



**St Albans**  
City & District Council

# The overview and scrutiny toolkit

2010/11

**St Albans**

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## 1 What is overview and scrutiny?

St Albans City and District Council wants to provide the best possible services to its residents. ‘Overview and scrutiny’ is a process to check that this happens. Councillors take an **overview** of key activities that the council is involved in, and can decide to **scrutinise** particular issues – that is, examine them in depth.



Developing and reviewing policies, making suggestions for change and improvement and examining decisions made, are key aspects of overview and scrutiny. Councillors choose topics to examine which are important to the public and the district of St Albans. The function is the equivalent of parliamentary select committees for UK central government.

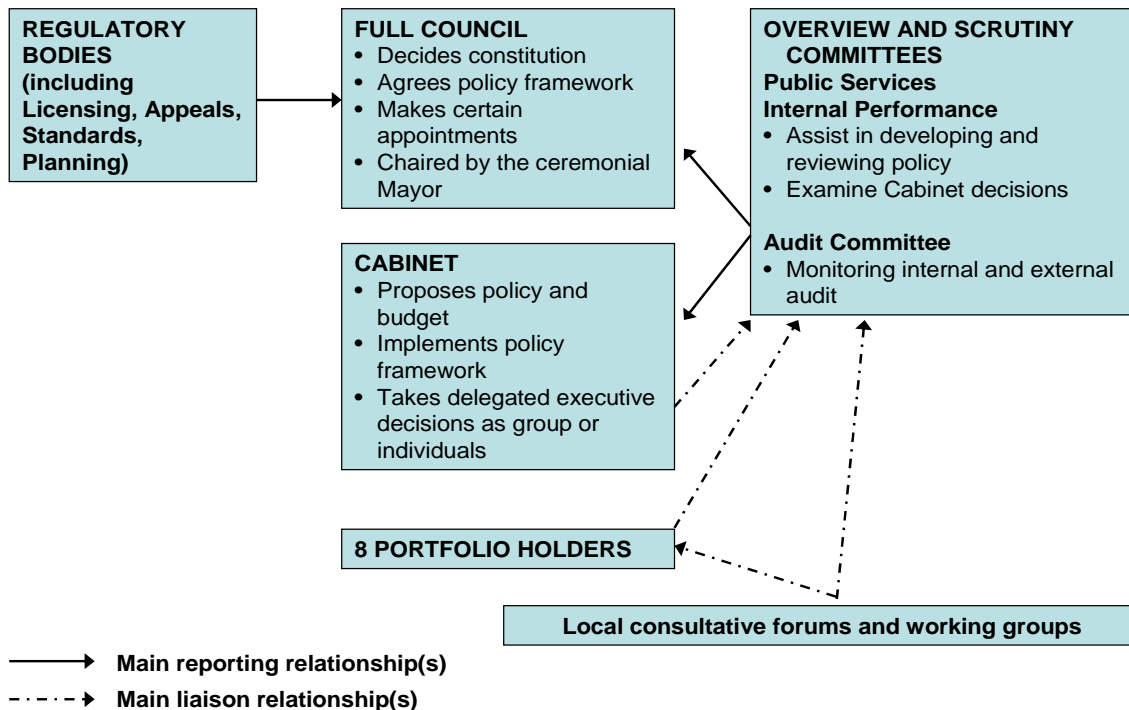
### 1.1 What powers does the scrutiny function have?

#### How does scrutiny fit with the council’s decision making structure?

Councillors who carry out scrutiny are not part of the council’s executive (the executive refers to portfolio holders, who sit on the cabinet, who are responsible for decision making). Therefore the executive can be questioned about its actions, and held to account, by scrutiny members. Overview and scrutiny committees can require cabinet members and council officers to appear before them to answer questions. They can also ask other people or organisations to give their views.

The diagram below shows how scrutiny is related to other aspects of the council’s decision making structure.

## Scrutiny within the Council's decision making structure



## 1.2 How is scrutiny organised? What kinds of issues are examined?

Two overview and scrutiny committees cover all of the council's work:

- 🔍 One, **Public Services**, looks at services provided to residents of the St Albans district, and issues about the local area;
- 🔍 The other, **Internal Performance**, looks at the way the council as an organisation runs itself, manages its budgets, and so on.

Overview and scrutiny can choose to examine issues which concern residents and the local area but which may not be the direct responsibility of the local authority – for example, public transport, health services and police. In this way, the council can examine a range of issues affecting residents in the St Albans district.

