

COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION

What is the Councillor Call for Action?

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) has been introduced by the government to strengthen the role of the ward councillor. The CCfA is a process for a councillor to act on behalf of residents to resolve a local issue, acting as a last resort for people who cannot get issues resolved through any other means.

1.1 Key points from guidance

IDeA and Centre for Public Scrutiny joint guidance has been published on CCfA¹, and came into force on 1 April 2009. Main points from this guidance are reproduced below.

- 🔍 The councillor call for action gives ward members powers to respond directly to local need and be a champion for local concerns, providing members with the opportunity to ask for discussions at scrutiny committees on issues where local problems have arisen and where other methods of resolution have been exhausted.
- 🔍 CCfA should not be regarded as merely a “scrutiny process”. Being able to use it effectively will require councils to consider making improvements to a wider range of council functions, including support for councillors’ ward work, the complaints process, call-in, petitions and others.
- 🔍 CCfA will be a means of “last resort” in a broad sense, with issues being raised at committee after other avenues have been exhausted. As such, the process should make it easier for issues that would benefit from scrutiny consideration to rise to the surface, and for those issues which are best dealt with through other means to be signposted accordingly.
- 🔍 CCfA is subject to certain exclusions – including matters which are being dealt with under an authority’s complaints process, and issues/complainants which can be described as “vexatious”, “persistent”, “unreasonable” or “discriminatory”.

The successful operation of CCfA will rely on several broad principles being recognized, and supported, in local authorities. These principles are:

- 🔍 transparency in decision-making, and the involvement of scrutiny in the decision-making process at some level;
- 🔍 a willingness to identify mistakes and shortcomings, and a recognition of the need to resolve problems through discussion;
- 🔍 an understanding (among senior officers and executive members in particular) of the role that scrutiny can play to help a council to improve its services;
- 🔍 an understanding, and a wish to bolster and support, the role that ward councillors play as champions and leaders of their communities.

1.2 What this document is for

This protocol is to help members to decide what should be identified as a CCfA.

¹ Councillor Call for Action – Best Practice Guidance. Feb 2009. <http://www.cfps.org.uk/what-we-do/publications/cfps-general/?id=92>

1.3 The CCfA process

Using the process, councillors can identify issues of local concern and act with and on behalf of the community to resolve those issues.

Councillor checklist for a CCfA²

Councillors should use this checklist when considering whether an issue should be taken forward as CCfAs.

Reject if it is any of the following:

- 🔍 an excluded matter (these are covered by legislation but in essence include planning and education appeals and any matter where an alternative avenue to resolve the issue is available);
- 🔍 it is, or has stemmed from, a vexatious, persistent, unreasonable or discriminatory issue/complainant;
- 🔍 the subject of an ombudsman complaint or other official complaints procedure;
- 🔍 a recent topic for scrutiny

🔍 **Accept** if it is:

- 🔍 an issue of genuine local concern;
- 🔍 there are no other/further avenues for it to be addressed; and
- 🔍 you believe that this is the most appropriate way to deal with it.

🔍 **If accepted, then...**

- 🔍 Discuss with other ward councillors (check they haven't rejected it and if they can help).
- 🔍 Log the issue with the Scrutiny team and seek guidance.
- 🔍 Take steps to resolve the issue through existing mechanisms such as liaising with officers, partners, county and parish councillors.

If the issue is then resolved, inform resident and Scrutiny of the outcome and the steps taken, including any difficulties or learning points.

If unresolved, refer to Scrutiny Support Officer/**Head of Legal, Democratic and Regulatory Services**.

1.4 Scrutiny and CCfA

At this point, a possible CCfA will be referred to the appropriate forum as to whether/when the item will be considered, timescales and so on. This is likely to be one of three main forums:

² Adapted from Tunbridge Wells' and Worcestershire's CCfA protocols

- i) regular agenda setting meetings of the two Overview and Scrutiny Committees (Internal Performance and/or Public Services) – chair/vice chair of each committee, party spokespeople, lead officer and Scrutiny Support Officer)
- ii) the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Group (chairs and vice chairs of both committees, lead officers and the Scrutiny Support Officer) – for an issue which requires joint scrutiny.

It is anticipated that any CCfA which will be considered by scrutiny will be taken to the next suitable forum (i) or (ii) above) for consideration, and if taken to a full scrutiny meeting, the next available meeting.

Any recommendations arising from discussion at scrutiny should be referred to the Executive in the usual way.

Appendix - list of services/areas which SADC provides which could be scrutinised

- 🔍 Housing/homelessness
- 🔍 Finance and benefits
- 🔍 General policy and strategy
- 🔍 Markets
- 🔍 Public conveniences
- 🔍 Parking
- 🔍 Cemeteries
- 🔍 Licensing
- 🔍 Emergency planning
- 🔍 Health and safety
- 🔍 Planning, development control, conservation
- 🔍 Community safety/town centre management
- 🔍 Leisure, arts, culture and sports
- 🔍 Parks and open spaces
- 🔍 Landscape/trees
- 🔍 Environmental health, health promotion
- 🔍 Environmental policy
- 🔍 Street cleaning, clearing abandoned cars/fly tipping, cleaning graffiti
- 🔍 Collecting household waste
- 🔍 Recycling
- 🔍 Support to local economy
- 🔍 Running elections
- 🔍 Equalities
- 🔍 Communications
- 🔍 IT
- 🔍 Working in partnership with others (LSP, LAA, parish and county relations)
- 🔍 Managing the council (staffing, structure etc)

SADC can also scrutinise³:

- 🔍 crime and disorder issues
- 🔍 issues which concern local area agreement (LAA) targets which SADC is signed up to

³ Note that every local authority also has powers of wellbeing which mean that scrutiny can look at anything which affects the wellbeing of local residents. However, putting any recommendations into effect will require close liaison with appropriate partners.