

DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES
FOR
SCRUTINY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS
Trainer/facilitator: Tim Young

Members and officers require a complex set of skills and competencies to realise the potential of Overview & Scrutiny. Effective scrutineers must have the ability to understand and interrogate financial and performance information, be able to question a wide range of witnesses, and have the confidence to challenge where appropriate.

A skills and capacity building programme or individual sessions can help both Members and officers to sharpen existing skills and develop increased competency to tackle new and emerging problems – especially at a time when new legislation and processes requires an enhanced role of overview and scrutiny.

My approach is to tailor training and development to meet flexibly the particular needs of an authority and its Members. I make sessions as interactive as possible, sharing information and examples of best practice, to help Members practise and enhance skills and gain the confidence to carry out effective scrutiny.

Methods used in sessions can vary depending on the topic but generally involve participative exercises, group discussions, teaching and handouts.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF SCRUTINY

An introductory session on the fundamentals of Overview & Scrutiny covers:

- the role of Overview & Scrutiny
- the four principles of effective scrutiny
- Overview & Scrutiny processes
- methods of scrutiny
- handling evidence
- handling people – working with other Members, officers, partners and the public
- making sure scrutiny gets positive outcomes



PREPARING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FOR THE 'NEW LOCALISM'

The emergence of the new localism agenda and other governmental initiatives to restructure public service provision, coupled with severe budgetary restraints, present both challenges and opportunities for Overview and Scrutiny.

This session presents an overview of the rapidly changing political, financial and institutional landscape for local authorities and public service providers and the potential impact on the work of Overview and Scrutiny committees. It examines key issues: how can scrutiny rise to these challenges with fewer resources? What should its approach be and how can it continue to add value? What skills will non-executive councillors require to do this to best effect?

The session covers:

- the impact of the Localism Act and the greater fragmentation in the delivery of public services at the local level, in such crucial areas as health, education and policing
- the challenges that this poses for Overview and Scrutiny in securing local political accountability
- what roles and activities scrutiny members might most usefully focus on in addressing these challenges



SUPPORTING POLICE AND CRIME PANELS

The new Police and Crime Panels providing both challenge and support to Police and Crime Commissioners are now up and running in all Force areas. As new bodies, the Panels face a series of new challenges as they work their way through their first full year, some of which are very similar to those experienced by Overview and Scrutiny committees in the early days of their existence.

Having done a number of pieces of work with shadow Panels on induction, further development support and training can be provided for Panels. This can cover briefings, facilitation of team-building days and planning discussions or skills development such as budget scrutiny, developing work programmes and listening and questioning skills. A key to success in providing this support is to ensure that it is tailored to the particular circumstances of Panels and their area.



ENSURING CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEES BUILD EFFECTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

This workshop will focus on the division of responsibilities between Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committees (at the local level) and a Police and Crime Panel (at force level) and what might be needed to make the relationships work well for a local crime and disorder scrutiny committee.

Although PCPs now have responsibility to challenge and support Police and Crime commissioners, each local authority is still required (by the Police & Justice Act 2006) to scrutinise crime and disorder partnerships at least annually. But demarcation may become complicated, especially as a PCC takes over funding of community safety work. The aim should be to avoid duplication and ensure a co-ordinated approach to scrutiny of community safety, at the strategic and local levels.

The workshop will enable scrutiny members to:

- develop a clear understanding of the new PCC and PCP arrangements
- explore how Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committees can help their force level PCP to understand how strategic priorities are being translated into operational action at the local level
- develop ideas for strengthening their relationship with the PCP so that community safety issues can be dealt with at the appropriate level.



SCRUTINISING PROCUREMENT EFFECTIVELY

An increasing number of Overview & Scrutiny Committees are turning their attention to the issue of how they can effectively scrutinise procurement activity by their councils (and also the health service). Driving this move are a concern to ensure that tender specifications capture to the best possible extent what the needs of service users are, and that when delivered contract performance is providing value for money and customer satisfaction. An added dimension here is that new government legislation may well lead to an increase in the contracting out of services and therefore to an even greater need to make sure that service providers are being held properly accountable.

