Overview and Scrutiny

A practical guide for councillors and contributors

stoke.gov.uk/scrutiny
Overview and Scrutiny...a practical guide for councillors and contributors
# Contents

## A  The operation of overview and scrutiny

1. Introduction to overview and scrutiny ................................................. 4
2. How does overview and scrutiny take place in Stoke-on-Trent? ............... 6
3. Role of the Scrutiny Councillors .......................................................... 9
4. Role of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs ......................................... 9
5. Role of the overview and scrutiny team ................................................. 11
6. Developing a work programme ............................................................ 12
7. Scrutinising performance ..................................................................... 13
8. Scrutinising budgets ............................................................................ 15
9. Scrutinising draft policies .................................................................... 16
10. The call-in process ................................................................................ 16
11. Taking part in task and finish and spotlight reviews ............................... 19
12. Giving evidence to overview and scrutiny committees .......................... 21
13. Engaging the community through scrutiny .......................................... 22
14. Health overview and scrutiny ............................................................... 24

## B  Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Scrutiny suggestion form</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Planning a review form</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>Call-in form</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4</td>
<td>Useful information</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Introduction to overview and scrutiny

Welcome to the guide. This guide provides clear and practical information to help members and officers of the Council to carry out and assist with overview and scrutiny activities in Stoke-on-Trent. It also details some of the skills required to operate overview and scrutiny successfully. If you have any comments or questions about the guidance please contact the overview and scrutiny team.

Meet the overview and scrutiny team

Paul Baddeley, Overview and Scrutiny Officer (supporting Corporate Services and City Renewal overview and scrutiny committees)

Mandy Pattinson, Overview and Scrutiny Officer (supporting the Adults and Neighbourhood and Children and Young People overview and scrutiny committees)

The Council’s overview and scrutiny activities and work programmes will place emphasis on making stronger links with the community to help elected members to focus on the things that matter most and on outcomes that make a real difference to local people.

Further information on the detailed arrangements for overview and scrutiny can be found within the Council’s constitution.

What are the aims of overview and scrutiny?

1. Help improve the Council’s (and other public sector partners) overall performance
2. Help the Council deliver the services local people require in the way they want them within the resources available.
3. Engage service users and the wider community in decision-making and public sector governance.
4. Ensure decision-making is clear, transparent and accountable.

What is overview and scrutiny?

Overview and scrutiny forms an essential part of the councillor’s role as a representative of the people. The overview and scrutiny function is a statutory power and a duty. It enables non-executive councillors to hold the Cabinet to account and to influence the future direction of the policies of the council and partners. Its main role is to:

- Contribute to the good governance of the area by monitoring decision-making, standards of service provision and examining policy issues.
- Monitor the work of Cabinet and the work of officers in carrying out council policy through decision-making.

Legislation also extends overview and scrutiny’s remit to take account of public service performance across an area, not just that of the council. Overview and Scrutiny provides an effective and non-partisan way for councillors to investigate the work of the council and its partners.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny, an independent charity that supports councils’ overview and scrutiny functions has set out four specific principles:

1. Scrutiny should provide a ‘critical friend’ challenge to executives as well as external authorities and agencies.
2. Scrutiny should reflect the voices and concerns of the people and communities as users of public service as well as electors.
3. Scrutiny should take the lead and own the scrutiny process on behalf of the public. It is vital that councillors act as champions for the value and potential of effective scrutiny, actively promoting its status and credibility throughout the organisation and among external organisations.
4. Scrutiny should make an impact on the delivery of public services – to do this effectively; councillors should develop an understanding of scrutiny’s position within the corporate planning cycle, timing interventions to have maximum impact on key decisions such as budget setting and service planning.
What does overview and scrutiny involve?

- Providing a ‘critical friend’ challenge – holding the Cabinet and other decision makers to account for their decisions. Councillors can ‘call-in’ decisions which are considered by an overview & scrutiny committee.
- Providing ‘critical friend’ support – working with Cabinet to ensure corporate priorities are met – reviewing the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and service areas.
- Supporting the Council’s improvement agenda by: monitoring performance and looking at proposals and policies and commenting on them before cabinet approve them.
- Acting as a ‘sounding board’ for the Cabinet
- Engaging the public, partners and key stakeholders and the media
- Carrying out scrutiny of external agencies that deliver services in Stoke-on-Trent
- Producing an Annual Report to full Council outlining work undertaken and achievements each year.
- ‘Celebrating success’ – acknowledge good practice and high performance.

