Self-evaluation framework

for overview and scrutiny in local government

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Introduction

In the short time since overview and scrutiny was introduced under the Local Government Act 2000, research has indicated slow but gradual improvement of its execution and outcomes. Evidence also suggests that effective political governance is related directly to effective council performance. This information is, however, based largely on Member and Officer perceptions.

There has been an absence to date of *objective* measures that can identify the successful operation of overview and scrutiny, largely due to the disparate nature of its implementation across local government.

This self-evaluation framework provides, for the first time, a mechanism for all local authorities to demonstrate the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny and, further, to identify areas and means for improvement. It can be used by any individual or group and does not presuppose an existing level of achievement. Rather, within a given set of principles, it requires the "evaluator" to:

- demonstrate evidence of achievement,
- identify of areas for improvement, and
- highlight potential barriers to improvement

Once completed, the framework will provide a clear picture of how overview and scrutiny operates in an authority. This can then be used to:

- communicate the potential of scrutiny to local communities
- encourage involvement in the process of those being scrutinised
- build confidence of those undertaking scrutiny activities
- demonstrate scrutiny's value to auditors and inspectors

Completion of the framework will also produce an explicit set of priorities for improvement planning.

User guide

The framework has been designed for use according the needs of each authority. It does not presuppose any current level of achievement and can be applied to any type of local authority, operating under any of the four options for political management as set out in the Local Government Act 2000.

It is up to individual councils to decide how to use this framework, however authorities might like to consider some of the following suggestions:

- offer the framework as a survey sent to key stakeholders and use results to develop an action plan

- hold a workshop with key stakeholders to complete the framework, using the results to develop an action plan

- contract external consultants to undertake the evaluation and produce recommendations

> **Key stakeholders might include:** scrutiny Members and officers, executive Members, senior management, departmental officers, members of the public, community groups, area forums (or their equivalents), the local strategic partnership, external bodies subject to scrutiny, etc

The framework is in four sections, reflecting the principles of CfPS' **Good Scrutiny Guide**. For each principle there is a set of key questions with prompts to help complete an evaluation table.

Once the tables are complete the authority will be have identified a set of areas for improvement that can be built in to an improvement plan, examples of which will be made available on our website at www.cfps.org.uk/evaluation.

If your authority decides to use the framework to review its overview and scrutiny function, please let us know by contacting info@cfps.org.uk.

Provide 'critical friend' challenge

Does scrutiny provide effective challenge to the executive and external agencies?

- o what opportunities are available for scrutiny members to challenge the executive and external agencies?
- o how does scrutiny provide an effective mechanism for the executive to demonstrate public accountability?
- o how do you ensure that challenge is "constructive, robust and purposeful"?
- o what evidence is there that scrutiny is able to operate independently of the executive?

What do we do well?	How can we improve?
• Challenge Executive via Call-in procedure. Any two members can Call-In a "key" decision, which effects two or more wards and has financial implications. Members must clearly state the reasons for why they have called in the decision • Scrutiny sets its own work programme independently of the Executive • Invitations to Scrutiny meetings are sent to all relevant Key Stakeholders. • Successful at engaging external organisations in the Scrutiny process. One particular example was the Drug Awareness Day, when all organisations involved drug services were invited to take part in an action day. The event was very well attended	• Ensure the Executive Forward Plan is a standing item on the agenda of the Scrutiny Board • Ensure Scrutiny Reviews are more specific
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

example:
chairing skills, member training/dev needs, officer support, information
requirements, resources (financial), executive interest, willing involvement
of council, setting standards, regular evaluation

How does o&s have an impact on the work of the executive?

- o can you provide an example where challenge to the executive has led to a better decision than would otherwise have been taken
- o can you provide evidence of where o&s has had a direct impact on the work of the executive?
- o has a cabinet member had a change of mind on a decision due to scrutiny?