Hertfordshire County Council also has the responsibility for scrutinising the services they provide directly – such as highways, education and so on – but St Albans City and District Council can get involved where there is a particular local issue to examine.

## 1.3 How are topics chosen?

Topics to be examined are determined by the relevant committee through their work planning process. It is good practice for each committee to hold a comprehensive planning session at its first meeting of each new municipal year, to decide its programme of work. It should also regularly review and update the work programme. The committee may find it helpful to look at a list of criteria for identifying and prioritising topics; you can find a list of suggested criteria in the 'scrutiny tools' section of this document.

Some scrutiny topics will concern policy development, others how well decisions have been implemented, and others still will examine things which have not worked so well. Whatever the reason for choosing a topic for scrutiny, the questions that the committee will want to ask itself when deciding what topics to cover in their work programme will include:

- 🔍 Is this a strategic and significant issue?
- 🔍 Will it affect one or more section(s) of the population? What are the likely benefits to the council and its customers? Is it of interest to the public, and/or in the public interest that it is examined?
- 🔍 Is there a clear objective to achieve? Is there evidence to support the need for scrutiny? Is this scrutiny activity likely to achieve a desired outcome?
- 🔍 What are the potential risks?
- 🔍 Are there adequate resources available to do this scrutiny activity well? Is there time, and is it the best time, to do this scrutiny activity?

Although a programme of work can and should be planned, the committee will also need to balance its longer-term scrutiny activities with its shorter-notice regular business.

### 1.3.1 Who can suggest a topic?

Councillors (whether or not they are on scrutiny committees) and individual members of the public can suggest that an issue is scrutinised.

**Recent changes in the law make it possible for councillors to refer matters to scrutiny through what is called a 'councillor call for action'.** This means that a councillor can demand that the appropriate overview and scrutiny committee should examine any local matter – relating to local government or crime and community safety – that is affecting his or her electoral ward or division. The committee is then required to discuss the matter at one of its meetings. It does not necessarily have to take any further action but, if it does decide to look at the issue, then it has the power to mount an inquiry, to ask for and get more information, and to make a report and recommendations about the matter.

The power to refer a matter to scrutiny is available only where the matter is of direct concern to the ward which the councillor represents. However, a councillor can refer a matter even if no citizen has asked him or her to do so and whether or not other councillors have given their support. In other words, any councillor can refer any relevant matter, with or without the backing of others.

The council also invites residents and other interested parties to nominate issues that they would like a scrutiny committee to examine. People can suggest an issue either via the St Albans Council website or by contacting the council's Scrutiny Support Officer (find the address at the end of this toolkit). Suggestions must be about something that:

- 🔍 affects people living within the St Albans City and District Council area;
- 🔍 relates to a service, event or issue in which the council has a significant stake or over which the council has an influence;
- 🔍 does not relate to an individual service complaint;
- 🔍 does not relate to matters dealt with by another council committee.

Suggestions are considered when the overview and scrutiny work programme is planned.

## 1.4 Call-in of decisions

An overview and scrutiny committee can 'call in' decisions that have been made by the executive, but not yet implemented. 'Calling in' a decision means that councillors who are not on the executive can consider whether a particular decision is appropriate and, if they so decide, recommend that the executive reconsiders the decision.

