

Scrutiny Tool Kit



SCRUTINY TOOL KIT

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2 Glossary

If you would like this information in large print, Braille or another language please contact 01702 318111

3 Introduction

The purpose of the toolkit is to explain the framework for Overview and Scrutiny at Rochford District Council. The toolkit is for the use of all those that might be involved in the scrutiny process on a one off or more frequent basis, including:-

- Members of the Review Committee
- Witnesses called to the Review Committee
- Members of the public
- Officers
- Other Members of the Council

4 Introduction to Scrutiny

Under Part II of the Local Government Act 2000, councils in England and Wales are required to introduce new arrangements for the purpose of decision making. In order to make the decision making process more transparent and accountable the legislation established overview and scrutiny committees. There is now a clear distinction between an executive role in proposing and implementing policies and the role of reviewing and scrutinising these decisions. Local authority overview and scrutiny committees can summon members of the Executive and officers of the authority before it to answer questions, and are able to invite other persons to attend meetings to give their views or submit evidence.

One of the most interesting aspects of a Committee's scrutiny powers is its ability to consider matters that are not the responsibility of the local authority, but which affect the authority's area or its inhabitants.

The Local Government Act 2000 established four key roles for scrutiny:-

1. Holding the Executive to account - This is done by scrutinising Executive decisions.
2. Policy development and review - Either through undertaking a review as part of developing key Council policies, examining how well existing policies have been implemented, or examining broad cross-cutting areas.
3. Best Value Reviews - Providing Councillors with the opportunity to be involved in the Best Value Review process, by reviewing services and setting challenging targets for improving them.
4. External Scrutiny - Examining the impact of work undertaken by outside bodies upon the community that the Council serves.

Underpinning these roles is a commitment to ensure that Council priorities are addressed, performance is well managed, and that partners and the public are engaged in influencing the Council's direction. Members of overview and scrutiny committees are expected to adopt a deliberative, investigative and evidence based approach while casting aside party politics. Scrutiny should work in an open, transparent, inclusive, and accountable manner to adopt an outward looking focus.

At Rochford District Council one Committee provides the overview & scrutiny function; it is called the Review Committee.

The Committee's aim is to review areas of interest that it has identified, or that have been suggested or are causing concern with respect to the operation of the Council, or that of its partners. Matters can be brought to the attention of the Review Committee by the electorate or Members and officers of the Council or, indeed, the Council's partners. It will also scrutinise

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decisions made by the Council's Executive, by use of its powers to "Call in" those decisions, to ensure that best practice and best value is provided at all times for the benefit of the Council Tax payers.

The Committee facilitates measures and initiatives to improve the environment in which we all live; to help guide the various energies and funding initiatives in the same direction in order to make the most of what is available.

5 Suggesting a Topic

Topics / areas for scrutiny can be suggested by members of the public, representatives or partners, Council officers and Members of the Council. Suggested areas of review can cover any area of the District Council's work and in some cases the work of partner organisations that might affect the community. Suggestions will be considered by the Council's Review Committee, which will determine whether the suggested item should be taken forward for scrutiny. While it will not be the case that all suggestions will make it into the Review Committee's work programme, all ideas will nevertheless be welcomed. Suggestions from the public are one of several sources of potential items for scrutiny that will be factored into the work programme. The Review Committee will focus its activities on areas of wider community significance; more local matters and individual concerns will still be pursued through the appropriate service of the Council or local Ward Councillors.

6 Conducting a Review

6.1 Scoping

Once a subject/topic for review has been decided on by the Committee the first stage of the process is to scope the review. This is where the terms of reference are agreed and what will be looked at as part of the investigation and, more importantly, what will not be looked at. It will establish what documents will be required and also who will be required to give evidence to the Committee. During the course of the investigation other documents and witnesses will be identified but the scoping aims to identify the starting point and the key lines of enquiry.

Finally, the scoping will establish the timeframe of the enquiry.

A copy of the Scoping form is attached in the Appendices of this toolkit.

6.2 Project Planning

It is at this stage that the timeframe for the review is broken down into milestones and each stage is given a time limit to be completed. It is usual for this stage to be completed at the same time as the scoping as it is an aid to accurately establishing the timeframe of the enquiry. Each part of the investigation process is assessed as to the length of time it will take with regard to meetings with witnesses, visits to sites, assessment of evidence and the writing and agreement to the final report. This gives an accurate indication of how long the review will take and assists in the planning of the Committee's work schedule.

6.3 Collecting the Information/Evidence

Information and evidence on a subject can come from a number of sources, some of these will be identified in the scoping document.

