can do the following:

- review and/or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken
- make reports and/or recommendations to the full Council and/or the Cabinet
- consider any matters affecting the area or its inhabitants
- exercise the right to call-in, for reconsideration, decisions made but not yet implemented by the Cabinet and/or any policy or area committees

The Scrutiny Steering Board oversees and coordinates all scrutiny. In order to allow in-depth scrutiny of specific issues, the Board appoints Scrutiny Task Groups. Further information on Scrutiny Task Groups can be found on page 11.

Membership of the Board

The Scrutiny Steering Board is made up of 7 Councillors and it is politically balanced. All Councillors, except Members of the Cabinet or Audit Board, may be Members of the Scrutiny Steering Board. Members of the Scrutiny Steering Board who cannot attend a particular meeting may not arrange for substitutes to attend.

Chairman and Vice-Chairman

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Steering Board are drawn from the Councillors sitting on the Board, and subject to this requirement, the Board may appoint such persons as it considers appropriate as Chairman and Vice-Chairman. Where the Chairman is absent, the Vice-Chairman will Chair a meeting.

Co-opted Members

The Scrutiny Steering Board can recommend to Council the appointment of a number of people as non-voting co-optees of the Scrutiny Steering Board.

Number of Meetings

The Scrutiny Steering Board is required to meet on at least 6 occasions per year and currently 12 ordinary meetings are scheduled each year. Extraordinary/Special meetings may be called from time to time as and when appropriate. An extraordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Steering Board may be called by the Chairman of the Scrutiny Steering Board or by any 3 Members of the Scrutiny Steering Board.

Venue and Time of Meetings

Meetings of the Scrutiny Steering Board are usually held at the Council House and commence at 6.00pm.

Participation at Meetings

No Councillor may be involved in scrutinising a decision which he/she has been directly involved. If any Member of the Scrutiny Steering Board finds that a decision in which he/she has been directly involved is to be scrutinised, he/she is required to declare the fact to the Scrutiny Steering Board and take no part in the discussion and voting in the part of the meeting which relates to that decision.

Scrutiny Steering Board Meetings are generally open to the public and anyone can attend as an observer.

There are occasions when the Board will invite members of the public or representatives from other organisations to address the Board in relation to a particular topic on the Agenda.

The Work of the Scrutiny Steering Board

Who decides what is scrutinised?

Members of the Scrutiny Steering Board decide what they wish to scrutinise and all such topics are placed on the Board's Work Programme. It is the Board which decides its own programme of work.

Scrutiny is a Member led process and should not be reliant on reports generated by officers as was the case under the old Committee system.

Work Programme

As the Scrutiny Steering Board agrees its own programme of work, this allows Members of the Board and the officers who provide support to them to plan the issues the Board will consider at each of its meetings. The work programme may contain items the Board plans to consider in several months time.

The Work Programme should contain a mixture of projects, some of which require an overview to be kept of an area of the Council's activity (for example, monitoring the progress of a major statutory plan) and others that will scrutinise a particular policy or area of work. Topics can be added to or removed from the work programme as priorities change. Occasionally, an urgent matter may need to be included in the work programme at short notice.

It states in the Constitution that when the Scrutiny Steering Board sets its own work programme, the Board shall take into account of:

- "the views of Members of the Scrutiny Steering Board who are not Members of the largest political group on the Council;
- the Forward Plan
- suggestions of matters for scrutiny made by the Cabinet; and
- suggestions of matters for scrutiny made by the Leader arising from his/her quarterly meeting with the Chairman of the Scrutiny Steering Board, Audit Board and Performance Management Board..."

The Constitution requires the Leader of the Council to meet on a quarterly basis with the Chairmen of the Scrutiny Steering Board, Audit Board and Performance Management Board with appropriate officers in attendance to review and, where appropriate, co-ordinate their respective work programmes. These meetings can also help to avoid duplication of work across the Boards.

Members of the Scrutiny Steering Board should take into account suggestions put forward by local residents and the public are encouraged to put their views and comments forward via Council press releases and the Council's website.

What is the Forward Plan?

The Forward Plan lists the Key Decisions which it is anticipated will be taken by the Cabinet or delegated over a period of 4 months. The Forward Plan is updated and published on the Council's website each month for anyone to view and an electronic link to the document is emailed to Councillors as soon as the updated Forward Plan is available.