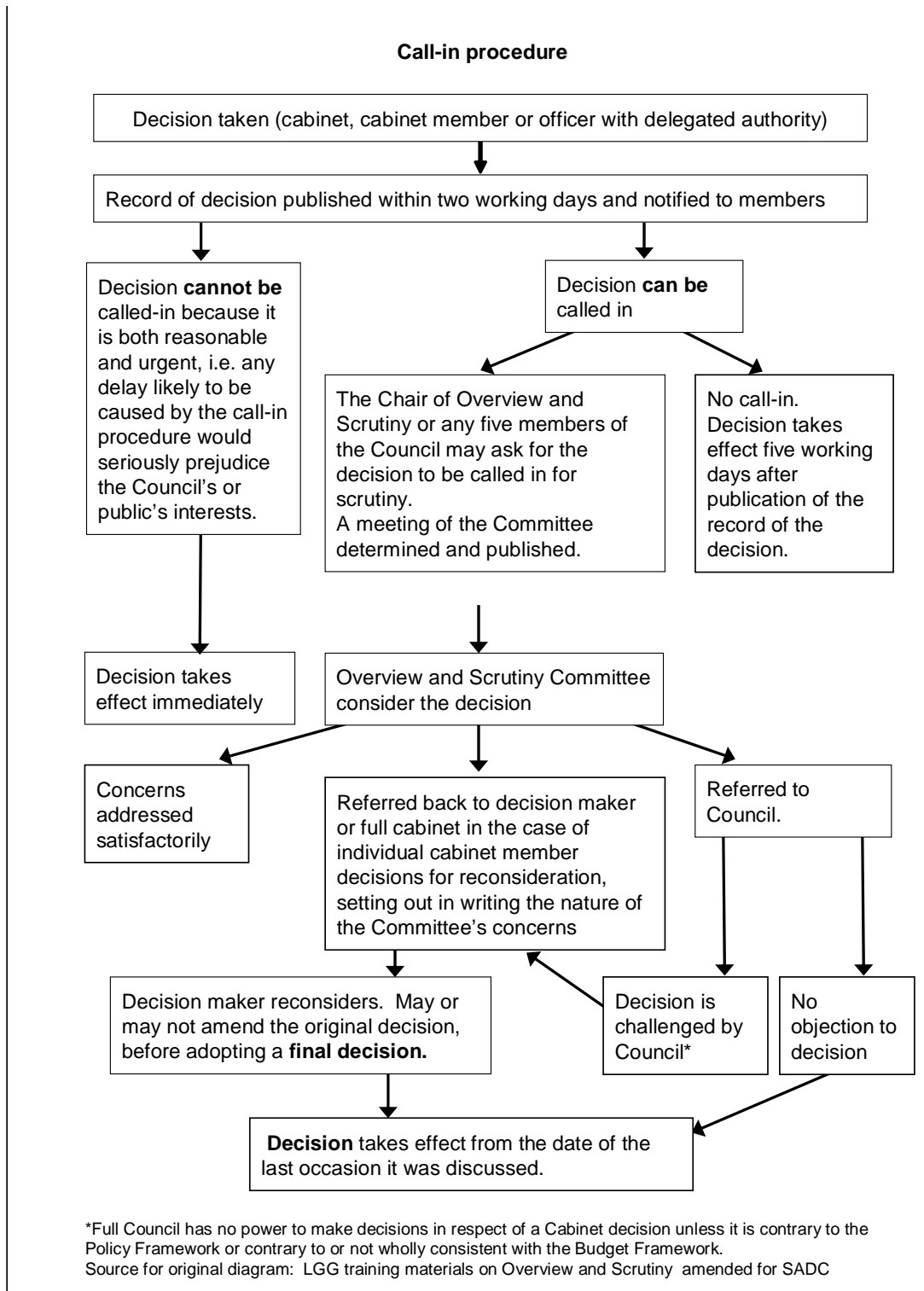
Call-in should only be used in exceptional circumstances. These are

- 🔍 where members of the appropriate overview and scrutiny committee have evidence which suggests that the executive has not taken the decision in accordance with accepted principles for decision making;

or

- 🔍 if the decision made – or about to be made – is contrary to the policy framework, or contrary to, or not wholly in accordance with, the council's budget.

Details and protocols for each of these situations can be found in the council's constitution. The diagram below outlines the basic process for call-in of decisions.



## 2 What are the roles of an effective scrutiny committee?



### 2.1 Principles for good scrutiny

The Centre for Public Scrutiny, a national body supporting scrutiny activity in public services, has developed four principles for good scrutiny, set out below.

#### Good scrutiny:

- 🔍 provides **critical friend challenge** to executive policy makers and decision takers;
- 🔍 enables the **voice and concerns of the public** and its communities to be heard;
- 🔍 is carried out by **independent minded governors** who lead and own the scrutiny process;
- 🔍 **drives improvement** in public services.

These principles were adopted by St Albans City and District Council in a recent review of its scrutiny function.

### 2.2 Effective scrutiny in practice

Research on effective scrutiny in English local authorities has identified the following good practice and tips for success:

- 🔍 **member-led work programmes** in which councillors rather than officers decide the scrutiny agenda;
- 🔍 a **planning** process or body for scrutiny activity which is separate from the main committee business. This helps to streamline the work and save committee time;
- 🔍 ensuring the **scrutiny process is clear** for all involved, for example, by developing and using a good practice guide for scrutineers;
- 🔍 a **comprehensive approach to topic identification**, involving a wide range of sources;
- 🔍 comprehensive **community involvement**, so that scrutiny provides a forum for community debate;

- 🔍 a **wide range of techniques used** to undertake scrutiny activities. These might include site visits, informal brainstorming sessions and conferences, etc, as well as the ‘usual’ committee meeting format;
- 🔍 **evaluating and tracking outcomes of scrutiny**, through the use of performance indicators and annual reporting;
- 🔍 conducting scrutiny reviews around **themes which are relevant to communities** – e.g. community safety, deprivation, public realm issues – or **cross-cutting/partnership issues**, rather than solely council service issues.