A key feature of any review is the involvement of the public and to this end details of all current reviews are posted on the web site which also contains details of how people can get involved.

Research into a topic will be carried out locally and, when appropriate, nationally to obtain corresponding data to assess the level of the problem or to establish best practice.

Witness contributions form an integral part of the evidence gathered and this can be by way of formal or informal meetings. In all cases details of evidence is recorded and will be referred to when the final report is produced.

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All items of correspondence received relating to a review forms an integral part of the evidence that the Committee considers.

6.4 Assessing the Evidence / Making Recommendations

Once all the evidence has been gathered it is assessed by the Committee and recommendations are formulated from the findings. The Chairman/Project Leader will prepare a draft report with recommendations, with the assistance of the Overview & Scrutiny Officer. This draft report will be circulated to all members of the Committee/Project Team for their comments and amendments prior to it being presented at a Review Committee meeting for endorsement.

6.5 Final Report

After the Review Committee has endorsed the report it will be sent to either the Executive or the Council as appropriate for consideration. At this time it will be shared with all other interested parties who have either given evidence to the review or are affected by the recommendations contained in the report.

6.6 Follow up

After the Review Committee has made its recommendations it will revisit a topic at a later date to monitor that its recommendations have been adopted and difference they have made.

7 Roles & Responsibilities

7.1 Members Roles

Members involved in overview and scrutiny are expected to provide a challenge as to how and why the Council or a partner under review delivers its services. This challenge should be in the form of a critical friend rather than in an aggressive or accusative manner.

Members are expected to prepare thoroughly for meetings and to follow up any outstanding matters between scrutiny meetings.

The Chairman of a scrutiny meeting has additional responsibilities to ensure that a review reaches its desired outcome. During a meeting the Chairman should encourage the participation of all Members of the Committee. The Chairman needs to ensure that the questioning keeps to the topic and does not digress away from the point of the meeting.

After a review has gathered all the evidence the Chairman is responsible with the Overview and Scrutiny Officer for drafting the final report.

7.2 Witnesses

Witnesses may be called as part of the scrutiny process to provide evidence or advice. Witnesses may be officers, Members or external stakeholders. Witnesses will receive a formal invitation by the Chairman and the following information will be provided by the Overview and Scrutiny Officer:-

- Scope of the review including the terms of reference
- Any pre determined questions
- Clear guidance on what information they are expected to provide
- Time and date of meeting

A copy of the Guide to Review Committee meetings for witnesses is attached in the appendices of this toolkit.

7.3 Members of the Public

Members of the public are able to play an important part in the scrutiny process either as part of a consultation process or as a witness. It should be pointed out that members of the public who attend a meeting of the Review Committee will only be able to observe the proceedings unless they have been formally invited to act as a witness by the Chairman. If a member of the public does feel that they have something to offer a review then they should contact the Chairman or the Overview and Scrutiny Officer in the first instance.

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7.4 Officer Support

Officer support for scrutiny comes in three forms. Direct support is provided by the Overview and Scrutiny officer while the Committee Administrator produce meeting records etc. Finally there is the support of the Service Officers who provide the professional, technical evidence.

The roles are detailed in the table below:-

Role	Responsibilities
Overview and Scrutiny Officer	<p>Provide research requested by Members that is independent of service departments, including comparative data and good practice.</p> <p>Work closely with the Chairman to help decide the scope of the review, determine the terms of reference, identify relevant information and potential lines of enquiry, set the agenda, and draft the Committee's final report.</p> <p>Provide internal policy documents, monitoring reports, and verbal updates.</p>
Committee Administrator	<p>Prepare and arrange venues for Review Committee meetings.</p> <p>Determine the dates and deadlines for Committee meetings.</p> <p>Produce agendas and minutes of Committee meetings</p>
Service Officers	<p>Provide professional, technical evidence on the invitation of the Chairman.</p> <p>Provide written or verbal reports when requested.</p> <p>Make policy documents and other information available to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer when requested.</p> <p>Attend a Review Committee meeting at the request of the Chairman.</p>

7.5 Contact Details

Paul Gowers
The Overview & Scrutiny Officer
Tel: 01702 318178,
e mail: paul.gowers@rochford.gov.uk

