

LUTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2009

DRAFT

(V-08)

This plan deals with the areas for improvement identified by the recent reviews of the Council's Scrutiny function.

There were common issues raised by both the internal review and that undertaken by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). For that reason, the IDeA assessment format has been used to develop the Scrutiny Strategic Plan 2009 (see separate document) and this supporting improvement plan.

The objectives and actions are set out under the following headings:

- ❖ Leadership
- ❖ Understanding and commitment
- ❖ Structure
- ❖ Operation

- ❖ Accountability
- ❖ Support and resources
- ❖ Communication and engagement
- ❖ Impact and outcomes

1. LEADERSHIP

Current situation: There is a lack of leadership of Scrutiny by Members and senior managers due to no confidence in the value and purpose of the scrutiny process.

Objective 1: To increase Scrutiny Members' leadership and involvement in the Scrutiny function

Expected outcome: A rise in the status Scrutiny relative to the Executive

No.	Actions	Responsible Persons	Time scale	Reasons for Action
a.	Arrange a Members' away day with external facilitators, involving Scrutiny and Executive Members, to build the leadership required within Scrutiny to enable the new ways of working to operate in an effective and consensual way.	Lead: Scrutiny Manager Supported by: Jenny Northwood	By 30 Oct 2009	To build consensus and more effective leadership to improve scrutiny.
b.	Corporate Leadership Management Team to give a clear direction on their expectations on staff in relation to their support and work on Scrutiny.	Lead: Chief Executive Supported by: Head of Strategic Planning and Performance, Head of Local Democracy and the Scrutiny Manager	From 30 Jun 2009	To give clearer steer to senior managers on the status and priority of Scrutiny.
c.	Parties in opposition to refrain from using Scrutiny as an opposition tool, and all Parties to refrain from subjecting Scrutiny Members to the whip.	Lead: Group leaders Supported by: Head of Local Democracy and Chair of the standards committee	From 30 Jun 2009	To ensure Scrutiny operates on a non-party political consensual basis.

REVISED APPENDIX C – TABLED AT THE MEETING

d.	Arrange cross-party meeting between relevant lead Members, to discuss and resolve differences and build consensus, including protocol for chairing and a performance system for Members.	Lead: Scrutiny Manager Supported by: Head of Local Democracy and Jenny Northwood	By 30 Oct 2009	To build consensus and more effective leadership to improve scrutiny.
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2. UNDERSTANDING AND COMMITMENT

Current situation: There is a lack of understanding and consensus on the Scrutiny process and the role of Scrutiny

Objective 2: To increase understanding of the purposes and roles of Scrutiny

Expected outcome: Greater Council and partners' commitment and involvement in the Scrutiny process

No.	Actions	Responsible Persons	Time scale	Reasons for Action
a.	Work with Democratic Services and Human Resources to develop and run a comprehensive member/ officer/ partner training programme on the scrutiny purpose and process, including latest legislative requirements/ duties.	Lead: Head of Human Resources Supported by: Scrutiny Manager, Democratic Services Manager, Ann Loffler and Alisa Watson	By 31 Dec 2009	To provide a common level of knowledge and understanding of Scrutiny, specially in those from partner agencies.
b.	Review current scrutiny handbook and develop into a scrutiny protocol/ policy and procedure, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, setting out clearly the objectives, process, benefits, expectations, and responsibilities of scrutiny Members and officers and senior service managers Notes: Also supports Objectives 5.2 and 6.1 below.	Lead: Scrutiny Manager Supported by; Head of Strategic Planning, Performance and Cohesion, Jenny Northwood and Democratic Services Manager	By 31 Oct 2009	To provide an easily accessible and clear Scrutiny handbook.

3. STRUCTURE

Current situation: The structure of Scrutiny committees is too bureaucratic and inflexible

Objective 3: To re-structure Scrutiny in line with recommended good practice

Expected outcome: Reduced bureaucracy and greater flexibility

No.	Actions	Responsible Persons	Time scale	Reasons for Action
a.	<p>Re-structure scrutiny into a single Scrutiny Board, under chairmanship of the Opposition, that would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - clearly articulate and communicate the role and purpose of scrutiny; - manage the overview and scrutiny processes; - establish working groups to undertake the task and finish reviews; - performance manage the work of scrutiny; - develop scrutiny for its future roles. 	<p>Lead: Scrutiny Manager</p> <p>Supported by; Chair of the Scrutiny Review Board, Chair of the Scrutiny Board, Group Leaders, Head of Legal Services, Head of Local Democracy and the Democratic Services Manager</p>	By 31 Nov 2009	To change the adversarial attitudes of Members and build consensus within Scrutiny.