The Forward Plan is considered by the Scrutiny Steering Board at each meeting and Members of the Board may request that it is given the opportunity to consider a subject and provide their input on that issue before a decision is taken by the Cabinet. This allows the Scrutiny Steering Board to feed in its comments and recommendations and therefore influence the decision making process.

Requests from Council and the Cabinet

A matter can be referred to the Scrutiny Steering Board by the Council (or the Monitoring Officer under the Council Procedure Rules contained within the Constitution) or the Cabinet. As mentioned previously, the Leader of the Council can also make suggestions at his quarterly meetings with the Chairmen of the Scrutiny Steering Board, Performance Management Board and Audit Board.

The Scrutiny Steering Board is expected to respond, as soon as its work programme permits, to such requests to review/scrutinise particular areas of Council activity from the Council, the Cabinet or the Leader. However, it is up to the Scrutiny Steering Board whether or not it chooses to include the suggestion on its work programme.

Requests from Individual Councillors

Any Member of the Council has the right to submit a request to the Scrutiny Steering Board to scrutinise a topic. To do this, the Councillor has to complete a Scrutiny Proposal Form and this is then considered by the Scrutiny Steering Board. As with any requests, it is up to the Scrutiny Steering Board to decide whether or not the request should be included on its work programme.

Requests from the Public

Any member of the public can put forward their suggestions on what they believe the Scrutiny Steering Board should be considering. Members of the public can either complete the online scrutiny form on the Council's website (www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/scrutiny), send an email detailing their scrutiny request direct to scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk or write to the Committee Section at the Council House in Bromsgrove if preferred.

How does Scrutiny contribute to Policy Review and Development?

The role of the Scrutiny Steering Board in relation to the development of any proposed plan, strategy or budget that forms or will form part of the Council's Budget and Policy Framework is set out in detail in the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules in Part 6 of the Constitution.

As stated within the Scrutiny Procedures rules contained within the Constitution, in relation to the development of the Council's approach to other matters which do not form part of the Council's Policy and Budget Framework, the Scrutiny Steering Board may make proposals to the Cabinet in so far as they relate to matters within its terms of reference.

What is a Call-In?

The Scrutiny Steering Board monitors the decisions made by the Cabinet and there is a mechanism known as 'call-in' which can be used in exceptional circumstances. If the Scrutiny Steering Board believes there is evidence which suggests that the Cabinet did not take a decision in accordance with the principles of decision making (as set out in the Constitution) it can call-in the decision which has not yet been implemented.

A request for call-in must be in writing addressed to the Monitoring Officer using the relevant form giving reasons for the call in and signed by either the Chairman of the Scrutiny Steering Board, any other 3 Members of the Scrutiny Steering Board or any 5 Members of the Council who are not Members of the Cabinet. The call-in request must be delivered to the Monitoring Officer within 5 clear working days of the publication of the decision.

When the Scrutiny Steering Board reviews a decision taken, it will either:

- Accept the decision;
- Request the Cabinet to reconsider its decision setting out its reasons in a report; or
- In exceptional circumstances, refer the decision to the Council to consider whether the decision should be accepted

Scrutinising external organisations

The Board can review the way that external organisations deal with issues of relevance to residents of Bromsgrove District if the particular organisation is willing to cooperate. However, the powers to focus on external scrutiny of partner organisations will soon be extended following the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 which received Royal Assent in October 2007. It is anticipated that the new legislation will come into force sometime during 2008 and guidance is awaited.

Joint Working

If the subject matter under scrutiny affects an area beyond the boundaries of the District then the Board may decide to set up a joint Overview and Scrutiny exercise with the adjoining Council. Alternatively, it may wish to invite a representative of that authority to be co-opted on to the Board or Task Group whilst the scrutiny exercise is being carried out.

What about Performance Management and Audit?

At Bromsgrove District Council, there is a Performance Management Board and an Audit Board. The Performance Management Board has overall responsibility for monitoring and driving performance improvement of the Council and the Audit Board role includes monitoring both internal and external audit performance and is responsible for focusing audit resources.

The Leader's quarterly meeting with the Chairmen of the 3 Boards helps to ensure the coordination of the respective work programmes and avoid duplication of work.

Scrutiny Task Groups

What are Scrutiny Task Groups?