What do we do well?	How can we improve?
• Scrutiny developed in agreement with the Executive a Budget protocol for Scrutinising the Budget • Executive accepted the recommendations in the Clean Streets review, which meant allocating additionally funding to the service area in order for the recommendations to be implemented.	• Make sure recommendations in final reports from Scrutiny are SMART

What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?
Example: chairing skills, member training/dev needs, officer support, information requirements, resources (financial), executive interest, willing involvement of council, setting standards, regular evaluation

How does scrutiny routinely challenge the authority's corporate strategy and budget?

- o is there evidence of questioning financial priorities and how they meet corporate objectives?
- o can you demonstrate that monitoring and questioning performance has provided effective challenge?

What do we do well?	How can we improve?
- Best Value Scrutiny Panel - Priority Performance Indicators are presented to each committee - Provide Scrutiny Members with training on Budget and effective Scrutiny - Special meeting of each Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the budget for the services that fall within their remit	Priority Performance Indicators need to be presented to Committees in a more readable / useable format to enable more effective Scrutiny.

What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?
example: chairing skills, member training/dev needs, officer support, information requirements, resources (financial), executive interest, willing involvement of council, setting standards, regular evaluation   Training on PI's and Budget Knowing what information is available Not being presented with the right information

Are external partners involved in o&s and how are they included?

- o are external partners used to provide challenge?
- o is there a process for external involvement in scrutiny? How far is it developed (i.e. LG Act 2003?)
- o are arrangements in place to support and encourage external challenge to the authority?

What do we do well?	How can we improve?
• Co-opted members of Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee include 2 Parent Governors, 3 employee representatives and 2 diocisaon representatives (one Church of England and one Catholic) • Working groups include a wide range of key stakeholders and interested parties and help gather evidence for reviews • Environment and Non-Executive Functions held a special meeting to allow members of public and interested groups to present their point of views regarding the development of a Corporate Nature Conservation Strategy	• Should broaden those involved to include hard to reach groups – so its not always the same people who are involved • Send out a pre-questionnaire to stakeholders to obtain their views on what the topic / review should include or exclude
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	
example: chairing skills, member training/dev needs, officer support, information requirements, resources (financial), executive interest, willing involvement of council, setting standards, regular evaluation Internal process of consultation Building up contacts and networking Knowing who to contact	

Does scrutiny work effectively with the executive and senior management?

- o do you have an agreed way of working with executive and senior management?
- o could you describe those relationships confidently and provide an example of them working in practice?
- o are there examples to demonstrate improved outcomes as a result of these relationships in use?

What do we do well?	How can we improve?
- Scrutiny Chairs present final report and recommendations to the Executive - Executive Portfolio holders are invited to Scrutiny Committees – sent agendas as matter of cause - Constitution outlines working protocols for ways of working between Scrutiny and the Executive, between Scrutiny and Senior Officers and between Executive and Senior Officers	- Encourage Scrutiny Chairs and Portfolio holders to meet outside of meetings - Ensure Senior Officers are more aware of their role in the Scrutiny process

What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?
example: chairing skills, member training/dev needs, officer support, information requirements, resources (financial), executive interest, willing involvement of council, setting standards, regular evaluation Training for Senior Officers

Reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities

How is the work of scrutiny informed by the public?

- o is there evidence of "an ongoing dialogue with the public and its diverse communities"?
- o what evidence is there to show how diverse/different public expectations of the scrutiny function have been managed?
- o what elements of the scrutiny work programme have been influenced by public suggestion?

What do we do well?	How can we improve?
- Social Inclusion working groups – Vulnerable Adults dealing with closure of Bramingham Day Centre. Different people had different expectations of what they thought the outcome of the Scrutiny would be. This was overcome by ensuring all groups were kept informed throughout the process. - Special evidence meeting so interested parties can raise their concerns over what the review should include / exclude - Community Cohesion Research - Consult Citizens Panel - Advert in Local Paper to encourage suggestion as to what Scrutiny should look at - Area Committees - Website	- Setting up a database of contact details of those who have been involved in Scrutiny and informing them of upcoming reviews - Using Member Surgeries to feedback suggestions / issues of local concern - Encouraging more involvement by Local MP's
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

example:
chairing skills, member training/dev needs, officer support, information requirements, resources (financial), executive interest, willing involvement of council, setting standards, regular evaluation

Resources to set up, maintain and run a database effectively

How does scrutiny make itself accessible to the public?

