

## **Scrutiny Handbook**

### **What is expected of Members at a scrutiny meeting**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This protocol sets out the standards of behaviour and responsibilities expected of Members involved in carrying out scrutiny, whether as individual members or as the Chair of any review committee. There are additional responsibilities and powers pertaining to Chairs of scrutiny included in this protocol.
- 1.2 Review Committees and Working Groups should conduct their business in a friendly and orderly fashion, in such a way as to maximise participation from all members and to facilitate debate. Proceedings should be conducted in a way that any parties appearing before review committees are treated with dignity and respect.

#### **2. Chairing Review Committees**

- 2.1 The Chair of a Review Committee is responsible for the effective management and running of the Committee's business. This involves directing the Committee's agenda and the effective management of any deliberations and maintaining a public image of effective scrutiny of the Council's business and other matters brought before it. The Chair is expected to identify areas for scrutiny and ensure that the Review Committee Members are taking part at all stages.
- 2.2 The Chairman needs to be sure that all members are clear about the purpose of the meeting, are given the opportunity to follow a line of questioning (via a number of supplementary questions if necessary), and have the opportunity to evaluate what they have heard and agree the next steps.
- 2.3 The Chairman should encourage discussion and debate between members and witnesses to ensure a full and meaningful debate of the issue being discussed. The Chairman should provide strong and fair leadership ensuring the meeting is carried out in a dignified manner and avoiding any conflicts of interest. Overview and scrutiny is non-partisan and the Chairman has a role in ensuring meetings are free of party political debate.
- 2.4 Because scrutiny is a member-led process, the role of the Chairman and their relationship with the support officers is an important one. For example, the Chairman may work with the scrutiny officers in advance of the meeting to identify appropriate witnesses and prepare lines of questioning.
- 2.5 The Chairman will normally be the spokesperson for the committee and will usually be the one to present and champion the committees findings and recommendations.
- 2.6 To assist cooperative working across the six committees, the Chairman and Vice-

Chairman of Review Committees meet bi-monthly to review progress across all committees, to consider good practice, and to share experiences as the annual work programmes develop. This group will also have the role of monitoring the scrutiny budget and making recommendations to the six committees about joint expenditure.

### **3. Conduct at Scrutiny meetings**

- 3.1 Review Committee Members should ensure that they refrain from personal criticism of other members of the committee and ensure that any debate is conducted in a polite and respectful manner.
- 3.2 It is intended that both officers and members should see the process as a partnership. Members are expected to ask probing questions in order to get the information they need. Officers are expected to respond openly and should not just limit themselves to answering questions but also be proactive in providing information that they feel it would be useful for members to know.
- 3.3 The work of the Committees is extremely varied and may involve decisions taken or witnesses known to Members. Members are expected to make a declaration of any interest in the matters under scrutiny that is known to them at the start of the meeting in the usual way, indicating whether it is a personal, or a prejudicial interest and how the interest arises. It may also be necessary for Members to make an interest known during the course of the meeting.
- 3.4 Scrutiny members must be free to carry out their work with the independence and freedom to challenge and monitor Council policies and service delivery.

### **4. Training and Conferences**

- 4.1 One key way in which Review Committee Members will be able to inform their deliberations and also to ensure a contribution from Members in Sunderland to regional and national debate is to attend training events and conferences.
- 4.2 Part 4 of the Council's Constitution (10. (c)) provides that Review Committees may '... go on site visits, hold public meetings, ... and do all other things that they reasonably consider necessary to inform their deliberations'. To assist each Review Committee a delegated budget of £10,000 a year has been agreed. This protocol provides a process whereby training and development opportunities and conferences may be funded from within the Review Committees dedicated budget.
- 4.3 A detailed Member Training Programme and associated budget has previously been established for all Members. This provides a consistent approach to corporate needs and reflects opportunities to address issues around ICT skills, awareness raising on current topics and training generally. In addition there is a list of standing conferences across each of the Council's service areas. Attendance at conferences outside this list are subject to approval, within the limits of a discrete

budget, by the Chief Executive or the City Solicitor in consultation with the Leader or Deputy Leader of the Council.

4.4 Where the Review Committee wishes to propose attendance at a conference/training opportunity outside of the above areas, and fund all costs associated with the conference/training from its own budget the following process will apply.

- A report will be prepared for the relevant Review Committee. The report will set out details of the costs of the event, benefits that attendance will bring to overview and scrutiny and clearly identify delegates to attend, or
- Where notice or invitation to a conference or training event does not provide sufficient opportunity to take an advance report to Committee, in those circumstances, the Chairman's approval will be sought for a delegate/s to attend the event funded by the Committee budget.

4.5 In either of the above circumstances the following will apply:

- The Leader will be notified of the training/conference opportunity
- The Chairman will authorise use of the budget by signing the appropriate
- authorisation form
- Following the conference/training opportunity a full report will be brought back to the relevant Committee by delegates.