Support for good scrutiny using these principles is widely available, especially from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) and other local authorities. A selection of tools from these sources and others is given in the “scrutiny tools” section of this document.

## 3 Roles for people involved in scrutiny



### 3.1 Roles of members of scrutiny committees

An effective scrutiny committee member will have the following range of skills:

- 🔍 knowledge of scrutiny's role in the working of the council and formal constitutional obligations;
- 🔍 the ability to question assertively and effectively whilst supporting, where appropriate, witnesses and others involved in the scrutiny process;
- 🔍 supporting constructive discussion and questioning;
- 🔍 the ability to work collaboratively with appropriate officers, stakeholders, members of the public;
- 🔍 the ability to evaluate and analyse evidence and information and contribute to appropriate, workable recommendations;
- 🔍 the ability to be responsible for the outputs and outcomes of scrutiny;
- 🔍 sufficient availability, time and energy to deal with the role.

The Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA) say that ways in which scrutiny councillors can perform as effectively as possible might include:

- 🔍 appointing scrutiny members who do not hold chair/vice chair roles to chair or lead on 'task and finish' sub-committee scrutiny investigations;
- 🔍 developing individual or 'paired member' roles for scrutiny. In this way sub-specialisms or issues within the remit of a committee can be allocated to individual councillors or pairs of councillors;
- 🔍 selecting topics which interest members and are important to the authority;
- 🔍 ensuring members own their work programmes;
- 🔍 undertaking workshop or review sessions to ensure that all members have the opportunity to discuss their views on what is working and what is not;
- 🔍 encouraging party groups to develop selection criteria for scrutiny, to include commitment to scrutiny and time to give to the role.

## 3.2 Scrutiny chairs

The **role** of scrutiny chairs and vice chairs is:

- 🔍 leading the scrutiny function within the council;
- 🔍 providing leadership and direction to the committee;
- 🔍 leading the effective consideration of issues under scrutiny;
- 🔍 ensuring an appropriate balance between overview and scrutiny activity;
- 🔍 ensuring that work programme is member-led, prioritised and co-ordinated with other council (scrutiny) work and reflects council and community concerns.

Relating to this, **tasks** for the chair and vice chair of committees will include:

- 🔍 working with the lead officer and Democratic Services (Corporate Administrator/Scrutiny Support Officer) to co-ordinate activities and work programme of the Scrutiny Committee;
- 🔍 working with the lead officer and Scrutiny Support Officer to co-ordinate activities of scrutiny working and task and finish groups and the effectiveness of scrutiny generally;
- 🔍 chairing the scrutiny committee in a timely and efficient fashion, following an agreed agenda;
- 🔍 promoting discipline and high standards of behaviour in scrutiny;
- 🔍 ensuring that adequate resources i.e., financial/officer support, training are provided;
- 🔍 taking a lead in:
  - monitoring the council’s decision making processes ensuring that such decisions are consistent with council policy
  - scrutinising activities of cabinet



- inviting members of the cabinet, officers and others to attend meetings of the scrutiny committee to ask questions
- owning and presenting the reports of the scrutiny committee to the relevant bodies within the council
- 🔍 acting as a focus for liaison between the council and its communities and partners in relation to the scrutiny function
- 🔍 actively engaging councillors and communities in scrutiny activity (e.g. through effective use of communication and liaison with the press)

See <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/10931389> for more information on being an effective chair<sup>1</sup>.

### **3.3 Training for councillors involved in scrutiny**

Training for scrutiny chairs and members is particularly useful to investigate effective questioning, different methods of conducting scrutiny, ways in which other organisations conduct scrutiny (e.g. select committees of the Houses or Parliament) and so on. Contact the Scrutiny Support Officer for more information on training available, or the Centre for Public Scrutiny runs regular seminars and conferences -see [www.cfps.org.uk](http://www.cfps.org.uk) . More information on effective questioning in scrutiny is given later in this document.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that you will need to register for the IDeA “Communities of Practice” website to access this publication

## 3.4 Officer roles

As mentioned above, good scrutiny is a developmental process to improve the delivery of council services. Therefore, officers should work with the scrutiny process in an open and constructive



way. All officers have a duty to serve and give advice to the scrutiny function, in the same way as they would to decision makers and elected councillors in general. Good scrutineers should not be trying to 'trip officers up' but rather ask the right questions to improve service performance and, ultimately, the quality of life for local residents.

