3. SCOPING A SCRUTINY REVIEW

Background

Scrutiny Committees can decide to undertake a detailed investigation of an area of concern by conducting a Scrutiny Review. The committee often tasks a small sub-group of its members to undertake the majority of the research and to evaluate the evidence.

The Task Group is responsible for interviewing witnesses, engaging service users and the public where appropriate, and for drafting the review report and recommendations. The Task Group gives regular updates on progress to the 'parent' committee to keep all members well informed.

The relevant Scrutiny Committee is responsible for making sure that the task group's review is well focused, timely, and pursues important lines of inquiry. All committee members have to take 'ownership' of the final report and recommendations.

Scoping a Scrutiny Review

In order to be effective, every Scrutiny Review must be properly project managed. This is to make sure that the review achieves its aims and has measurable outcomes. One of the most important ways to make sure that a review goes well is to ensure that it is well defined at the outset. This way the review is less likely to get sidetracked or be overambitious in what it hopes to tackle. The task group's objectives should be as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic & Time-bound) as possible.

The Project Cover Sheet template has been designed to help each committee undertaking a review to think through the purpose of a review, and exactly what the members hope to achieve. A good scoping template is also a great communication tool in helping others to understand what the inquiry is about. Once agreed, the template should therefore be circulated to relevant officers, stakeholders and potential witnesses, as well as placed on the public website.

Tracking a Review

One member of the task group (usually the Chairman) should be nominated at the outset to have special responsibility for keeping track of the review, how recommendations are being dealt with and whether the project is on track. This will ensure that the review keeps to the relevant lines of enquiry and that the committee is able to effectively evaluate the impact of the review 12 months later.

Officer Support

Scrutiny has independent dedicated officer support to make sure that reviews run smoothly. One officer will take the lead co-ordination role for each review. The officer supporting the process will act as project manager:

- Clarifying tasks
- Keeping to timetable
- Acting as facilitator
- Advising witnesses
- Reflecting back to members the thinking and ideas being developed and evidence gathered

Rationale

These are the key reasons for doing the review. A clear rationale will also help to identify the indicators of success. Rationales are likely to include some of the following:

- The issue has been identified as an area of concern for the public (through area committees, surgeries, citizen panel, questionnaires etc)
- It relates to a poor performing service (evidenced through performance indicators, frequent complaints etc)
- The service is considered important by the community (through surveys, panels etc)
- High level of user dissatisfaction with service
- Public interest covered in the local media
- High level of budgetary commitment/overspends to the service/policy area
- Council corporate priority
- Central government priority area
- Issue has been raised by external audit
- New government guidance or legislation
- Opportunity to make a distinctive impact

Purpose of Review/Objective

It is essential that the scoping process clearly identifies exactly what the review hopes to achieve. Distinguish between what will be included and achievable and that which may be desirable but will not be covered by this project. Possible examples are:

1. To identify what is being done and what the potential barriers are
2. To explore existing initiatives and determine if they are appropriately joined up
3. To review performance indicators relating to ……
4. To compare our policies for ….. with those of a similar authority
5. To assess the environmental/social impacts
6. Benchmark current service provision
7. To find out community views on …
8. To identify gap between provision and need surrounding the issue

Indicators of Success

Each review should have two or three key indicators which could be used to tell you if the review is achieving its purpose. Having an idea in advance of what a successful review would look like is useful to show what the review is actually about while helping to avoid straying off the topic. Success indicators could include:

- Having identified local needs
- Having evaluated alternative ways of doing ….
- Having developed an awareness of any contractual, economic, legal or structural constraints on Council's approach
- Having formulated recommendations for the Cabinet
- Having identified how a service could be improved

Methodology/Approach

It is important to think about what types of enquiry will be used to gather evidence and why. This is likely to be influenced by several factors including the actual topic itself, the need for expert advice/training and how easy it is likely to be to gather information. Possible approaches to research are:

- Issuing Questionnaires and surveys
- Mystery Shopping
- Site visits/job shadows/observations
- Document Analysis
- Interviewing Experts/Officers
- Facilitating open meetings (public and partners)
- Comparison with other local authorities and organisations
- Auditing Performance against objectives
- Joined up working with area committees, neighbourhood forums etc
- Commissioning Research
- Workshops/focus groups
- Seminars/public meetings