2. How does overview and scrutiny take place in Stoke-on-Trent?

Committees

There are four committees:

- Adults and Neighbourhoods (including health and crime and disorder)
- Corporate Services
- Children and Young People
- City Renewal

Each committee consists of 9 councillors. Committee membership is determined according to the political balance of the Council. Each committee has the power to review the Council services provided by the relevant directorate, for example, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee looks at the services provided by the Children and Young People Directorate. It can also request that partners of the Council contribute towards its work.

The committee can appoint task and finish groups that are time limited to conduct focused reviews on particular topics and report back to the committee with its findings. Further information on task and finish groups is provided later in this guide.
How does the committee carry out its role?

a) Performance and budgetary monitoring

Committees receive details of how Council services are performing. Committee members ask questions and seek answers from Cabinet members and senior managers particularly where performance is poor or budgets are overspent. Further details of this role are outlined in sections seven and eight of this guide.

b) Involvement in setting budgets

Each Committee considers the proposed budget for the relevant directorate in December and January. This allows scrutiny to have a view and challenge budget proposals before they are agreed by Cabinet and approved at a Council meeting. Committees will challenge proposals and ensure that proposed savings can be achieved with the least disruption to service users and people. They may also ask questions about ensuring increases in fees and income projections are realistic and achievable. Further details are outlined in section eight of this guide.

c) Call-in

Where councillors (a minimum of three) have concerns or disagree with a decision made by cabinet they can call-in the decision. The relevant overview and scrutiny committee will consider the decision. The Committee will receive details of the decision, and hear from the councillors who called it in and from the relevant cabinet member and Director. The committee are asked to confirm the existing decision or make an alternative recommendation for Cabinet to consider. Further details of the call-in process are detailed in section 10 of this guide.

d) Developing policy

Committees may be involved, if they choose, in developing policy either by setting up a task group or receiving details of proposals and commenting on them.

e) By conducting reviews

Committees may decide to carry out a review. Careful consideration will take place before deciding whether to carry out a review given the time and resource commitments involved. Suggestions for reviews can come from anywhere; councillors, petitions, request by Cabinet, partners, senior officers or by direct request from the public or service users. Task and finish groups
Overview and Scrutiny...a practical guide for councillors and contributors

consist of councillors who volunteer to take part and carry out activities over a few months on an informal basis to find out more (gathering evidence) about a particular service. Once the activities are complete the task group draw up a report (with support from an Overview and Scrutiny Officer) with recommendations that it would like the Cabinet to consider implementing. **Spotlight reviews** are similar to task and finish groups but the activity involved normally takes place in a day. A report with recommendations is written and this is considered by Cabinet in the same way as task and finish group reports. Further details are outlined in section 11 of this guide.

f) Pre-decision scrutiny (using Notice of Decisions)

Councillors can suggest to committees that they look at forthcoming decisions that Cabinet will make. Many of the proposed decisions are within the Council’s Notice of Decisions. Committees will receive details of the proposed decision and if they feel it necessary, they will make recommendations for Cabinet to consider before they take a decision. Any recommendations made by the committee are considered by Directors and/or the Cabinet. Further details of this role is outlined in section 9 of this guide. Councillors (a minimum of three) can also call-in items from the forward plan. The relevant scrutiny committee will consider the proposed decision in the same way as a called-in cabinet decision and make recommendations for cabinet to consider.

To carry out their work, committees can...

Invite / require:

- Cabinet Member including Leader
- Director including Chief Executive
- Head of Service

to attend and explain the reasons for any decision, outline how decisions have been implemented and answer questions around Council policy and performance.

It is good scrutiny practice for people invited to a meeting to have advance notice of the questions that they are likely to be asked. Whilst this should not detract from Councillor’s ability to hold people to account, officers and members will be able to give much fuller and more useful explanations with a little advance notice.
3. Role of the Scrutiny Councillors

**Principal Accountabilities**

- Contribute to the good government of the area by monitoring decision-making, standards of service provision and examining policy issues.

- Monitor the work of the Executive and the work of officers in carrying out council policy through decision-making.

**Key Duties**

- Participate constructively in the activities of the committee under the guidance of the chair.

- Monitor the council’s decision-making process.

- Investigate the basis on which major decisions are taken and ensure they are consistent with council policy.

- Monitor the effect of national legislation on the council.

- Hold the Cabinet and officers to account in respect of their actions in carrying out council policy.

- Monitor the council’s performance, jointly, where appropriate, with the cabinet member.

- Investigate the quality of services provided.