The Scrutiny Steering Board can establish Task Groups to carry out in-depth scrutiny investigations on behalf of the Board.

When the Scrutiny Steering Board decides to add a topic to its work programme, it also decides whether or not an in-depth scrutiny is required. If an in-depth scrutiny investigation is necessary, a Task Group is established.

Who Chairs Task Groups?

The Chairman of a Task Group is appointed by the Scrutiny Steering Board and is usually a Member of the Board. However, the Board can appoint a Councillor who is not a Member of the Scrutiny Steering Board if it considers it appropriate.

Whoever is Chairman, whether it is a Member of the Board or another Councillor, they have to have undergone appropriate chairmanship training to carry out the role.

Task Group Membership

Any Councillor who is not a Member of the Cabinet may serve on a Task Group. When a Task Group is established, all Non-Cabinet Members are informed and if they would like to sit on the Task Group, they are requested to complete a membership form explaining why they are interested and what particular skills, experience or expertise they could bring to the Task Group.

Once Members have had time to submit their completed membership forms, the Scrutiny Steering Board (in consultation with the Task Group Chairman if they are not a Member of the Scrutiny Steering Board) considers and agrees the membership of the Task Group at its next available meeting.

As Members are appointed to a Task Group in a personal capacity, there is no provision for a Member who cannot attend a meeting of a Task Group to be represented by a substitute Member.

What about co-opted members?

The Scrutiny Steering Board may co-opt Members who are not Councillors on to a Task Group, particularly if they have skills, experience or expertise which would assist the Task Group in their scrutiny investigation. However, co-opted Members have no voting rights.

Size of Task Groups

The size of a Task Group varies but as a general rule, the minimum number is 3 and the maximum number is 7.

Proportional allocation of seats

Task Groups are not covered by the requirement for seats to be allocated on the basis of political group proportionality.

Terms of Reference

Once the Scrutiny Steering Board has appointed a Task Group Chairman, it is the responsibility of the Task Group Chairman (in consultation with officers) to carry out an initial scoping exercise for the Task Group which includes proposals for the Task Group's terms of reference. The Task Group Chairman is requested to complete a Scrutiny Exercise Scoping Checklist and this is considered and agreed at the next available meeting of the Scrutiny Steering Board.

The agreed Scrutiny Exercise Scoping Checklist, including the terms of reference, is considered at the first meeting of the Task Group. The Scrutiny Steering Board will consider any request from the Task Group for modification of its terms of reference at the start of the investigation as agreed by the Task Group at its first or second meeting.

The Task Group may wish to revisit its original scrutiny exercise scoping checklist at various points during the scrutiny investigation in order to refocus the issues which need to be considered. This may take account of information received as part of the exercise or because the Board has made a suggestion for the Task Group to consider. However, it is important that the Task Group remains within its terms of reference.

It is the responsibility of the Task Group to identify those witnesses who need to be called to give evidence.

The work of Scrutiny Task Groups

Task Group Meetings are less formal than Board Meetings and there is a considerable amount of discussion between Members and witnesses called to provide evidence.

A Scrutiny Task Group has no powers to take any decisions. It should consider the issues it has been asked to investigate and submit a report to the Scrutiny Steering Board which will then decide whether or not to make any recommendations to the Cabinet.

Task Groups should carry out its investigation in accordance with the Scrutiny Procedure Rules which form part of the Council's Constitution.

What are the timescales for Task Groups?

Scrutiny Task Groups are normally expected to conclude their investigation within 4 months of the date of the first meeting. Task Groups are not disbanded by the Scrutiny Steering Board until the Scrutiny Report has been considered by the Cabinet and any questions or issues raised by the Cabinet have been resolved.

Monitoring progress of the Task Groups

During a scrutiny investigation which is being carried out by a Scrutiny Task Group, regular updates on the progress of the Task Group are supplied to the Scrutiny Steering Board at every meeting when appropriate. In considering those regular updates the Scrutiny Steering Board may suggest areas of work or issues for consideration or investigation by the Task Group which fall within the terms of reference.

Public Access to Task Group Meetings and Papers

Unlike the Scrutiny Steering Board, Task Group Meetings are generally private meetings, therefore, the agendas for Task Group Meetings are usually only circulated to those attending the Task Group Meeting.

The public has no legal right to attend Task Group meetings, nor a right of access to the agendas and minutes (beyond those rights provided by the Freedom of Information Act).