4. OPERATION

Current situation: Scrutiny lacks focus and clarity of purpose around key decisions and policy choices

Objective 4: To increase Scrutiny's involvement in policy development

Expected outcome: Scrutiny adding value to decision-making on policies

No.	Actions	Responsible Persons	Time scale	Reasons for Action
a.	Review and update topic selection procedure to ensure fit with neighbourhood priorities and Council strategic objectives.	Lead: Scrutiny Manager Supported by: Neighbourhood Governance Project Manager, Area Committee Manager and Democratic Services Manager	By 30 Oct 2009	To ensure better focus on what is of strategic importance to the area.
b.	Establish a programme of informal meetings between Scrutiny, Democratic Services Officers, and chief officers at which discussions take place about the year ahead.	Lead: Jenny Northwood Supported by: Angela Fraser and Democratic Services Manager	By 30 Oct 2009	To improve dialogue and build consensus.
c.	Scrutiny Team working practices to include regular liaison meetings with relevant senior managers, partners and Democratic Services to identify key current and future areas of interest to Scrutiny for possible inclusion on committees' work programmes.	Lead: Scrutiny Manager Supported by: All members of the Scrutiny Team, all members of Democratic Services and the Local Strategic Partnership Manager	By 30 Oct 2009	To build consensus around key areas of interest and greater commitment to Scrutiny.

5 ACCOUNTABILITY

Current situation: Scrutiny is not held to account and does not hold to account

Objective 5.1: To improve Scrutiny's management of its performance

Expected outcome: Clearer expectations of Scrutiny and increased accountability

No.	Actions	Responsible Persons	Time scale	Reasons for Action
a.	Develop a Scrutiny strategic plan, directly linked to the Sustainable Communities Strategy, Local Area Agreement and the Council's Corporate Plan, with clear (SMART) outcome related objectives, supported by a detailed performance management framework for Scrutiny officers and Members.	Lead: Bert Siong Supported by: Scrutiny Manager and the Chair of Scrutiny Board	By 31 Dec 2009	To clarify actual performance expectations and results, enabling continuous improvement in scrutiny.
b.	Analyse all Members training needs through a 'light-touch' appraisal process and provide appropriate incentives for them to work to a personal development plan.	Lead: Head of Human of Resources Supported by: Head of Democratic Services, Scrutiny Manager, Democratic Services Manager, Ann Loffler, Ailsa Watson and Chair of Scrutiny Board	By 31 Dec 2009	To improve personal training and development for Members, to increase role- specific effectiveness

REVISED APPENDIX C – TABLED AT THE MEETING

Objective 5.2: To increase the ‘critical friend’ aspect of Scrutiny’s role

Expected outcome: Improved performance from more timely interventions

No.	Actions	Responsible Persons	Time scale	Reasons for Action
a.	Provide information on the role of Scrutiny in holding the Council and its partners to account for the delivery of key priorities and plans, and the processes used to do so, as part of the Scrutiny handbook. (See Objective 2, Action b.)	Lead: Scrutiny Manager Supported by; Jenny Northwood and Democratic Services Manager	By 31 Nov 2009	To help improve partnership working and ensure no surprises.
b.	Include a standing item on the Scrutiny work programme to review the area performance against the Local Area Agreements improvement plan.	Lead: Scrutiny Manager Supported by: Performance Manager and Local Strategic Partnership Manager and Head of Strategic Planning, Performance and Cohesion	By 31 Dec 2009	To hold the Council and partners to account for their performance.
c.	Scrutiny should ensure that, once accepted by Executive, the implementation of their recommendations by services is evaluated after an agreed interval by Scrutiny. The result of evaluation, if negative, should be reported back to the Executive, to hold Corporate Directors to account if internal, or to seek explanation from relevant Chief Officers, if partner agencies involved. Notes: Also supports Objective 8 below.	Lead: Scrutiny Committee Chairs Supported by: Scrutiny Manager	By 30 Oct 2009	To ensure accountability for the implementation of Scrutiny recommendations.

REVISED APPENDIX C – TABLED AT THE MEETING

d.	Develop an implementation of recommendations and Executive decision monitoring system.	Lead: Scrutiny Manager Supported by: Democratic Services Manager and Scrutiny Team	By 30 Oct 2009	To provide mechanism for monitoring and reviewing compliance.
e.	Scrutiny Officers to invite relevant portfolio holders to provide feedback to Scrutiny in person on Executive responses to scrutiny recommendations, where not accepted.	Lead: Scrutiny Manager Supported by: All Scrutiny Officers	From 30 Jun 2009	To enable the Executive to be held to account for its decision.

6. SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

Current situation: The way Scrutiny works is ineffective

Objective 6.1: To establish constructive Scrutiny working protocols with the Council and partners

Expected outcome: Constructive working relationships

No.	Actions	Responsible Persons	Time scale	Reasons for Action
a.	Develop joint working protocols with partners, including one on the new Councillor Call for Action power.	Lead: Scrutiny Manager Supported by: Head of Local Democracy, Democratic Services Manager and Jenny Northwood	By 31 Dec 2009	To clarify needs for joint working and consensus building for more effective scrutiny.

Notes: This objective is also supported by Objective 2 - Action b. and Objective 4 - Actions a. and b. above.

Objective 6.2: To fully examine the role of the Scrutiny Team

Expected outcome: Better fit with Scrutiny's developing roles and responsibilities

No.	Actions	Responsible Persons	Time scale	Reasons for Action
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REVISED APPENDIX C – TABLED AT THE MEETING

a.	Carry out a comprehensive review of the Scrutiny Team, looking at: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Its role and purpose2. Its relationships across with other teams and partners3. Developing it for its new roles4. Improving its performance	Lead: Scrutiny Manager Supported by: Head of Strategic Planning, Performance and Cohesion and all Scrutiny Officers	By April 2010 ?	To ensure a better reflection of developing roles and responsibilities of Scrutiny and to ensure performance issues are fully addressed.
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7. COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Current situation: Scrutiny means nothing to most people

Objective 7: To market Scrutiny across Council, partners and local communities

Expected outcome: A recognised independent Scrutiny identity and enhanced reputation

No.	Actions	Responsible Persons	Time scale	Reasons for Action
a.	Develop in conjunction with the Communication Team and implement a comprehensive marketing strategy for scrutiny, including its own separate identity and publicity plan.	Lead: Angela Fraser Supported by: Mick Ireland and Communications Manager	By 30 Oct 2009	To raise the profile of Scrutiny and outline the benefits for the people of the Town.
b.	Work with the Area Committee Officer to develop a process for Scrutiny to raise issues with Area Committees and vice versa.	Lead: Bert Siong Supported by: Area Committees Manager and Democratic Services Manager	By 30 Oct 2009	To achieve more joint working, closer to the community.
c.	Develop a Scrutiny community engagement toolkit, in conjunction with the Community Engagement team; as part of the Comprehensive Community Engagement strategy.	Lead: Bert Siong Supported by: Consultation Manager	By 30 Oct 2009	To improve community engagement.
d.	Use all opportunities, during surveys, consultation exercises, public workshops, etc, to review the findings of them and inform people about the benefits of Scrutiny and how they can get involved.	Lead: Angela Fraser Supported by: Mick Ireland, Communications Manager and the Consultation Manager	From 30 Jun 2009	To provide public more information and encourage more participation.

8 IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

Current situation: Scrutiny makes little difference

Objective 8: To ensure Scrutiny recommendations are fully evidenced and implemented when approved

Expected outcome: Greater Scrutiny influence and impact on policy decisions to improve services

No.	Actions	Responsible Persons	Time scale	Reasons for Action
a.	Agree for Scrutiny reports and recommendations to go to the next available Executive meeting, without going through Chief Executive and Council Leader clearance process, presented by the relevant Scrutiny Chair. Executive should respond to the scrutiny committee within the regulatory two months deadline.	Lead: Chief Executive Supported by: Scrutiny Manager and Democratic Services Manager	From 30 Jun 2009	To remove the opportunity for undue interference with Scrutiny reports, and put onus on Executive to respond.
b.	Scrutiny should ensure that, once accepted by Executive, the implementation of their recommendations by services is evaluated after an agreed interval by the scrutiny committee. The result of evaluation, if negative, should be reported back to the Executive, to hold Corporate Directors to account if internal, or to seek explanation from relevant Chief Officers, if partner agencies involved.	Lead: Scrutiny Committee Chairs Supported by: Scrutiny Manager	By 30 Oct 2009	To increase accountability for the implementation of Scrutiny recommendations.
c.	Ensure Scrutiny reports and recommendations are written in plain English, robustly evidenced, suitable, feasible and acceptable prior to being finalised.	Lead: Review Chairs Supported by: All Scrutiny Officers and all Democratic Services Team	From 30 Jun 2009	To provide clearer, more robust and evidence-based recommendations.