Cabinet members and officers, when asked to make a contribution to an overview and scrutiny committee, should contribute within the scope of the normal boundaries of the officer and member roles, at the direction of the chair.

### 3.4.1 How officers might work with scrutiny committees

Officers are likely to work with scrutiny committee members in the following ways:

- 🔍 preparing information for scrutiny members for an overview and scrutiny committee report;
- 🔍 attending an overview and scrutiny committee meeting to answer questions;
- 🔍 being involved in a scrutiny review (an in-depth examination of an issue or policy conducted outside the main business of a committee).

Officers' work will also be affected if the implementation of a decision made by the executive is suspended because scrutiny has called in this decision.

The following members and officers are particularly closely involved in the scrutiny process:

- 🔍 scrutiny committee chairs, vice chairs and members;
- 🔍 lead officers for the two overview and scrutiny committees (the Chief Policy and Partnerships Officer for the Public Services Committee and the Chief Finance Officer for the Internal Performance Committee);
- 🔍 the Scrutiny Support Officer;
- 🔍 the Corporate Administrators for the two overview and scrutiny committees.

### 3.4.2 The Lead Officer

The lead officer works collaboratively with the committee chair to develop agendas and work plans, and supports the chair in liaising with other officers whose input is needed.

There is a deliberate separation between the scrutiny lead officer's role and that of the Chief Executive as lead officer for the cabinet.

### 3.4.3 The Scrutiny Support Officer

The Scrutiny Support Officer's role is to provide support to the scrutiny process, especially in the following tasks:

- 🔍 providing project management support on specific scrutiny reviews (including scoping the project, implementing and co-ordinating actions, ensuring deadlines are met and ensuring that the project is completed on time and within budget (where appropriate));
- 🔍 developing the role of scrutiny, and providing advice to members and officers;
- 🔍 providing support to witnesses;
- 🔍 tracking the outcomes of scrutiny activity;
- 🔍 liaising with heads of service as appropriate.

Corporate administrators schedule and organise main meetings of the overview and scrutiny committees, as well as any call in meetings, and clerk these. They also track meeting-to-meeting actions arising from committees and report these and the forward work programme to the council's Chief Executive's Board

### 3.4.4 Preparing information for scrutiny committees

Any information which is requested by an overview and scrutiny committee should be tailored as far as possible to that committee's requirements. The recent review of scrutiny activity has resulted in a request for short reports (6-8 sides where possible, with minimal use of appendices), and a focus on the topic, scrutiny members' requests and likely questions. It may be that a report can be accompanied by or replaced by an oral presentation. This is best confirmed with the lead officer, Scrutiny Support Officer or others early on (perhaps at the agenda setting briefing).

It is unlikely that an officer's report to an overview and scrutiny committee will include recommendations, as it is for the committee to make recommendations themselves.

## 4 Tools for scrutiny

This chapter contains a variety of tools and templates which can support the scrutiny planning process. Both councillors and officers may find them helpful.

### 4.1 Identifying and prioritising topics

Most authorities have a checklist or filtering system to decide which items should go on the scrutiny work programme. Below are some initial suggestions. Please feel free to add your own.

- 🔍 First, identify a 'long list' of topics at an early meeting of the municipal year. Section 1, below, contains some initial questions which should be asked of each proposed topic. Section 2 contains filtering questions which can be scored 1-5: the items with the highest tally taking precedence.
- 🔍 Then, suggest that brainstorming on section 1 takes place within a full overview and scrutiny meeting and scoring/prioritising work is done outside the meeting.



	Comments/rating
<b>Section 1: General questions to be asked at the outset – brainstorming</b>	
Does this issue have an impact for one or more section(s) of the population?	
Is the issue strategic and significant?	
Is there a clear objective for scrutinising this topic?	
Is there evidence to support the need for scrutiny?	
What do we hope to achieve?	
What are the likely benefits to the council and its customers?	
Are we likely to achieve a desired outcome?	
What are the potential risks?	
Are there adequate resources available to do the activity well?	
Is the scrutiny activity timely?	