- Participate in reviews in carrying out existing policies and the development of new policies by the council through the scrutiny arrangements available and through group consultation mechanisms.

- Participate constructively in any short-life task groups or spotlight reviews agreed by the committee.

4. Role of Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs

- Provide leadership and direction
- Work closely with Scrutiny officers
- Ensure that work is member led - members lead on developing a work programme.
- Ensure that members have the necessary skills
Overview and Scrutiny… a practical guide for councillors and contributors

- Try to engage all members of the committee
- Ensure that adequate resources (financial and officer support) are provided
- Act as a ‘gatekeeper’, prioritising main work
- Work to minimise common pitfalls that befall overview and scrutiny
- Co-ordinate work with other overview and scrutiny committees and chairs and share learning and experience
- Develop a constructive, ‘critical friend’ relationship with the executive, especially with relevant portfolio holders and relevant chief officers.

Job profile

Principal Accountabilities

- Take a lead in scrutinising the activities of the Cabinet (and Executive), in particular by co-ordinating the activities of the scrutiny committee by liaising with relevant councillors and officers.
- Take a lead in scrutinising the performance of services in carrying out the Council’s policies.

Key Duties

- Chair the scrutiny committee, co-ordinate its activities and take a lead role in the work of the committee.
- Lead and oversee the proper process of called-in cabinet decisions in accordance with the agreed procedure.
- Provide advice to the Cabinet on major issues or policies before final recommendations are made by Cabinet.
- Contribute effectively to the council’s scrutiny process by ensuring the questioning of the relevant Cabinet Member on the development of policy and strategies and performance against such strategies and policies, whether at the scrutiny committee, the Full Council or by other means.
- Scrutinise performance of the Council including as appropriate its partners.
- Lead on planning task and finish and spotlight reviews including the selection of witnesses and determining whether evidence is to be given orally or in writing.
- Lead on determining a timetable for task and finish and spotlight reviews.
• Ensure regular contact with other scrutiny Chairs and relevant Cabinet members.

Some Practical advice on carrying out the scrutiny role:

• Create a user-friendly environment to obtain maximum information from third parties
• Committee members work together to allow team building
• Firm chairing to keep enquiry on line and ensure questioning appropriate
• Concentrate on discussion and interviewing to elicit information rather than gaining information from just paper
• The Committee should prepare, prior to the meeting with the scrutiny officer prior to meeting particularly where there are people external to the Council attending.
• Provide questions in advance to allow witnesses to prepare and respond with evidence at the meeting
• Keep work confidential as much as possible to ensure committee retains control
• Respect for witnesses and recognition of their role and position.
• Decide how you will involve witnesses (avoid an inquisition)
• Don’t use scrutiny as a political forum
• Ensure enough time for discussion of the findings and how ideas might be developed

5. The Role of the Overview and Scrutiny team

Overview and Scrutiny Officers:

• Manage the overview and scrutiny process in liaison with the Committee Chairs
• Provide policy and procedural advice to Chairs and committees
• Compile and commission committee reports, briefings and presentations
• Carry out research and advise on who might be approached to give evidence, advice or opinion
• Liaise with and support those attending committees, task groups and spotlight reviews
• Advise on the style and location of meetings
• Assist chairs and other members to write and present final reports
• Provide advice on whether recommendations are supported by adequate reliable evidence
• Monitor the implementation of overview and scrutiny recommendations
Overview and Scrutiny…a practical guide for councillors and contributors

- Conduct training sessions for officers, members, partners agencies and local communities
- Evaluate the overview and scrutiny process and make recommendations for improvement.
- Produce an Annual report

6. Developing a work programme

The committee sets the work programme.

How do you decide what goes on a work programme?

- Use of performance information
- Feedback from the community (petitions, complaints, ward work, direct public requests)
- From councillors and senior officers

Potential criteria for selecting items

- Issue identified by members as a key issue for the public
- Poor performing service (evidenced by performance data)
- High level of user / general public dissatisfaction with service (surveys / complaints)
- Public interest issue covered in local media
- High level of budgetary commitment to the service / policy area
- Pattern of budgetary overspends
- Council corporate priority area
- Central government policy area
- Issues raised by external audit management letters / external audit reports
- New government guidance or legislation
- Key reports or new evidence provided by external organisations on a key issue

Potential criteria for rejecting items

- Issue being examined by the cabinet
- Issue being examined by an officer group: changes imminent
- Issue being examined by another internal body
- Issue being addressed by other methods (e.g., policy review)
- New legislation or guidance expected within the next year

*It is important to choose the right topics whilst being flexible to take on work at short notice*
The 8 Elements of Work Programme success

1. Be realistic. Start small and add elements if time permits.
2. Make sure scrutiny councillors take the lead in identifying and managing the work programme.
3. Identify some ‘quick wins’ to gain confidence in the early stages.
4. Shift/filter/prioritise your work programme.
5. Select a small number of issues which can be examined in depth.
6. Make sure the issues are of interest to members, relevant to the work of the authority – don’t avoid politically contentious issues.
7. Work programmes that cover 6-12 month periods work best.
8. Ensure that you monitor the results.

