

5. POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT

Policy review is the process of maintaining an overview of Council policies and those of key partners. Policy review can take a number of different forms from wide-ranging, cross-cutting reviews. In this way, policy reviews assist the Council in its role as community leader.

Policy development involves shaping the formulation of key plans and policies through identifying the outcomes to be achieved, and moving on to examine alternatives against needs, resources and other issues. For example a review into the provision of outdoor play facilities focused on development of future policy reflecting the changing needs of children and young people.

Policy development and policy review are necessarily part of the same process, since undertaking policy review will usually lead to making recommendations for developing policy.

Policy reviews focus on examining whether the Council's intended policy outcomes have been achieved, and also explore other issues such as the service user's perspective, awareness of services, the processes involved in accessing services etc.

The following are 10 steps to good practice to be followed in overview and scrutiny in-depth reviews:

The 10 steps to undertaking a successful in-depth scrutiny investigation	
Step 1	Be sure that the subject is significant
Step 2	Project plan the investigation
Step 3	Determine the nature of member involvement, in Committee or by working group report
Step 4	Engage partners, public and local media
Step 5	Gather secondary evidence and primary written evidence
Step 6	Get the witness package right
Step 7	Gather oral evidence
Step 8	Adopt other methods
Step 9	Prepare draft report, disseminate and route the report
Step 10	Follow-up

Cabinet Request for Policy Review

Cabinet may request that a policy review is carried out to assist Cabinet in its development of policy and in addressing emerging issues. Cabinet's request will be forwarded to the Head of Scrutiny, who will ensure it is included on the next available agenda of the Scrutiny Management Committee. If requested by the Chair, the relevant Portfolio Holder will attend the meeting of the Scrutiny Management Committee to explain the reasons for Cabinet's request.

Scrutiny Management Committee will consider Cabinet's request and consider whether to

- Itself undertake a review of the policy area
- Allocate the review to be undertaken to another Committee, according to its terms of reference and current work programme
- Decline to progress a policy review and report to Cabinet explaining the Committee's reasons.

Where a review is undertaken following Cabinet's request, the Committee will observe the arrangements for policy review set out later in this protocol.

A request to undertake a policy review should be declined only where

- It would represent duplication of work already being undertaken by the council, or by partners
- The Committee has identified other issues that must take priority
- The Committee has identified an alternative means of progressing the policy development.

Selection of Topics

At each annual Scrutiny Conference, Members of each Committee will consider which topics Members wish to prioritise for policy review for the year ahead. Portfolio holders will attend and support the discussion. Key partners will also be invited to participate.

Directorates will supply each Committee with details of their anticipated work priorities, and those of key partners in the subject area, and provide officer support to each Committee's round-table discussion of potential areas for policy review.

Each Committee will also receive information on performance issues, and cross-cutting priorities relevant to the Committee's terms of reference.

Regular meetings between Chairs of all the Committees are scheduled to consider current and emerging Council decisions and priorities, and ensure these are prioritised within a coordinated approach to delivery of the Committees' work programmes. The Head of Scrutiny will coordinate information to be provided to this meeting.

At the first meeting of the Council year each Committee will select the Issue or issues to be taken forward for policy review and incorporated in the Committee work programme, prioritising according to the following criteria.

Topics should be considered against the criteria set out below to ensure they align with existing corporate goals and priorities. Criteria will be shared with key partners to ensure fairness and to avoid duplication with ongoing policy development work.

Criteria for Selection of Topic for Policy Review	
1.	Assist in meeting the Council's Strategic Priorities as set out in the Sunderland Strategy
2.	Address the Council's role as Community Leader
3.	Reflect issues identified by Members as key (through constituency activities)
4.	Address equal opportunities aspirations and accessibility to Council services
5.	Avoid replicating recent Best Value and Performance Improvement reviews or themes in the programme for forthcoming reviews but builds on opportunities to assist in meeting Improvement Plans
6.	Have an external focus and be a matter of concern for the City and its inhabitants e.g. identified in the Council's annual residents survey
7.	Explore options for future direction where dissatisfaction or poor performance has been identified
8.	Provide a wider cross-cutting perspective avoiding day to day operational issues
9.	Meet the interests of local people for collaborative working with external organisations particularly where expertise or resources can be utilised

Project Planning

While each review may be approached in a different way as appropriate, generally they will follow this framework:

- ☐ Identify the key reasons for selecting the review
- ☐ Set the terms of reference including clear aims and objectives
- ☐ Methods to be adopted to carry out the review
- ☐ Identify timescales, resources and constraints

Methodology

Methods to be used to gather evidence can be determined once the topic has been selected. For example:

- ☐ Officers/Members/external contributors/ "experts" etc to be invited to the Committee
- ☐ Invite written evidence from stakeholders

- ☐ Meetings with stakeholders
- ☐ Site visits
- ☐ Questionnaires
- ☐ Workshops
- ☐ Public meetings
- ☐ Comparisons may be made with other local authorities
- ☐ Documentary research

At the outset of a review it should be determined whether and how to engage partners, members of the public and media as participants, observers and/or witnesses.

Gathering written and oral evidence are not the only methods available to the Review Committee. The investigation should be matched to the appropriate methods such as site visits to allow Members to see at first hand what is happening and to talk to the people who are actually using the service.

Other methods may include visiting other local authorities, commissioning research, joint working with partner organisations, public meetings, workshops and seminars.

Prepare, disseminate and route the report

Good practice from a variety of authorities suggests that the most effective reports are evidence-based, written in plain English, use photographs, graphs and charts to illustrate points made in the text, include a summary, and include SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely) recommendations.

Once all the evidence has been collected the Committee should identify and agree recommendations. At the draft report stage the Review Coordinator will consult with stakeholders to draw the main themes and emerging conclusions to their attention. This may include the appropriate Head of Service, Director, Portfolio Holder, service users and other stakeholders internally and externally. This is to agree facts and to ensure adequate consultation for the Directorate to prepare their response once the report is presented to the Cabinet. The report can be changed by agreement of the Committee up to and including the final draft.

The final report is presented to Cabinet by the Committee Chair together with a proposed action plan for implementation, incorporating targets which are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (SMART). Cabinet decides which recommendations it will accept and explains why some may not be acceptable. Where the policy review recommends departure from an Article 4 plan the report will also be presented to Council under the policy framework procedure as set out in the constitution. It is the Cabinet's responsibility to ensure that a resource assessment is undertaken and a final implementation plan produced incorporating SMART targets for action. The Review Committee should ensure that a timetable for monitoring progress on

implementation is built into its recommendations. Following this, copies of the report should be sent to all contributors and any other interested bodies.

Monitoring Implementation

Once the recommendations have been approved by Cabinet, the Review Committee will take responsibility for monitoring the delivery by the Directorate of the recommendations. The Committee will agree a schedule for monitoring, and incorporate this within its work programme.

The relevant Director or partner organization will provide progress reports on actions at a minimum of six-monthly intervals until the Committee signs the action plan off as delivered.

The Scrutiny Management Committee will agree a schedule to receive reports on progress of delivery against action plans.