	Comments/rating
<b>Section 2: Scoring – which topics should take priority?</b>	
<b>A. Public/community interest</b>	
Issue identified by members through surgeries/other contact with constituents	
There is user dissatisfaction with service (e.g. complaints)	
Issue identified through engagement and consultation mechanisms	
Issue covered in local media	
Information obtained from other organisations, e.g. parish, school governors, partners	
<b>B. Internal council priority</b>	
This is a corporate priority area for the council	
There is a high level of budgetary commitment to the service/policy area	
There has been a pattern of budgetary overspends	
This has been a poor performing service (evidence from CPA/PIs/benchmarking)	
Issue identified through staff consultation (surveys, officer feedback, etc.)	
<b>C. External factors</b>	
This is a central government priority area	
This is new government guidance or legislation on this issue	
The issue has been raised by CPA/external/internal audit reports	
The issue has been raised by reports or new evidence from external organisations	
<b>D. Criteria to reject items</b>	
The issue is being examined (or could be examined) elsewhere, e.g. by the cabinet, working group, officer group or other body	
The issue was dealt with less than two years ago	
New legislation or guidance is expected within next year	
There is no scope for scrutiny to add value or make a difference	
The objective cannot be achieved in the specified timescale	

## 4.2 Supporting data and evidence

Scrutiny works best when it considers a range of sources of evidence and involves others in its work.

A recent review of scrutiny in St Albans revealed that officers and members involved in scrutiny in the past did not think we have involved others enough in the process. The information below may help in developing this aspect of scrutiny in the District.

### 4.2.1 Evidence gathering – types and sources

Types of evidence gathering include:

- 🔍 **background information** through desk research within and outside the council (e.g. county/national research) including service reviews, inspection reports, partnership plans, etc.;
- 🔍 **research and consultation:** survey data, corporate and service-based focus groups, ad hoc feedback from public (e.g. City Forum feedback, residents associations, LSP) and other formal or informal consultations;
- 🔍 **continual engagement and governance processes** e.g. business or interest forums (Chamber of Commerce, etc), City Forum, residents associations, standing/advisory panels, and co-option (could include citizen co-option from Citizens Panel).

All these types of evidence can be gathered from a range of sources, as relevant:

- 🔍 council staff and members;
- 🔍 statutory sector partners such as the police, health, fire, other local authorities and government;
- 🔍 voluntary and community organisations locally and nationally;
- 🔍 residents and other members of the public – as individuals, householders, demographic groups (e.g. young/older people) residents associations, etc;
- 🔍 businesses, whether individual, through the Chamber of Commerce, or geographically-based (e.g. all businesses on a particular road).



## 4.2.2 Evidence and engagement mapping tool

The matrix below can be useful in mapping out where you have obtained evidence after using the questions above.

- 🔍 Aim for a range of types and sources of evidence or engagement. Are any areas either over-concentrated or not covered? Why?
- 🔍 Consider: fitness for purpose; linking with existing mechanisms and data; new methods to publicise and invite people's interest or attendance (e.g. co-opting resident representatives, resident scrutiny panel linked to residents' consultation panel, inviting scrutiny topic suggestions from existing community groups)
- 🔍 Link to the internal or external scrutiny communication strategy.

	<i>Types of evidence</i>			
<i>Sources of evidence/audiences</i>	<i>Background information</i>	<i>Primary research</i>	<i>Consultation</i>	<i>Continual engagement</i>
<b>Internal council (members/staff)</b>				
<b>Statutory sector</b>				
<b>Voluntary sector</b>				
<b>Residents/public</b>				
<b>Business</b>				

## 4.3 Task and finish review scoping template<sup>2</sup>

This template should be used in planning task and finish groups for scrutiny.

<b>Review topic</b> (Name of review)			
Review reference code			
<b>Parent scrutiny committee</b>			
<b>Lead member review group</b> (Councillors involved)			
<b>Member responsible for tracking</b> (Nominate one councillor)			
<b>Officer support</b>			
<b>Rationale</b> (Key issues and/or reason for doing the review)			
<b>Purpose of review/objective</b> (exactly what the review should achieve)			
<b>Indicators of success</b> (What factors would tell you what a good review should look like)			
<b>Methodology/approach</b> (What types of enquiry will be used to gather evidence and why)			
<b>Specify witnesses/experts</b> (Who to see and when)			
<b>Specify evidence sources for documents</b> (Which to look at)			
<b>Specify site visits</b> (Where and when)			
<b>Specify evidence sources for views of stakeholders</b> (Consultation, workshops ,focus groups ,public meetings, etc.)			
<b>Publicity requirements</b> (What is needed: fliers, leaflets, radio broadcasts, press releases, etc.)			
<b>Resource requirements</b> (Person days <i>and</i> expenditure)			
<b>Barriers/dangers/risks</b> Identify any weaknesses and potential pitfalls			
<b>Projected start date</b>		<b>Draft report deadline</b>	
<b>Meeting frequency</b>		<b>Projected completion date</b>	
<b>When to evaluate impact and response</b>			
<b>Methods for tracking and evaluating</b>			

<sup>2</sup> From Derek Bishop, external consultant to St Albans review of democratic arrangements

## 4.4 Protocol for working groups and panels<sup>3</sup>

### **Guidelines for new overview and scrutiny single issue workshop-style meetings**

#### **Appointment of members**

An Overview and Scrutiny Committee will appoint a Chairman and determine outline terms of reference for the Member Working Group.