The objectives of the session are to enable scrutiny committee members to:

- be aware of the potential impact of the Localism Act and the Open Public Services White Paper for increasing the contracting out of services
- increase their understanding of the authority's procurement procedures
- develop their understanding of the potential role that scrutiny can play in the procurement process, with particular reference to tender specification
- develop their understanding of ways in which contracts can be drawn up to include scrutiny's rights to information and attendance at scrutiny community meetings, to enhance accountability
- become more aware of ways in which the community's experience and views of contract performance can be obtained
- develop their understanding of the techniques available to challenge contract performance and maximise Member influence to achieve improvements in contract management and service delivery.



SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is the responsibility of the local authority, working in partnership with other public organisations, the voluntary sector, children and young people, parents and carers, and the wider community. A key objective for local authorities is to ensure that children are protected from harm.

Overview and Scrutiny has a critical role to play in securing this objective in this complex and sensitive area of public service, by holding policy-makers and providers to account, by challenging performance and by acting as a voice for service users, particularly looked after children.

This session focuses on safeguarding matters and issues and how Overview and Scrutiny can approach the topic in such a way as to enable it to add value to the work already being carried out. In doing so, it draws on examples available from Overview & Scrutiny Committees elsewhere which have applied themselves to the task of scrutinising their child protection and wider safeguarding arrangements.

The session is a mixture of presentations, group discussions, questions and answers and open debate. At the end, there is space to draw together conclusions emerging from the session to assist with action planning.

Members may also be interested in a companion session (or it can be delivered as a stand-alone) focusing on Overview & Scrutiny work on looked

after children. This focuses on the task of scrutinising how well councils are exercising their corporate parenting responsibilities, again drawing on examples available from Overview & Scrutiny Committees around the country.



THE HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE ACT – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY IN THE NEW LANDSCAPE

Since 2003 health overview and scrutiny has provided a platform for councillors, professionals and communities to come together around the complexities of health and wellbeing and the planning, delivery and reconfiguration of health services.

The Health & Social Care Act represents a major structural reform in the way that health and social care services are planned, commissioned and delivered. The new Health and Wellbeing Boards potentially offer a way for decision-makers to better understand and meet local health needs and to ensure that planning, delivery and reconfiguration of services becomes more inclusive and accountable. Their partners, the new Clinical Commissioning Groups, can potentially bring a strong clinical and professional focus to the commissioning of services, based on meaningful engagement with patients, carers and their communities, which would bring real added value at a time of declining public resources yet rising health and social care needs.

These and other changes provide an opportunity for non-executive councillors to consider how they can best establish relationships in the new environment. The key questions are: how can they be most effectively carry out their role in relation to the Health & Wellbeing Board's work and commissioning (through the NHS Commissioning Board, clinical commissioning groups and the local authority itself)? And how can they, together with health and wellbeing boards, stimulate the integration of healthcare, social care and health improvement?

The session aims to:

- increase Members' confidence in how to carry out their overview and scrutiny role in the new health landscape
- increase their understanding of how they can scrutinise the health and social care services
- support Members in thinking about what an effective health scrutiny programme might look and how to help ensure that health and other partners can contribute effectively to health scrutiny work

CHAIRING SCRUTINY FOR POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Chairing skills are central to ensuring that council meetings are effective. But chairing an Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Scrutiny Panel is not like chairing an old-style council committee. Scrutiny chairs need to draw on a much wider set of skills and expertise – and they need the support from other scrutiny committee or panel members.

The session is therefore for all scrutiny members, including Overview and Scrutiny Committee chairs and vice-chairs, who want to improve their understanding of a scrutiny chair's role and acquire (or be reminded of) some of the key skills, approaches and tactics that enable the role to be carried out effectively.

It aims to explore how chairs can use their skills to increase scrutiny's chances of influence and success and offer an opportunity to do some work on developing and improving the skills necessary to do so. The session will enable participants to:

- identify what makes scrutiny meetings and the scrutiny process effective
- chair meetings effectively through the use of preparation, structuring and management
- use available resources to achieve their objectives
- encourage investigation, evidence collection and assessment
- explore ways of dealing with the problems that can affect meetings, such as conflict, negativity and lack of participation
- frame effective recommendations and follow up effectively

As a supplement or as an alternative to this course, I also offer observation of the chairing of a scrutiny committee meeting in practice and subsequent feedback to Chair committee members, with a report and discussion about how to build on the strengths observed.

IMPROVING QUESTIONING SKILLS

This training is for scrutiny members who would like to improve their questioning skills for their overview and scrutiny work.