However, the Task Group Members can and often do invite members of the public to meetings to find out their views. The progress of a Task Group is also reported to the Scrutiny Steering Board and these meetings are open to the public.

Publicity

Publicity of Scrutiny Investigations

When a Task Group is established and the membership and terms of reference is agreed, a press release is issued informing the public of the new scrutiny investigation with details of what Members will be scrutinising.

The public are encouraged to submit their views and comments on the subject area and these are fed back to Members of the Task Group to consider.

Information is on the Council's website (www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/scrutiny) and the scrutiny web pages are regularly updated, usually on a monthly basis.

Scrutiny Reports and Recommendations

All Scrutiny Reports are available to the public and can be found on the Council's website (www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/scrutiny) together with the Cabinet Response.

A hard copy is made available at the Customer Service Centre on School Drive in Bromsgrove for a period of time too.

All those who were involved in the scrutiny investigation, whether they were members of the public or representatives from other agencies, are contacted and informed when the scrutiny report with recommendations has been considered by the Scrutiny Steering Board. An electronic version is emailed, where possible or information is provided on how they can view a hard copy, if preferred.

Scrutiny reports are also uploaded on to the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) website in the library section.

Collecting Evidence

General

There are several ways which the Scrutiny Steering Board or Scrutiny Task Groups can collect evidence such as conducting public surveys, seeking information from expert witnesses and going on site visits.

It is useful if background research is carried out prior to a scrutiny investigation (if possible) such as finding out if other local authorities have scrutinised the same topic and what is classed as best practice in relation to the particular subject area.

Anyone invited to attend a meeting or provide written evidence should be given sufficient notice.

Written Evidence

Scrutiny Members may decide to obtain written evidence from witnesses such as officers or partner organisations. They can then consider this at a meeting so that conclusions can be drawn or the need for further evidence can be discussed.

Sufficient time has to be given to those who are requested to provide written evidence and unlike at Board meetings, where there is a standard report template that should be followed, for Task Group Meetings, written evidence can come in any format which suits the witness but as a general rule, all reports should be short, concise, clear, jargon free and covering all the points the Task Group requested.

Oral Evidence

It may be more appropriate for Scrutiny Members to invite witnesses to a meeting to enable them to question officers or find out from members of the public their own views on the topic area being scrutinised, for example. Members should inform the witnesses what areas specifically they will be focussing on in the meeting to allow the witness to fully prepare and therefore have the required information for Members.

Questioning

Questioning is a useful way for Members to probe issues in detail; however, particular skills are required when it comes to questioning witnesses. The aim is not to catch the witness out but to investigate and understand the issues. Questions should be asked one at a time and the officer or representative should be allowed time to answer it as asking multiple questions all at once can be unproductive and it makes it more difficult to ask follow-up questions. It is always encouraged that witnesses are provided with a list of questions in

advance wherever possible as this allows the witness to prepare and ensures Members receive the information they require. This does not, however, preclude supplementary questions being raised.

Members and Officers giving Evidence

Scrutiny Members may request a combination of both written and oral evidence. Officers are generally requested to submit a written report in the first instance and often they are requested to attend meetings to enable Members to seek clarification on elements within a report. Alternatively, officers may be requested to give a presentation.

Other Councillors, particularly Portfolio Holders (Members of the Cabinet with responsibility for a particular area) are often invited to attend Scrutiny Meetings too and can be requested to give either written or oral evidence or both.

Witnesses are expected to respond openly to questions and should not just limit themselves to answering questions but also to provide information that they feel would be useful for Members to know. Witnesses will not be expected to recommend a course of action unless specifically asked to do so. They will however be expected to provide facts that are relevant to the questions.

Evidence provided by others

Members of the public who have submitted their comments to the Board or Task Group can be invited to a Meeting, although it is completely up to the individual whether or not they wish to attend. At Scrutiny Meetings, Members of the Board or Task Group may give those individuals the opportunity to expand on their comments as it allows Members to find out what those individuals would like Councillors to focus on.

Others, such as representatives from other organisations, experts in a particular field and service-users, may be invited to attend a meeting, provide written evidence or both depending on what the issue is being scrutinised and who is being asked to supply the information.