Be clear what you what to achieve from looking at something – what information do you want? How are you best doing the task?

Things to consider when deciding topics / items:

- Prioritise Workload - You cannot do and cover everything
- Is it appropriate to work jointly with neighbouring local authorities?
- How can we best involve local people and the media?

7. Scrutinising performance

Performance management is about:

- Improving our services
- Achieving the goals of the Council (and often partners) and the community
- Prioritising what gets done and making sure there are enough resources to do it
- Ensuring local authorities provide value for money
- Motivating and managing staff
- Providing satisfaction for users and communities

‘Taking action in response to actual performance to make outcomes better than they would otherwise have been’ – Audit Commission

Performance management involves:

- Clear leadership from elected members and senior management
- Genuine desire to use performance information to improve the way things are done
- Clear roles in performance monitoring for members and managers
Overview and Scrutiny: a practical guide for councillors and contributors

- Openness about performance, a willingness to learn from mistakes and no blame culture
- Celebrating success
- The benefits and impacts of performance management on service improvements being shared across the authority
- Performance reporting is complemented by self-evaluation and external validation

What is overview and scrutiny’s role in performance management?

Overview and Scrutiny committees receive performance information quarterly. There is a focus on the Directorate’s Quarterly Business Reviews.

Some questions for councillors to consider:

- Are we able to see clearly how the Directorate / Service is contributing on the achievement of Improvement Plan targets and corporate aims?
- Performance information should clearly show whether targets are on track to be achieved or not achieved – does it?
- Is success celebrated?
- Where performance is not on track, the report should provide information to say how performance can be improved – does it?
- Do you fully accept and understand the performance information you are being shown? – if not, ask questions. Would a member of the public understand?

Some questions councillors may ask

- Can you explain why don’t we do y instead of x?
- Please explain the reasons that this approach to doing x been adopted? Did you consider another approach?
- How does this fit with our existing plans/budget priorities?
- What are the intended outcomes of the programme? How is the programme supporting improvements?
- How does the performance this reflect community priorities / community strategies?
- How well do we compare with others (local authorities or other agencies)?
- What needs to be done to achieve target x?
- What options are there to improve performance?
- What are the implications if target y is not achieved?
- What are the implications for achieving target x or putting right target y?

These questions are intended as a guide only and members are encouraged to adapt and supplement them as circumstances dictate.
8. **Scrutinising budgets**

There are two aspects of scrutinising budgets:

- **Budget Monitoring** – Overview and Scrutiny committees look at how directorates are performing against the allocated budget on a quarterly basis. If overspent it will ask for the reasons why and the plans in place to prevent further overspend and the proposals in place to save money to ensure a balanced budget.

- **Setting a budget** – Overview and Scrutiny committees will receive details of the budget proposals for the forthcoming three years and be asked to comment on it, particularly the areas where savings are proposed. The committee will provide the Cabinet with:
  
  - A view on the overall approach to the Budget
  - A view on the three year direction for expenditure and income projections
  - A check that the savings proposed will have the least impact on service users
  - That the saving proposed are robust and are deliverable. Can the savings be achieved on the ground or are they unachievable and result in the relevant budget being overspent?

Cabinet considers recommendations from overview and scrutiny before proposing a budget for full Council to approve.
9. Scrutinising draft policies

When new policies are drawn up or existing policies are revised, overview and scrutiny committees can act as a ‘critical friend’ and make comments on the proposals before a decision is taken. Councillors or overview and scrutiny committees may choose to look at a new or revised policy from seeing it on the forward plan, or cabinet may suggest that scrutiny looks at it before they take a decision to approve it.

Overview and Scrutiny committees will be looking to see if a policy:

- Does what the law says
- Conforms to Government requirements
- Is it what the community would like if possible
- Is it achievable within the resources and capacity of the Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committees have a valuable role in asking about whether consultation has taken place and if so how did it take place, what did it tell us, what changes were made to the policy as a result.