The Scrutiny Support Officer will advise all portfolio holders of the establishment of the Group, approach group leaders for nominations (on a proportional basis) consult the lead officer and advise all heads of service. In conjunction with the Scrutiny Support Officer, the lead officer will draft the scope of the Group, identify and contact any other officers who need to be involved and draft a timetable for the work of the Group. The Chairman of the Group will invite portfolio holders and shadow group spokespersons to be involved.

#### **First meeting**

The agenda should include the following:

- 🔍 agreeing the draft terms of reference for the Group and submitting them to the parent committee for endorsement;
- 🔍 agreeing the approach and methodology for the scrutiny review;
- 🔍 agreeing a timetable and identifying which officers should undertake different tasks.

#### **During the review**

The lead officer should draft agendas in conjunction with the Scrutiny Support Officer and agree them with the Chairman; identify and supply any preparatory reading for members; and help to identify any potential witnesses.

The Scrutiny Support Officer should book rooms, refreshments and any equipment for meetings; liaise with witnesses/experts/critical friends; conduct research; design any survey to be undertaken and manage any consultation; analyse and present data to the Group; monitor progress and against the original project plan and manage the scrutiny process on behalf of officers.

The Chairman should manage the scrutiny process overall; control agenda setting; follow normal rules for chairing meetings; and oversee the drafting of a final report of the Group.

<sup>3</sup> Developed as a result of internal Democratic Arrangements Review

## **Final report**

Members of the Group should outline the framework; drafting should be undertaken by the lead officer and/or Scrutiny Support Officer; while editing and final approval should be the responsibility of the whole Group. Each report should include a recommendation on how the recommendations within it might be monitored.

The draft final report should be shared with the officers' Corporate Management Team (CMT), members in a workshop setting and all contributors/stakeholders. The finalised report and recommendations to the parent committee should then be approved by the Group.

The final report should be presented to the parent committee by the Chairman of the Working Group; the portfolio holder should be invited to attend that meeting.

Recommendations as agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be presented to the portfolio holder, Cabinet and/or Council by the Chairman of that Committee, supported by the Chairman of the Working Group and lead officer.

## 4.5 Communicating scrutiny

Communicating the activities of overview and scrutiny should be a part of the Council's overall public relations strategy. It helps raise awareness of local government generally, and the profile of overview and scrutiny in particular, which can have the following benefits:

- 🔍 **raise public confidence in local government** by showing the public that decision- and policy-making are open to examination;
- 🔍 **encourage external involvement** in task and finish groups from members of the public, external groups, business and other organisations.

External press coverage of Overview and Scrutiny activities is discussed on a meeting-by-meeting basis, between the chair/vice chair, lead officer, Scrutiny Support Officer and the council's Public Relations team. What might be covered by an SADC press release is agreed at each pre-meeting briefing, and the press are invited to meetings as necessary.

The council's partners are informed about scrutiny as necessary through contact from the relevant committee's lead officer (e.g. if a partner organisation is involved in a specific review) or more generally through St Albans' Local Strategic Partnership newsletter.

Press coverage of focused task and finish reviews is agreed on the basis of each individual review.

## 4.6 Effective questioning

There is an excellent, free, publication from the Centre for Public Scrutiny on questioning techniques for scrutiny members. This can be found at the following web address <http://www.cfps.org.uk/uploads.php?file=56.pdf> or from the Scrutiny Support Officer. Some key points it raises are:

- 🔍 scrutiny needs to remain calm, measured and balanced while demonstrating strong, objective and successful challenge;
- 🔍 use specific question techniques such as
  - open questions allowing free narrative from person being questioned (e.g. tell me about ..., what is your view on...?)
  - open probing ('any other' vs. 'what other' because the former prompts a yes response, the latter a *no*)
  - a mix of probing styles including challenging, encouraging, acknowledging, gaining more detail, 'faking' puzzlement, etc. (see document for more details);
- 🔍 positive reinforcement will encourage further responses
- 🔍 avoid biased questions, leading questions and absolute questions which beg a one word response.