Effective questioning skills are central to carrying out scrutiny that can add value to a council's business or how partners deliver services. Knowing how to ask effective questions is as important as knowing what questions to be asking.

Effective questioning needs both good preparation and listening skills, so the session will first briefly cover these essentials. Following this, it will concentrate on explaining good questioning techniques so that committee members can ask the right questions to discover the answers they need. A large part of the session is given over to an opportunity for participants to hone their skills, through practice and observation.

The session will enable members to:

- consider how best to prepare for scrutiny meetings
- develop a deeper understanding of the importance of clear and focused listening and questioning
- develop their questioning skills
- explore different strategies for questioning and when and where to use them
- apply the areas of awareness and skills to the committee context through an exercise, based on a case scenario

As a supplement or as an alternative to this course, I also offer observation of a scrutiny committee in practice and subsequent feedback to the committee members, with a report and a facilitated discussion about how the committee might improve in future.

EFFECTIVE WORK PROGRAMMING AND SCOPING OF REVIEWS

The emergence of the new localism agenda and other governmental initiatives to restructure public service provision, coupled with severe budgetary restraints on local government and other public services, present both challenges and opportunities for Overview and Scrutiny.

Effective work programming is the bedrock of a successful scrutiny function. How can Overview and Scrutiny make the best use of available resources to focus on work areas and issues that matter most to both the Council and local people, in a way that adds real value? Are there 'smarter' ways of working for scrutiny that can deliver targeted, incisive and timely results?

This development session is for Overview and Scrutiny Members who wish to:

- understand the new landscape for overview and scrutiny and how this may affect their work in 2012/13 and beyond
- develop a deeper understanding of the mechanics of effective work programming, including the use of performance information to identify areas that require more in-depth scrutiny
- develop their understanding of the range of ways in which topics within a work programme can be effectively dealt with, depending on the

- importance of the issue, available resources and the timescales within which they need to be handled
- develop their skills in scoping and carrying out effective tasks and finish reviews

The session will enable members to:

- add to and enhance their current skills in deciding which issues to include in work programmes and how to investigate them
- practise these skills through carrying out a scoping exercise on a topic of local relevance

ASSESSING EVIDENCE AND DRAFTING EFFECTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

During scrutiny reviews, OSCs receive information and views in a variety of forms and from a wide range of sources. Faced with a range of 'evidence' of different types – technical, users' and residents' experiences, performance data etc – OSC members can sometimes find it difficult to compare and evaluate this evidence in order to reach fair, balanced and informed conclusions. A further test is to build on these conclusions to develop effective recommendations that can rectify and improve on what they have found. Differences of opinion and judgement among scrutiny members and working under pressure can further complicate this process.

This session aims to address what scrutiny members find difficult about moving from taking the evidence to drawing sound conclusions and framing clear, effective recommendations that command all-party support. It deals with how to tackle the following issues and challenges successfully:

- choosing what evidence to collect – the importance of problem definition and effective scoping
- different types of evidence – whether based on quantitative or qualitative material – and what sort of quantitative or qualitative evidence it is
- the potential problem of conflicts of interest being held by those providing information and evidence
- the importance of being aware of the way in which values are influencing interpretation and assessment of the evidence
- the importance of exercising judgement about the quality of evidence, its comprehensiveness, its meaning and relative value
- the process of evaluating the robustness of a piece of evidence by weighing it up, assessing its validity and estimating its usefulness in informing conclusions and recommendations
- the necessity of testing the conclusions that scrutiny members reach against resource implications

The session also explores helpful techniques for seeking and winning consensus where disagreements exist. To make scrutiny recommendations as effective as possible, it further provides guidelines on what are 'weak' and 'strong' recommendations and how to turn 'weak' into 'strong' ones.

The session will enable members to:

- add value to their current skills
- develop a deeper understanding of how to weigh, assess and use evidence to inform conclusions
- develop a deeper understanding of how to move from evidence-based conclusions to developing effective recommendations
- apply these skills and awareness to the committee context through exercises, with feedback

EFFECTIVE FINANCIAL AND BUDGET SCRUTINY

Current unprecedented financial pressures mean that local authorities are having to rigorously examine their services and spending and make very difficult decisions over the next three or four years. Severe budget pressures often require major changes to the way services are managed and delivered. These changes might include decisions to restructure services and reduce their funding levels.