Typical questions to ask

- Can you explain the reasons we need this policy/strategy please?
- Are there any legislative requirements in the policy? If so what are they? How have they been met?
- How will the policy/strategy be used?
- How does the policy/strategy help the Council deliver its strategic priorities?
- How have local people and/or service users and partners determined the content of the policy/strategy?
- How will Council resources and those of local people and partners affect this policy/strategy?
- How will we know if the policy/strategy has been effective?

10. The Call-In process

What is ‘call-in’?

Call-in is a function of overview and scrutiny. It is the name of the process that lets councillors request that a Cabinet decision is considered by an overview and scrutiny committee before it has been put in place. Reasons need to be given to say why the decision should be reconsidered and what decision they would like to be made. Call-in is part of the balance to cabinet decision making.
Overview and Scrutiny...a practical guide for councillors and contributors

The Member Services Division publishes a green booklet called “Cabinet decisions” following each meeting of the Cabinet. These decisions will be implemented five working days after the booklet is published, unless the call-in procedure is activated.

Decisions that have already been subject to called-in cannot be called in again.

Some of the decisions taken will be “Key Decisions”. Notice of Key Decisions to be taken will have been published in the Notice of Decisions publication. A minimum of three councillors can call-in a decision from the Notice of Decisions for ‘pre-decision’ scrutiny.

A decision that is not Key or those taken under the urgency mechanisms outlined in the city council's constitution, are not subject to the formal call-in procedure, but are open to scrutiny by councillors.

How are decisions / items called-in?

Councillors are required to complete a ‘call-in’ form'. The form must include details of why the decision is being called-in. A minimum of three councillors can call-in a decision. For convenience, a call-in form is attached to each councillor’s copy of the Cabinet Decisions booklet.

Any other written information from the councillors who are calling in the decision should be supplied with the call-in form.

Before calling in a key decision councillors are urged to seek more detailed information from the relevant officer whose name and telephone number are listed with the decision in the green cabinet decisions booklet and/or Notice of Decisions.

Councillors are asked to notify Member Services Officers of their intention to call a matter in via the council’s e-mail facility. Advice should also be sought from an Overview and Scrutiny Officer. Details of why the matter is being called-in and what decision they would like to see be put in place will also be needed.

What happens when a decision or item is ‘called-in’?

When Member Services receive a completed ‘call-in’ form the decision-taker is contacted and the decision put on ‘hold’. Arrangements are made for the matter to be considered by the relevant overview and scrutiny committee. Consideration will be given to holding a special meeting to hear the call-in.

The named councillors on the ‘call-in’ form are contacted and they are asked to nominate one councillor to speak at the committee meeting.
Who considers the ‘called-in’ decision?
The relevant overview and scrutiny committee. A decision requested by the City Renewal Directorate will be considered by the City Renewal overview and scrutiny committee.

How does a committee consider a ‘called-in’ decision?
The call-in will be a formal item on a committee agenda. The committee is supplied with a copy of the decision taken, a copy of the report used to make the decision and a copy of the ‘call-in’ form.

Any written information from the councillors who are calling in the decision must be supplied with the call-in form and will be distributed to members of the committee.

The cabinet member / chief officer should be invited to provide any information they wish the committee to consider, such information will be circulated with the agenda papers.

At the committee meeting the Chair will conduct business in the following way:-
1. Ask the Cabinet member (or their representative) to briefly outline details of the decision, and reasons for it being taken.
2. Ask the representative from the members who called in the decision to outline their concerns and the reasons for their concerns.
3. Ask the Cabinet member (or their representative) to respond to the points raised.
4. Allow the committee to debate the decision and issues involved.
   At this point only Committee members speak. The representative of the councillors who called-in the decision and cabinet member or their representative should only speak by invitation of the Chair to answer specific questions.
5. Ask the Cabinet member (or their representative) and the representative of those members who called-in the decision, to make any final comments.
6. Ask the Committee to either:
   - support the decision taken; or
   - recommend a different course of action.

This can involve a vote by members of the committee on which course of action to recommend.

The meeting room will be arranged so that there is space for observers to attend. A copy of this guidance will be available for observers.
What happens after the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting?

If the committee support the decision taken, the decision may be implemented immediately by the Chief Officer.

If the committee recommend a different course of action the Cabinet will reconsider the decision, taking into account the committee’s recommendation(s), and make a final decision.

All councillors who called-in the decision will be informed of the outcome of the committee meeting.