Specific types of question relating to the above points might include:

*What else can you tell us about...*

*That was an interesting response from Ms X, Mr Y can you tell us a little more?*

*You mentioned X – what about Y and Z?*

*I wonder whether you have considered X action...*

*Mmm...tell me more about that*

*I see...*

## 4.7 Measuring success - performance indicators

It is sometimes difficult to know that the overview and scrutiny function is having an effect if activity is examined on a meeting-by-meeting basis rather than over a period of time. The Centre for Public Scrutiny has suggested that “performance indicators” for scrutiny could be formulated under the four scrutiny principles as below<sup>4</sup>:

### Critical friend challenge

- 🔍 percentage of items on work programmes taken from the forward plan;
- 🔍 percentage of items on the cabinet agenda amended through scrutiny intervention.

### Reflecting the voice and concerns of the public and its communities

- 🔍 percentage of items on the work programme suggested by the public, in response to issues raised through surveys, comments or complaints or linking to the Council's corporate priorities;
- 🔍 number of visits to the authority's scrutiny web pages;
- 🔍 number of external people involved in the scrutiny process.

### Taking the lead and owning the scrutiny process

- 🔍 percentage of meetings attended by members at which they were required;
- 🔍 percentage of members involved in training on scrutiny;
- 🔍 percentage of members that have a good awareness of the role of scrutiny and of their role as a scrutiny member.

### Making an impact on service delivery

- 🔍 percentage of scrutiny recommendations implemented by the executive;
- 🔍 percentage of stakeholders who feel that scrutiny has an impact on services
- 🔍 improvements identified by stakeholders as a result of scrutiny.

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<sup>4</sup> Some of these indicators were suggested as part of a CfPS working group – more details can be found at the CfPS website. Others have been developed following discussions with scrutiny members within SADC.

## 4.8 Information for participants in the scrutiny process

The following information should be sent to participants in the scrutiny process, for example representatives from external organisations and/or members of the public.

Thank you for agreeing to attend the Council's scrutiny meeting. Councillors have asked you to be involved because of the knowledge you bring. We appreciate the time you have given up and the fact you have chosen to be involved.

We will:

- 🔍 make you feel welcome and explain the process you are to be involved in, including how the meeting itself is to operate
- 🔍 tell you the background to the review and key issues you need to know about
- 🔍 provide you with documents such as scrutiny reports, terms of reference
- 🔍 ensure you are introduced to the Chair of the meeting prior to the start
- 🔍 ensure you are treated with courtesy and respect
- 🔍 ensure you feel comfortable and supported while being involved in the review
- 🔍 try to help you as far as possible – the Council's Scrutiny Support Officer, Claire Cowley, will be happy to help you.

You can:

- 🔍 be frank and open in your discussions
- 🔍 expect to be treated with courtesy and to be listened to
- 🔍 ask questions of council officers and councillors
- 🔍 receive additional information you need, and that is available, to be involved
- 🔍 expect to receive notification of reports and recommendations of a scrutiny review
- 🔍 attend the whole scrutiny meeting, or just the part which is relevant to you, whichever suits you best
- 🔍 expect to be reimbursed for any out-of-pocket expenses you incur while being involved in scrutiny.

You should be aware that most discussions in overview and scrutiny committees are in public, with potential press involvement, and therefore they are publicly recorded. Task and finish/scrutiny review group discussions may not be, although the result of their deliberations will be published.

The Council's protocol on member/officer relations will apply to all internal witnesses.

## 5 More information

### 5.1 Contacts

This guide was compiled by Claire Cowley, Scrutiny Support Officer, in Legal and Democratic Services. Please contact Claire if you have any questions or need further information.

 [scrutiny@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@stalbans.gov.uk)





 01727 814606

 [www.stalbans.gov.uk](http://www.stalbans.gov.uk)






### 5.2 Web links

Find out more about the overview and scrutiny function by following these links.

-  Overview and scrutiny in Hertfordshire County Council, including health services.  
<http://www.hertsdirect.org/havesay/scrutiny/>
-  Information on the scrutiny function of national government – select committees.  
<http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/committees/select.cfm>
-  The Centre for Public Scrutiny – a national body which supports the work of scrutiny functions in government and public services. Information on scrutiny generally and for national government, health, crime and policing and so on.  
<http://www.cfps.org.uk/>
-  Department for Communities and Local Government – the Government department with responsibility for local authorities.  
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/>

### Information sources/acknowledgements

Information in this toolkit has been drawn from a number of sources including

-  IDeA
-  Centre for Public Scrutiny
-  Wansbeck, Darlington, Staffordshire Moorlands councils (for chairing role descriptions).

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