Witnesses/Experts

An important part of the scoping process is deciding who should be interviewed. Cabinet members and senior officers are required by the Constitution to attend to explain why decisions have been made, performance, etc. It is possible that more evidence could be gathered by visiting people for an informal discussion but it is important to balance this against the openness and transparency necessary for good scrutiny. Possible witnesses are:

- Senior managers/Chief officers
- Service users
- Cabinet members
- External partners and business representatives
- Voluntary and Community groups
- Professional experts

Publicity

Publicity is important when engaging the public and is key to the influencing role of Scrutiny. Not only is it necessary to consider the best ways to publicise the meetings but also how the results of the review are to be published. Things to consider are:

- Is the issue something which will interest the public? Should a public meeting be held?
- Should a newspaper advert be taken out to request public participation/publicise review?
- Radio Interview to raise awareness?
- Publicity leaflet/flier?

Resource Requirements

It is important to estimate (as far as possible) the amount of time in person hours that will be required for the review in order to manage the work programme effectively. Additional expenditure such as expenses, publicity and research commission costs should also be taken into account.

Barriers/Risks

The project needs to be achievable in the timescales that have been set and Scrutiny must be able to make a difference for the project to add value.

Are there any potential risks to the project?
Are there any issues or obstacles that could threaten the projects?

Time Management

A vital part of project management is specifying timescales for when things should be done.

- Projected Start Date
- Meeting Frequency
- Draft Report Deadline
- Projected Completion Date

Questions to consider are:

- How frequently does the task group need to meet?
- What are the key deadlines to be met?
- Who needs to see any analysis and who needs to contribute to the report?
- At what points will there be progress reports to the committee?

Documents for Analysis

It can be beneficial to ascertain which documents may need to be considered before writing any report. Documents can take a variety of forms:

- Government guidance or legislation
- Best Value Performance Plan
- Relevant service plan for departments
- Performance indicators
- Evidence from consultation exercises
- Budgetary data and activity
- Minutes of meetings
- Independent research articles and papers

Site Visits

Visits to observe how things are working elsewhere can be very instructive and can help the group collect evidence from expert witnesses or service users. It is always important to advise people that information collected will ultimately be published in a public report. There is also the possibility of using "mystery shoppers" to provide a 'reality check' on theoretical claims.

Methods of Collecting Evidence

If there are interest groups or stakeholders whose views the group want to hear, it will be necessary to determine the best way of gathering information from them. Possibilities are:

- Consultation with hard to reach groups possibly led by a specialist advisor
- Focus groups
- Public meetings
- Questionnaires

It is important to ensure that the review provides a balanced view of the issue.

Tracking and Evaluation

Scrutiny's role is to influence others to take action; therefore, it is important to decide at the outset when the review should be evaluated to gauge the effectiveness of the response to its recommendations. This is usually 12 months after the review is published.

What changes have been made as a result of the review is the most common way of assessing effectiveness. This can be done by questioning portfolio holders and relevant officers to determine what has been delivered. Other possibilities are to invite a witness or stakeholder to report back to the committee on their recommendations and actions taken.

HOW TO SCOPE A SCRUTINY REVIEW

Review Title: *Please include a reference for tracking purposes.*	The project needs a working name that relates to the topic. The final report can have a catchy title which will grab attention.	**Review Reference Number:** Helps track the review
Type of Review:	Details of the parent Scrutiny Committee to identify who commissioned the review. IE Scrutiny Review for ……………………	
Task Group Members:	Names of all those seconded to the Task Group and name of the chairman of the group	
Officer Support	Scrutiny has independent dedicated officer support to make sure that reviews run smoothly. One officer will take the lead co-ordination role for each review. The officer supporting the process will act as a project manager: clarifying tasks and keeping to timetable: acting as facilitator and advisor to witnesses; and reflecting back to members on an ongoing basis the thinking and ideas being developed, based on evidence gathered.	
Rationale	Each review needs to have a clear rationale behind it, which explains why the review is important to the Scrutiny Committee. A clear rationale will also help clarify the indicators of success. Possible reasons could be: Identified by members as key issue for public Poor performing service Service considered important by community Public interest covered in local media	
Review Aims & Objectives: *Please include the main priorities of the project, etc.*	It is essential that the scoping process clearly identifies exactly what the Review hopes to achieve. Distinguish between what will be included and achievable and that which may be desirable but will not be covered by this project. Possible examples are: • To identify what is being done and what the potential barriers are • To explore existing initiatives and determine if they are appropriately joined up • To review performance indicators relating to …… • To compare our policies for ….. with those of a similar authority • To assess the environmental/social impacts • Benchmark current service provision	
Link with Corporate / Divisional / Service Aims and Priorities:	Explain how the review is linked to corporate aims and priorities.	