Details of any final decision made by the Cabinet will be included in the following decision booklet and in the ‘work programme’ report to the committee.

11. Taking part in task and finish and spotlight reviews

Public involvement is always welcomed in overview and scrutiny; from attending a committee meeting to see overview and scrutiny in actions or suggesting a topic for scrutiny to look at. As part of a review the views of service users and the public’s views are often sought. Often they are invited to attend a meeting of a task group. During a recent task group on the City Centre Night Time Economy, evidence sessions with interested parties took place in public and were not only filmed and streamlined live on the internet, Social Media was used to gain views and pass on information. This included tweeting meetings and the task group having its own Facebook page.

What are task and finish groups?

Task and finish groups are a small number of councillors who carry out a specific piece of work. Task groups give councillors the opportunity to explore issues in depth and are set up by an overview and scrutiny committee. They usually consist of between 3 and 6 councillors and take between 2 and 8 months. The group can invite other experts to join the group or give evidence to it including other councillors (not already taking part) and cabinet members. The group produce a report with recommendations at the end. Recommendations are considered by Cabinet.

How do spotlight reviews differ?

Spotlight reviews only differ from task and finish as the evidence for the review takes place in a day. Spotlight reviews are best suited when the scope of the topic is relatively small and well defined.
How do we plan task and finish / spotlight reviews?

Choosing the right topics

It is important to consider carefully the topics for review as you only have a limited time. Councillors should consider:

- Why choose the topic?
- What benefits will result from the work?
- How will it contribute to achieving the council’s priorities?

Councillors will look at the topic areas from a residents’ point of view.

Plan the review

It is also important to carefully plan the review and its activities. It should set out:

- A clear statement of the scrutiny topic
- The aim (or purpose) of the project
- The scope of the project – what will be included and excluded
- Any specific concerns or issues which should be addressed
- An initial list of officers, agencies and others to involve
- Timescale
- Questions to be asked of invited guests

Collecting evidence including consultation

- Written information – council documents, national guidance, performance information, other relevant information - research
- Asking questions – inviting officers and guests from other agencies and asking them questions
- Site visits – to see places including best practice elsewhere
- Could include consultation work and / or mystery shopping
- Consulting users of the service

Considering a final report

When the group has gathered all the evidence it needs, they will assess it and reflect on what they have learned. A draft report is written by a Scrutiny Officer to help this process. This helps the group to draw conclusions from what they have learned. The conclusions have to reflect councillor’s views and be backed up by evidence in the report.
Overview and Scrutiny…a practical guide for councillors and contributors

**Formulating recommendations**

Once the conclusions are agreed the group will draw up recommendations. The recommendations need to be **SMART** (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely). The report and recommendations will be submitted to Cabinet for them to consider. The more clear and concise the recommendations and the robust the evidence to support the recommendations them the greater chance of a positive response.

**Following up and celebrating success**

Cabinet will formally respond to the recommendations at one of its meetings and the response will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. If there is agreement, details of the action(s) in place to do it will be given along with a timescale and responsible officer. The committee will monitor the way its recommendations are put in place and keep track of progress.

An important part of the process is to evaluate the review process – what went well – what did not go so well and then to share this information. When things have successfully been changed there is a need to celebrate success.

**12. Giving evidence to Overview and Scrutiny committees / task groups and spotlight reviews**

**What should witnesses expect?**

As a general rule witnesses appearing before overview and scrutiny committees should be welcomed and made to feel at ease – “This is not an ambush” and people should not feel interrogated or made to feel under pressure to answer questions they may not be prepared for. The primary purpose of inviting someone before a committee / task and finish group / spotlight review is to ask questions and gather information. If they feel threatened or intimidated they are less likely to be forthcoming with all the information required. There will be occasions when officers and key stakeholders are required to attend. There is no obligation, however, for everyone to attend.

Notes are taken and these are used to write the final report. Pre-prepared questions should be set to allow time to prepare a response. Councillors can ask supplementary questions on the day.

**Presentations**

Sufficient time should be given to prepare any presentation in advance of the meeting/hearing. There should also be advance agreement on the focus and length of the presentation. Ideally, it would help if an electronic copy of the
presentation was sent in advance of the meeting (especially for Powerpoint presentations). If a presenter wishes to distribute handouts with their presentation, it would help to receive them in advance of the meeting to distribute to councillors.

Questions from councillors

The questions should not be designed to help understand issues, and to enable councillors to make recommendations. They should be designed to look for the facts, figures, professional advice, ‘best practice’ from expert witnesses, and for personal experiences of members of the public and service users.