- o what mechanisms are in place to enable/encourage the public to become involved in the work of scrutiny?

- o how can you demonstrate that they have been effective?

- o how are the outcomes of scrutiny communicated to the public?

- o what evidence is there to show how the public has been engaged in the meetings and work of scrutiny?

What do we do well?	How can we improve?
• Working Groups which have been established for Scrutiny Reviews – Vulnerable Adults Chair was a parent of a service user • Scrutiny meetings and the topics to be discussed are advertised in the Local Newspaper • Meetings held in location relevant to topic, where appropriate • Members of Public are taken first if they are presenting an item. • Members of the public are given opportunity to ask questions • Community Cohesion Launch – invited all those who contributed to the Research	• Scrutiny Officers liaising with members of public in terms of what to expect • Meetings informal • Maintaining interest throughout the review • Send copy of final report to all those that have been involved in the review • Publishing an external newsletter
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

example:
chairing skills, member training/dev needs, officer support, information requirements, resources (financial), executive interest, willing involvement of council, setting standards, regular evaluation

Chairing skills and training

How does scrutiny communicate?

- o are mechanisms in place to ensure that all members and officers are aware of and understand scrutiny?
- o how do you ensure that opportunities for communicating scrutiny are identified and used, including corporate arrangements for media and public relations?

What do we do well?	How can we improve?
- Newsletter circulated to all Members and Senior Officers - Annual Report summaries the work completed by the Committees - Scrutiny Handbook – details the Scrutiny process and acts as a reference point and as a guide to Members and Officers - Witness Guides – provides guidance for internal and external witnesses - Intranet - Community Cohesion Research – Communications team won media award for the publicity surrounding this piece of work - Press Officer to attend meetings when final reports are being presented	- Regular magazine article about Scrutiny in In-Line - Protocol needs to be developed to publicise the work of Scrutiny. And the input Scrutiny has had on the work of the Executive
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	
example: chairing skills, member training/dev needs, officer support, information requirements, resources (financial), executive interest, willing involvement of council, setting standards, regular evaluation Protocol needed	

Take the lead and own the scrutiny process

Does scrutiny operate with political impartiality?

- o are you able to demonstrate that the party whip is not used?
- o is it possible to demonstrate political consensus?
- o how have executive members been involved in championing the value and potential of scrutiny?
- o how does the process of appointing chairs support objective scrutiny?

What do we do well?	How can we improve?
- Scrutiny Members have no experience of having a whip for a Scrutiny meeting - Political consensus can be demonstrated by the number of reviews that have been completed and approved by the Scrutiny Committee and then approved by Executive - Budget Protocol – also required political consensus - Executive Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People publicising the work of Life Long Learning Scrutiny Committee and regularly attends the meetings - Chairs are Labour members, but the Committees are proportionally representative - A Chair of one of the working groups was a member of the public.	Knowing who is interested and opening up the opportunity
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

example:
chairing skills, member training/dev needs, officer support, information requirements, resources (financial), executive interest, willing involvement of council, setting standards, regular evaluation

Does scrutiny have ownership of its own work programme?

- o how have members been involved in developing the work programme?
- o do members monitor and evaluate the progress of work programmes regularly?
- o can you provide evidence to show how conflicting views in regard to the work programme have been resolved by scrutiny members?
- o do scrutiny members set goals for what they want to achieve?

What do we do well?	How can we improve?
• Work programmes set by Committees and can be altered as deemed appropriate • Work Programmes are on every agenda to make members aware of the current and future workload of the Committee • Project plans outline the goals and milestones Scrutiny want to achieve and are also put on agendas to enable members to review progress • Reaching a consensus as what is in the publics interest	• Work programme to be mixed and not overloaded • Occasionally put the work programme as the first item on the agenda so more time is spent looking at it. • Keep reviews on track in line with the project plan and re-evaluate
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

example:
chairing skills, member training/dev needs, officer support, information requirements, resources (financial), executive interest, willing involvement of council, setting standards, regular evaluation

Officer support to complete reviews in line with Project Plan

Do scrutiny members consider that they have a worthwhile and fulfilling role?