Indicators of Success:	For each review identify two or three key indicators which will be used to tell you if the review is achieving its purpose. Having an idea in advance of what a successful review would look like can help to show what the review is really about. It can also help to avoid the potential danger of straying off the topic. Indicators of success are likely to include: • Will have identified local needs and wishes • Will have evaluated alternative ways of doing …… • Become aware of any contractual, economic, legal or structural constraints on council's approach • Formulated recommendations for the Cabinet • Will have identified how a service could be improved
Methodology/Approach What type of enquiry will be used to gather evidence	This requires consideration as to the kind of enquiry which will be most suitable for this review/ This will be influenced by several factors including the actual topic itself, the need for expert advice or training, and the ease or difficulty with which certain methods can be pursued. Same ways of working are listed below: Desk based review of papers Site visits/observations Comparisons with other authorities Process mapping/client journeys Workshops/focus groups Seminars/public meetings Commissioned research Interviewing officers Calling witnesses/experts to give evidence
Witnesses/Experts	An important part of the scoping process includes deciding what people should be asked for interview. Cabinet members and officers are required by the Constitution to attend to explain decisions, the extent to which actions taken implement council policy, and their performance. Other people may be invited to discuss issue of local concern and /or answer questions but are not required to attend. It may be more beneficial to visit people for an informal chat; however this should be balanced against Scrutiny remaining open, public and transparent.
Evidence Sources for Documents	Part of the scoping process is to determine which sort of documents may need to be considered before writing any report, and can take a variety of forms. Government legislation Best Value Performance Plan Relevant service plans for service groups Relevant Performance Indicators Budgetary data and activity Minutes of meetings Independent research and papers It is important to consider if there are stakeholders or interest groups whose views need to be heard and considering the best way to collect evidence from them – focus groups/questionnaires/public meeting etc
Site Visits	The use of site visits to observe how things work elsewhere/the use of mystery shoppers

Publicity Requirements	Publicity is a key component to the influencing role that Scrutiny plays in the political process. It is therefore also worth thinking about how the results of the Review once it has been completed will be made public? Possibilities are : Fliers/leaflets/radio broadcast/press-release
Personnel Resources:	List people involved in Task Group Project Sponsor Project Leader Project Team Members
Other Resources Requirements: *Including financial*	Person days and expenditure Witness expenses Commissioning of research Estimate the amount of time in person hours the review is likely to take so the Scrutiny Officers can manage a work programme effectively.
Review implications / impacts / risks: *Consider financial, planning, social, economic, environmental, health and safety, legal, service provision, procurement etc.*	Provide explanation of why topic has been chosen for Scrutiny Review, implications if matters do not change covering budget overspends/high level of budget commitment, government guidance/legislation, impact in health/society etc.
Milestones during Implementation:	Set timescales for when various parts of project should be completed – what will be done, by how and when. E.g. Projected start date Meeting frequency Draft report deadline Projected completion date When to evaluate and gauge effectiveness of recommendations
Project Monitoring Arrangements: Methods and timescales	Usually a review is assessed on its effectiveness by finding out what changes have been made as a result. This is usually established by questioning the Cabinet member on the extent to which the response they gave has actually been delivered. Another option are inviting a witness or stakeholder group for questioning This evaluation may lead to further action by the Scrutiny Committee.
Project Amendments:				
Cover Sheet Completed by: *(Name and Signature)*		Date	
Project Approved by: *(Name and Signature)*		Date:	