Expenses

Find out in advance if the Council is prepared to pay reasonable travel expenses. Remember, expert witnesses can also claim a fee, which will be negotiated when the invitation is expended.

Feedback

Gather feedback and views from those attending before committee; learn from their experience. This will help to refine the approach taken to inviting future guests to meetings.

13. Engaging the community through scrutiny

Scrutiny can make a valuable positive contribution to the Council’s reputation and general well-being. An inclusive review of a service should seek a wide range of involvement, for example, a review of libraries should include both library users and non-users.

When planning reviews you should automatically consider whether service users could be actively engaged in the review. Service users can offer specific insight into issues that they have experienced. There are different ways to do this. Focus groups can be useful if the aims of the meeting are clear.

Individual interviews can offer testimony for use in reports and this gives a real face to the policy review. However, these are individual views and may not reflect the wider service and so need to be used in context.

Surveys can also be useful for the right client group. However, to avoid “survey overload” you should consider whether anyone in the Council or an external body has already undertaken work with this client group which can be used. If an authority in your benchmarking family has done a similar survey can you test out their results in your own authority?
Engaging front-line staff

Front-line staff are at the forefront of delivering the service. They have a wealth of experience about how well or otherwise services may be working. They, as with service users, can give another view about service delivery.

Staff generally welcome the opportunity to meet with councillors and contribute to the policy review.

Engaging external bodies

Both third sector and other public and private organisations can offer expertise to a review. There are many partners who can offer insight into how the Council’s policies work for them in practice.

It is worth remembering that they will have pressure on their time. Task groups can be a useful way to gather a lot of information from expert guests in a relatively short time period. This will work better for guests used to speaking in a public environment and pre-prepared questions will make for more informed information gathering.

Promoting a review to engage the public

Whether you can get press coverage will often depend on the nature of the topic: clearly something that is a pressing local concern is likely to receive some press coverage. Press releases highlighting the issue being considered can produce a good public response.

Engaging the public/service users in meetings

When councillors engage with people / service users as part of a review they may choose to receive one or two people informally at a task group meeting or to visit facilities and speak with users, for example, at a library or a local centre. Councillors may want to engage local residents in the neighbourhood at community centre. Furthermore, if the City Council refers a petition to scrutiny, the relevant committee should invite the lead petitioner to attend and speak on the petition at its meeting.

Welcoming the public to committee meetings

There may be some topics being considered at an overview and scrutiny committee meeting that will be of interest to the public / service users. Overview and Scrutiny Committees meet in public and people are welcome to attend. The Chair should be clear and communicate if or how members of the public may raise questions at the meeting. It may be through a written note to the Chair or at
some point at the end of an item a time period is opened for questions. A leaflet could be provided to explain the format for the meeting.

At the meeting councillors and key officers will normally have a nameplate in front of them.
14. Health Overview and Scrutiny

Health overview and scrutiny currently has some distinct powers from the general overview and scrutiny, it can:

- Review matters relating to health and health services including consultation processes as defined by the health scrutiny guidance and relations
- Refer contested decisions to the Secretary of State for Health
- Call for information and evidence from NHS bodies including requiring senior NHS Managers to attend an overview and scrutiny meeting

The powers for Health scrutiny are given to all local authorities with social care responsibilities.

Health Overview and Scrutiny aims to improve the health of local people by:

- Improving health and reducing health inequalities. Scrutiny can ensure local health trusts and the Council and partners are working together to achieve this.
- Reviewing and scrutinising any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services in Stoke-on-Trent
- Having a duty to be consulted on “substantial variations or developments in health services” in Stoke-on-Trent.
- Requesting information about the provision, planning and operation of local health services in Stoke-on-Trent.
- Working with the local LINk (Local Involvement Network) to improve NHS services for local people.

Health overview & scrutiny takes place as part of the work of the Adults and Neighbourhoods overview & scrutiny committee.
Appendix 1 Review suggestion form

Stoke-on-Trent City Council  
*Overview & Scrutiny*  
Proposal for an Overview & Scrutiny Review

Anyone can suggest an issue they would like to be considered by one of the Council’s Overview & Scrutiny Committees.

To ensure that your suggestion is fully considered, please provide as much information as possible. An Overview and Scrutiny Officer can help you to complete the form if you prefer.

Suggestions are submitted to the relevant Committee. We will let you know what happens.