- o do Members have an opportunity to communicate their views on the development and operation of overview and scrutiny?

- o are the views of Members canvassed/collected and evaluated regularly?

- o is there evidence to demonstrate that scrutiny is seen as an attractive political career?

What do we do well?	How can we improve?
- Chairs are invited to Scrutiny Board to provide feedback on the work of their Committees - Members of the Scrutiny Board are appointed as monitors for the Committees, they attend the Committee they are responsible for and report back to the Board how Scrutiny has conducted - Members questionnaire distributed to consult on the effectiveness of Scrutiny - Scrutiny Board conduct an annual evaluation of Scrutiny and consider implementing examples of best practice.	- Should have a standing item on the agenda of the Scrutiny Board for any member to attend the board meeting and ask questions regarding scrutiny. - Need to improve the status of Scrutiny so that it is on an equal footing with the Executive
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

example:
chairing skills, member training/dev needs, officer support, information requirements, resources (financial), executive interest, willing involvement of council, setting standards, regular evaluation

Members' allowances for Scrutiny are less then Executive – perception of less importance.

Is there a constructive working partnership with officers including support arrangements for scrutiny?

- o can you provide evidence to show that there are arrangements to enable discussion and consensus building between scrutiny, the executive and officers?

- o how have officers from across the authority been involved in championing the value and potential of scrutiny?

- o what training and development has been provided with a view to improving scrutiny (members / officers & exec)

- o how are the arrangements for scrutiny support evaluated for effectiveness and appropriateness?

What do we do well?	How can we improve?
• Director of Scrutiny, Chair and Vice Chair of the Scrutiny Board met with the leader to discuss how relations between Scrutiny and Executive can be improved. • Scrutiny support section has 3 Scrutiny Officers and a Director of Scrutiny at a Head of Service level • Members are offered Training • Lunch time briefing sessions have been run for Officers	• Evaluating workload • Reviews completed
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

example:
chairing skills, member training/dev needs, officer support, information requirements, resources (financial), executive interest, willing involvement of council, setting standards, regular evaluation

Resources

Making an impact on service delivery

How is the scrutiny workload co-ordinated and integrated in to corporate processes?

- o are you able to use the forward plan to programme the work of o&s?

- o is the forward plan fit for purpose?

- o what evidence is there that scrutiny contributes to the delivery of corporate priorities?

- o can scrutiny demonstrate an involvement and impact in setting performance objectives?

- o what evidence is there to show that scrutiny involvement has identified the need to realign resource allocation or objectives?

What do we do well?	How can we improve?
- Are able to use the forward plan - Work programme in line with Luton 2011, so reviews and recommendations from those reviews help deliver corporate priorities - Clean Streets, Children Services BVR, Older Peoples Strategy, Enforcement, Vulnerable Adults - Clean Streets review led to a realignment of resource allocations and objectives	- Should encourage regular and effective use of the Executive Forward Plan - Develop a checklist to help Scrutiny Members examine the Executive forward plan
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

example:
chairing skills, member training/dev needs, officer support, information requirements, resources (financial), executive interest, willing involvement of council, setting standards, regular evaluation

What evidence is there to show that scrutiny has contributed to improvement?

- o what evidence is there to show that changes have been brought about as a result of scrutiny activity?

- o what arrangements are in place to ensure that recommendations and actions arising from scrutiny are acted upon?

- o how does scrutiny monitor routinely the implementation of its recommendations?

What do we do well?	How can we improve?
- Clean Streets led to increase resources - Lead Officer given responsibility to implement recommendations - Lead Officer reports back to Scrutiny on progress of implementing recommendations	Encouraging more communication with Lead Officers – for officers to approach Committee as soon as they know there is going to be a problem, rather than leaving it till they are due to come a report back

What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?
example: chairing skills, member training/dev needs, officer support, information requirements, resources (financial), executive interest, willing involvement of council, setting standards, regular evaluation Training of Officers

How well is information required by scrutiny managed?

