

ACTIVITY

Why scrutiny matters

Effective outcomes from scrutiny – A quick quiz!

Your task

Read the four examples below. For each:

- Identify which of the two statements about scrutiny processes is accurate. Mark the pairs true and false.
- Decide (invent) an outcome from this scrutiny activity which could be regarded as a successful outcome.

1. A decision of the executive (cabinet) has been called-in, which concerns closure of a library branch and reduced opening hours in others. It is argued this is not in line with the corporate plan and budget.

- The scrutiny committee can reverse the decision of the executive
- The scrutiny committee can question the relevant member of the executive and staff, and recommend the executive reconsider its decision

2. A scrutiny review is planned into discouraging anti-social behaviour in the locality. It is planned to involve the Police in this as well as council services.

- The review can make recommendations for action by the council and the Police
- The review can only make recommendations for action by the council

3. The scrutiny committee receives quarterly year reports on performance information

- The scrutiny committee can question and hold to account the executive member for the general performance of the service
- The scrutiny committee can only question specific decisions of the executive

4. The scrutiny committee wants to contribute to the development of the environmental services strategy

- The scrutiny committee should only comment on strategies put forward by the executive
- The scrutiny committee can investigate and promote its own ideas for strategies

5. You are informed that a scrutiny review is taking place on a topic that enthuses you and you are interested in participating in the exercise

- You say nothing and wait for the next full council meeting where members are appointed to Task and Finish Groups.
- You inform both your Group Leader and the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers of your interest in the exercise. They then inform the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee of the Member interest, who will ultimately make a decision on who will participate in the review.

6. You wish to propose an item for scrutiny / review:

- You contact the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers and other relevant officers to complete a scoping document outlining the terms of the review and refer this to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for discussion.
- You ask an existing Task and Finish Group to review the matter to save time and resources (after all, the Group is already up and running!)

7. You are undertaking a scrutiny exercise and wish to invite a relevant Officer to a meeting to answer questions about the subject being reviewed.

- You ask the Officer to attend with no prior notice. After all they should know their subject and you know exactly what you want to ask
- You ask the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer to invite the Officer to the next meeting and provide him / her with a list of questions at least 5 working days before the meeting.

Author: Jo Dungey, Local Government Information Unit
(With a few contributions from Helen Saunders and Jess Bayley)