Please contact an Overview and Scrutiny Officer if you need assistance. They can be contacted on:-

- Telephone: 232723 or 233018
- e-mail: scrutiny@stoke.gov.uk
- post: Overview & Scrutiny, Corporate Services Directorate Civic Centre, STOKE-ON-TRENT, ST4 1HH

Further information on Overview & Scrutiny can be obtained at www.stoke.gov.uk/scrutiny

This form can be completed and submitted on line.

Submitted by:

Date:

Contact details

*We may need to talk to you about your suggestion.*
This form can be used by the public, councillors and council officers.

**What issue do you think should be looked at?**

**Why do you think it should be looked at?**

**How would this make things better?**

**Have you contacted your local Councillor about this issue? If so, who and what was their response?**

---

**This part of the form will normally be completed by councillors or officers.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential criteria for selecting items</th>
<th>tick box</th>
<th>Which Great Working City priorities would this project contribute to?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Council corporate priority area (these are listed to the right)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Make Stoke-on-Trent the place to bring business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service ranked as important by Council’s community (e.g. through Community Strategy/surveys/citizen’s panels)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor performing service (evidence from performance indicators)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level of user/general public dissatisfaction with service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public interest issue covered in media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level of budgetary commitment to the service/policy area or Pattern of budgetary overspends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central government priority area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New legislation or guidance (from government or external bodies)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue identified by members as key issue for the public (through member surgeries and other contact with constituents)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue raised by Inspectorate Reports (e.g. GOWM, OFSTED, CSCI, Best Value)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential criteria for rejecting items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue being examined by another internal body (executive, officer group, area arrangement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue to be addressed or has been reviewed as part of best value review within 12-18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New government legislation or guidance expected in the next 12-18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject to external inspection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>related to an individual complaint</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Support and develop existing business
3. Work with people to promote independence and healthy lives
4. Make Stoke-on-Trent a great city to live in
5. Develop an effective and confident council

**Would this project encompass our core values?**
These are to...
Be open and honest
Take responsibility willingly
Show respect, commitment and loyalty
Listen to people and involve them
Value diversity and promote equality
Work in partnership
Strive for excellence
Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Proposal for an Overview and Scrutiny Review

Appendix 2   Planning a review form

PROJECT PLAN
(Develop using info supplied on the suggestion for review project form)

Name of Project:

Aims Of Project:

Project Objectives: (think about key issues and desired outcomes)

Scope: (what’s included: what’s excluded)

Contribution to achieving Corporate Priorities:

Timetable for project:
### INFORMATION GATHERING and COMMUNICATION NEEDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods to be used:</th>
<th>Details: who/what/where – why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Officers/Members/others invited to participate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentary sources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site visits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison or performance information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Engaging Stakeholders (including hard to reach groups)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods to be used:</th>
<th>Details: who/how/where – why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eg, Workshops, Questionnaires, Focus groups, Area Forums, Public meetings Other…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Special Resource Requirements:

### OFFICER SUPPORT:

- Scrutiny Officer
- Others
Overview and Scrutiny… a practical guide for councillors and contributors
Appendix 3  Call In Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Call In Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet Decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for Call-in:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please also tick the

- [ ] Decision outside the Policy / Budgetary Framework
- [ ] Viable alternative not considered
Overview and Scrutiny…a practical guide for councillors and contributors

boxe(s) as appropriate

- Inadequate consultation relating to the decision
- Relevant information not considered
- Justification for the decision open to challenge on the basis of evidence considered

Alternative Decision(s) you would like to see put in place

Called in by a minimum of THREE Councillors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Please Print)</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Monitoring Officer – Is Justification Valid?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussed with Scrutiny Support Team
Appendix 4 - Useful information

Useful web-sites

www.stoke.gov.uk/scrutiny
www.cfps.org.uk

Useful publications

These are available, some as free downloads, from the CfPS web-site at www.cfps.org.uk

- A Cunning Plan? Devising a Scrutiny Work Programme
- Counting the cost, measuring the value
- Measuring What Matters
- Policy Briefing 6: Scrutiny and Local Enterprise Partnerships
- Policy Briefing 1 – Future Challenges for Scrutiny
- Accountability Works
- Pulling It All Together (guide to legislation covering O&S)
- Library Monitor No 7: Community Engagement, CfPS (2008)
- The Independent Minded Governor, CfPS (2008)
- How to win friends and influence partners, CfPS (2008)
- Life of the Party, CfPS (2007)
- Scrutiny Bites, CfPS (2007)
- Putting It into Practice: The Questioning Technique, CfPS (2007)
- Successful Scrutiny, CfPS