Site Visits

Site visits by Scrutiny Members can be very useful and can assist Members with understanding the issues. It can also be used to explain to external stakeholders what scrutiny is all about and encourage them to participate. Site visits can be used as a way of reaching out to those witnesses/contributors who may not otherwise put forward their views and participate in scrutiny.

Scrutiny Report and Cabinet Response

Scrutiny Report

Task Groups are expected to compile a report following the scrutiny investigation (and within the 4 month timescale). The reports include recommendations which the Task Group should identify and agree. From May 2008, Scrutiny Members should prioritise recommendations as being low, medium or high to identify to the Cabinet and officers the order in which approved recommendations should be implemented.

The report is considered in detail by the Scrutiny Steering Board and is usually presented by the Task Group Chairman who is expected to answer any questions from Board Members. The Scrutiny Steering Board will then submit the agreed Scrutiny Report for the Cabinet to consider with a request that the recommendations contained within the Scrutiny Report be approved and implemented.

The Scrutiny Report is then put on the next available Cabinet agenda. The Chairman of the Scrutiny Steering Board and the Task Group Chairman attend the Cabinet meeting to present the report and answer any questions in relation to the scrutiny investigation.

If Members of the Task Group cannot agree on one single scrutiny report, then no more than one minority report may be produced which may put forward alternative proposals. This will then be considered alongside the majority report by the Scrutiny Steering Board. The Scrutiny Steering Board will then decide which recommendations it wishes to support and put forward to the Cabinet.

Cabinet Response to the Scrutiny Report

The Cabinet has to consider all reports and recommendations presented by the Scrutiny Steering Board within 2 months of the Scrutiny Steering Board completing its report. The Cabinet also has to provide the Scrutiny Steering Board with a response. The relevant Portfolio Holder is expected to present the written response to the Scrutiny Steering Board and if any recommendations are not agreed by the Cabinet, the response will include reasons for the decision taken.

Once a report has been considered by the Cabinet and any questions or issues raised by the Cabinet have been resolved, the Scrutiny Steering Board will disband any Task Group appointed in connection with the preparation of that report.

Monitoring Implementation and Review

Scrutiny Recommendation Tracker

The Scrutiny Recommendation Tracker was introduced in January 2007 and it lists all the scrutiny recommendations including those from Task Group investigations which were approved by Cabinet. The Scrutiny Recommendation Tracker is considered by the Scrutiny Steering Board on a bi-monthly basis and it includes the actions officers have taken to implement the approved scrutiny recommendations.

Reviewing a Scrutiny Exercise

The Scrutiny Steering Board reviews the implementation of the recommendations which came from a Task Group investigation. Typically, the review is carried out approximately 12 months after the Cabinet considered the report. The Scrutiny Steering Board may appoint a Task Group or reconvene the Task Group which carried out the original investigation or any Member of that Task Group to undertake this review on its behalf.

The reason for a review is to check the progress made in implementing the scrutiny recommendations and the effectiveness of the actions proposed within the report. The Board may also decide to review how it carried out the scrutiny exercise and establish how future scrutiny exercises could be carried out more efficiently.

The Task Group states within the scrutiny report when the review will take place but reviews are not carried out any sooner than 12 months after consideration of its report by the Cabinet.

Scrutiny Roles in Brief

Scrutiny Steering Board Chairman

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Steering Board has the responsibility of leading and managing the Scrutiny Steering Board. The Chairman should ensure the information needs of Councillors on the Board are met so that they can contribute fully to decision making with the Board. The Chairman should also initiate and develop constructive relationships with Members of the Cabinet and senior officers.

Scrutiny Steering Board Member

All Members of the Scrutiny Steering Board should contribute to the development of a manageable work programme for the Board and understand that the Board can only act within its terms of reference. Members of the Scrutiny Steering Board should establish and maintain effective and efficient working relations with the Cabinet, other Members and officers as appropriate and undertake scrutiny functions in a positive and constructive manner.

Scrutiny Task Group Chairman

Similar to the Scrutiny Steering Board Chairman, the Chairman of a Task Group has the responsibility of leading and managing a Task Group and the specific scrutiny investigations it is undertaking. This should be done in such a way that contributions from all sources are encouraged and the objectives of the Task Group are achieved. Once the scrutiny investigation has concluded, it is the responsibility of the Task Group Chairman to present the final report and recommendations to the Scrutiny Steering Board.