- o how effective are the arrangements for planning and scoping scrutiny reviews?
- o what arrangements have been made to ensure that scrutiny members receive accurate, timely and appropriate information?
- o how does scrutiny record, monitor and evaluate its own proceedings?

What do we do well?	How can we improve?
 • Standard format for scoping – leads to development of Project Plan. All members are familiar with the process for scoping a review • Reports are sent out with agendas 10 days before the meeting. If a presentation is being made to the Committee a briefing paper must also be provided • Scrutiny Committees should evaluate how the meeting went at the end of each meeting. • Members of the Scrutiny Board are given responsibility to monitor a particular Committee and provide feedback to the Scrutiny Board	• Officers to give info in appropriate format • Ensure summing up of meeting actually happens – keep a record of it happening
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

example:
chairing skills, member training/dev needs, officer support, information requirements, resources (financial), executive interest, willing involvement of council, setting standards, regular evaluation

Other assessment tools and methodologies

Full details on other performance management models and improvement tools are available from the IDeA Knowledge website (free registration / log-in required)

Performance management model	Summary description
Balanced Scorecard	A multi-dimensional framework for managing strategy by linking objectives, initiatives, targets and performance measures across key corporate perspectives
EFQM Excellence Model®	Organisational improvement framework for assessing strengths and areas for improvement across the spectrum of an organisation's activities
Dolphin EFQM Excellence Model™	Improvement framework for conducting self assessments using the EFQM Excellence Model®
PQASSO	Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations, or projects within larger organisations
Public Service Excellence Model	Organisational improvement framework and diagnostic tool for identifying strengths and weaknesses within an organisation or programmes of work
The Big Picture	Organisational development framework and toolbox designed to make an organisation think about every aspect of their work and take action to improve it.
Performance improvement tool	Summary description
Charter Mark	The Government's national standard and quality improvement scheme for customer service.
Investors in People	National standard for improving organisational performance by training and developing people to achieve organisational goals
ISO9001 Quality System	Global standard and approach for quality management systems. The standard focuses on the management of processes and documentation in order to meet customer needs and expectations
Kaizen Blitz	Short term performance improvement approach to improving business processes, which can achieve rapid results
Local Government Improvement Programme	Performance Improvement approach based on a peer review against a benchmark of an 'ideal' local authority
Six Sigma	A disciplined methodology for process improvement that deploys a wide set of tools
Value management	Organisational improvement framework incorporating a toolbox of proven methods that aim to optimise customer outcomes within the resources available

Examples of performance indicators for overview and scrutiny

Critical friend challenge:

- percentage of items on work programmes taken from the forward plan
- percentage of items on the cabinet agenda amended as a result of scrutiny intervention

Reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities

- the percentage of items on the work programme suggested by the public
- number of visits to the authority's o&s scrutiny web pages
- number of requests for the scrutiny newsletter

Take the lead and own the scrutiny process

- the percentage of meetings attended by Members at which they were required
- percentage of Members that have a good awareness of the role of o&s and of their role as a scrutiny member

Making an impact on service delivery

- the percentage of scrutiny recommendations approved by the executive
- the percentage of scrutiny recommendations implemented by the executive

Useful websites

CfPS

- o [Library of scrutiny reviews](#)
- o [Discussions forum](#)
- o [Scrutiny map](#)
- o [Scrutiny Champions' Network](#)

National

- o [Improvement and Development Agency](#)
- o [Local Government Association](#)
- o [Audit Commission](#)
- o [Parliamentary Select Committees](#)

Regional

- o [South East Employers](#)
- o [Association of London Government](#)
- o [North East Regional Employers Organisation](#)
- o [East of England Regional Assembly](#)
- o [West Midlands Local Government Association](#)
- o [East Midlands Regional Local Government Association](#)
- o [South West Regional Assembly](#)
- o [North West Regional Assembly](#)
- o [Yorkshire and Humber Association of Local Authorities](#)

Others

- o [Evaluating Local Governance New Constitutions and Ethics](#)
- o [Local Government Information Unit](#)
- o [Democratic Health Network](#)
- o [New Local Government Network](#)
- o [Office for Public Management](#)