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8 Appendices

Appendix A

REVIEW COMMITTEE– SCOPING FORM FOR *name of the project to be inserted here*

Project Leader:	with support from	Date:
Review Title:		
Terms of Reference:		
Include everything that is within scope and is going to be looked at during review		
Out of Scope:		
State here what will not be included in the review		
Brief outline of how review will be conducted:		
<i>This should be an overview of how review will be undertaken</i>		
Documents/information:		
<i>Include any documents and/or information that will be needed to be used for the review</i>		
Witnesses:		
<i>Include details of the people the committee wish to meet and the information they hope to gather from them.</i>		
Site visits:		
<i>This should include details of where the committee wish to visit, Why they wish to go there and at which point in the review they wish to go there.</i>		
Consultation/research:		
<i>Include details of who the committee wish to contact, why they wish to contact them and what they want to obtain from them.</i>		

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Venues to be used for meetings/evidence gathering:
Officer support and other resources:
Timescale/milestones:
<i>Include details of the start and finish time of the review and the significant milestones during the review</i>
Reporting line for the Review:

Appendix B

Guide to Review Committee meetings for witnesses

Rochford District Council

November 2007

Guide to Review Committee Meetings for Witnesses



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Introduction

Under Part II of the Local Government Act 2000, councils in England and Wales are required to introduce new arrangements for the purpose of decision making. In order to make the decision making process more transparent and accountable the legislation established overview and scrutiny committees. There is now a clear distinction between an executive role in proposing and implementing policies and the role of reviewing and scrutinising these decisions. Local authority overview and scrutiny committees can summon members of the Executive and officers of the authority before it to answer questions, and are able to invite other persons to attend meetings to give their views or submit evidence.

One of the most interesting aspects of a Committee's scrutiny powers is its ability to consider matters that are not the responsibility of the local authority, but which affect the authority's area or its inhabitants.

Overview & Scrutiny at Rochford District Council

The overview & scrutiny function at Rochford District Council is carried out by the Review Committee. The Review Committee sets its own work programme taking into account suggestions for topics from the Council, the Executive, individual councillors and the general public. It is made up of 8 non-executive Members of the Council and can create project teams to investigate matters with a view to reporting back to the full Review Committee.

Giving Evidence

The Review Committee invites witnesses to attend meetings to give expert evidence about an issue which it is currently reviewing. Witnesses will receive a written invitation to attend a Review Committee meeting outlining the areas on which they will be questioned. In some cases the Committee will forward a list of questions to the witness in advance, although witnesses should not expect the Committee to restrict itself to these questions.

Witnesses are invited for their advice and expertise - not to be criticised by the Committee. Witnesses do not have to answer any questions that they feel unhappy with and if they do not know the answer to a question then it is acceptable to say so rather than try to guess at an answer.

Guidance and advice for witnesses attending review meetings is available from the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Officer. To ensure that witnesses can prepare thoroughly for meetings the Council will aim to provide:-

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- The scope for the review
- Advice as to the purpose of the review
- Some pre-determined questions
- The agenda and supporting documents for the meeting

If you are unable to attend a meeting when asked to do so, you may nominate and brief a suitable replacement to attend and give evidence on your behalf.

Presenting Evidence

Witnesses will occasionally be asked to provide a presentation to a Committee on a particular subject area - any request to make a presentation will be specified on the invitation. If making a presentation witnesses are asked to provide a summary of their presentation in writing in time for the meeting agenda deadline. The provision of the summary helps Members to prepare for the meeting and helps the meeting to be more productive.

When preparing for a Review Committee meeting please ensure that :-

- You have read the papers for the Committee meeting
- Any presentation you make includes an introduction about yourself and/or the organisation that you represent
- Any written information you provide is concise and factually accurate
- You take the opportunity to fully represent your organisation's views
- You are prepared to honestly express your views

Witnesses should note that the Review Committee meetings are held in public and information will not be withheld unless it is specified as being confidential. If you need advice on this contact the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Officer.

After the meeting

Once the meeting has taken place witnesses will be asked to complete a witness feedback form. This is to help monitor and improve the scrutiny process at Rochford District Council. This is attached at Appendix A.

Contact Details

Paul Gowers

The Overview & Scrutiny Officer

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e mail: paul.gowers@rochford.gov.uk

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Appendix A

Witness feedback form

Following your attendance of the Review Committee we would be interested to get your feedback in order that we can improve the scrutiny process.

Please would you spare the time to fill in the following form:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The administrative arrangements were well organised				
I was clear about the role of the Committee in the context of the issue under discussion				
I was clear about my role as a witness				
I feel that the way the Committee functioned enabled me to contribute effectively				
I feel that as a result of my attendance the Committee is better informed				
Overall I felt that attending the Committee was a constructive exercise				

If you disagreed, or strongly disagreed with any of the above please state why:

Name:

Organisation:

Please return this form to:

Member Services,

Rochford District Council

South Street, Rochford

Essex, SS4 1BW

Phone: 01702 318178

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