Scrutiny Task Group Member

Again, similar to the Scrutiny Steering Board, Members of Task Groups should agree a work programme for the Task Group and only act within its terms of reference. Task Group Members are encouraged to actively contribute throughout the scrutiny investigation and they should make certain that they listen to witnesses called to provide information whether they are other Councillors, officers, representatives from other organisations or members of the public.

Co-opted Task Group Member

Individuals who are not elected Councillors may be co-opted onto Task Groups by the Scrutiny Steering Board. Although co-opted Members do not have any voting rights, they do have the same equally important role as other Task Group Members. This means they can contribute in the same way as other Task Groups Members during discussions, questioning of witnesses and putting forward suggestions for improvement.

Co-opted Members can be individuals who are classed as 'expert' co-optees as they may have specific expert knowledge on the topic being scrutinised which could add value to the scrutiny investigation.

Portfolio Holder (Cabinet Member with responsibility)

A Portfolio Holder is a Cabinet Member with responsibility for a particular area of the Council. The Scrutiny Steering Board can invite the relevant Portfolio Holder to attend a meeting and Cabinet Members also have the right to attend a Scrutiny Steering Board Meeting as an observer if they wish. However, Cabinet Members can only attend a Task Group Meeting by invitation only.

When a scrutiny report is considered by the Cabinet, it is the responsibility of the relevant Portfolio Holder to ensure a written response is compiled. They are also expected to attend a Scrutiny Steering Board Meeting to present the written response from the Cabinet.

Other Organisations

Representatives may be invited to attend a meeting of the Scrutiny Steering Board or Task Group or they may be asked to provide written evidence.

Whenever external organisations are contacted, it is made clear what Members of the Board or Task Group are requesting together with reasons for the request.

Information provided by other organisations is vital in order to ensure effective scrutiny.

Members of the Public

Scrutiny Members need to take into account the views and comments of members of the public who are the Council's customers. To find out the views of the public, scrutiny investigations are publicised in the local media and via the Council's website. The public are encouraged to submit their views on any current scrutiny investigation and they can also suggest other subjects that they believe should be scrutinised. Views may also be sought through questionnaires and focus groups. Members of the public may be invited to

attend meetings of the Scrutiny Steering Board or a Task Group and they can also attend a Scrutiny Steering Board Meeting as an observer.

The comments and views put forward by members of the public are extremely valuable and can ensure effective scrutiny.

Officers

Scrutiny Task Groups are supported by an officer from the Committee Section. Their role is to guide and advise the Task Group and ensure action agreed by the Task Group is undertaken. The Committee Services Officer provides administrative support such as arranging dates and venues for meeting, issuing agendas, taking minutes, carrying out necessary research, organising visits and witnesses and liaising with other officers. The Committee Services Officer will also assist in compiling the scrutiny report.

The Committee Services Officer will attend all meetings of the Task Group where as other officers will attend by invitation to provide evidence or expertise in the area being scrutinised.

Improving Scrutiny

Member Training

The Council is committed to providing training for its Councillors and Scrutiny training forms part of the overall training programme. This includes specific training for the Scrutiny Steering Board and any other Member with an interest in scrutiny (this will include appropriate chairmanship training on how to lead a scrutiny investigation) as well as scrutiny training for the Cabinet.

Evaluation

The Council will endeavour to continually review its scrutiny process to ensure it becomes as efficient and effective as possible.

The Council is committed to community involvement and will seek feedback from any member of the public or organisation invited to take part in the scrutiny process to ensure that they feel that their contribution is valued and to see how we can further improve the scrutiny process.

Future Developments for Overview and Scrutiny

Legislation introducing changes to the current scheme of Overview and Scrutiny is due to come into effect during 2008.

The Police and Justice Act 2006 will enable every local authority to review or scrutinise crime and disorder matters, including organisations which are members of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 includes new powers for matters of local concern to be placed before Overview and Scrutiny Committees (Councillor Calls for Action) and for the Councils in two tier authorities to work together to scrutinise the Local Area Agreement (LAA).

The full details of how the new legislation will operate in practice will become clearer once the government has issued the relevant guidance.

Further Information

If you require any further information or clarification on any aspect of this Guide please email scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk. Alternatively, you can telephone 01527 881288 and ask for the Committee Section.



This guide can be provided in large print, braille, CD, audio tape and computer disc.

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