Overview and scrutiny has a key role here in ensuring that those making undoubtedly difficult financial planning and budgetary decisions are held accountable and use their powers in a considered manner, to best effect.

Moreover, budgets and spending are likely to become more fragmented in future, through the increase in contracts, direct payments and service provision through local communities and the voluntary and community sector. These developments will serve to complicate the role of scrutiny in assessing the impact of spending.

The purpose of this session is to set out for Members what the different aspects of scrutiny's key role in financial planning and budgetary processes are and how scrutiny can add value, in order that Members may become better equipped to deal with the current challenges.

The course will deal with:

- the implications for financial and budget scrutiny in the new local government landscape
- the overall financial management process in a local authority, including the legal and best practice frameworks
- how financial planning and budget setting relates to strategic and service planning and performance review
- how to scrutinise the coherence of your council's financial and other planning processes

- how to scrutinise your council's annual budget/budget decisions
- how to scrutinise and review your council's key spending decisions

It will assist Members to:

- contribute more effectively to the council's budget process in 2012-13
- enable them to link budget planning
- add to and enhance their current skills

DEVELOPING SCRUTINY

Members sometimes find themselves in the position where they have some experience of scrutiny but can't join up all the dots to make it more effective. Customised training can be provided for Members interested in developing scrutiny and tackling the issues that are acting as barriers to improving scrutiny.

A tailored session can set out the four principles of effective scrutiny developed by the Centre for Public Scrutiny, as a basis for enabling Members to reflect on current practice and identify barriers to success and action which will assist improvement in practice. It will enable participants to:

- add value to their current skills
- increase their awareness of the potential of scrutiny
- develop a deeper understanding of the role of scrutiny members
- think about how they might make better use of the opportunities for effective scrutiny
- develop some suggestions for how scrutiny practice might be developed and improved in future

IMPROVING SCRUTINY OF PERFORMANCE

Members often find scrutinising performance (as opposed to conducting a scrutiny review of a particular subject) either dull and uninteresting or too difficult to get to grips with.

This course aims to provide Members with the information to enable them to get to grips with this important element of scrutiny. Through presentations and discussion, the session will enable Members to:

- understand the new performance framework for local authorities
- understand approaches and techniques for effective performance management

- understand the role of scrutiny in performance management & improvement
- acquire more confidence and expertise in scrutinising performance

The session also involves some exercises for Members to practise their skills.

About Tim Young

Tim Young has worked as an independent scrutiny and policy consultant since 2006, carrying out assignments for the Centre for Public Scrutiny (as one of their associates) and a wide range of local authorities and other bodies. In doing so, he draws particularly on his experience as Head of Scrutiny at the London Borough of Camden, which earned a national reputation as a leading edge authority for Overview and Scrutiny, and on extensive networks that he has built up during sixteen years in local government.

Tim has worked extensively with Members across the political spectrum and with officers from different types of authority, across the country. Drawing on this wide experience, he can flexibly tailor training and development to meet the particular needs of an authority and its Members, and provide more specialised support.

He also has extensive experience of the voluntary sector through working in a policy and research capacity for regional and national organisations and as elected chair and management committee member of a national voluntary organisation. He holds postgraduate research degrees from the University of Sussex and is also an LGIU associate.

Tim has written on a wide variety of topics. Recent scrutiny publications include *'small print, BIG PICTURE: a guide to scrutinising public-private partnerships'* (published by CfPS); *'Capital Improvement: stories from the London Scrutiny Network'*; *'The future of holding partners to account – the local accountability framework: a report of a learning event for scrutiny members held by the London Scrutiny Network'* (LSN, November 2010) and *'Budget scrutiny: a report of a learning event for scrutiny members held by the London Scrutiny Network'* (LSN, March 2011).

What users have said

"Just to feed back – this went very well. Members said after that Tim had struck perfect balance between telling them how CCfA works, and facilitating their debate. And my own observation on top of that would be that he kept them to pace and structure of debate very well."

Shelley Burke, Head of Scrutiny, London Borough of Southwark

"Cllr Trevor Jones thought the chairing skills session was extremely good and a 'very high standard'."

Linda James, Member Development Officer, South Gloucestershire Council

"The feedback sheets are very positive, and the role play receives particular praise for being effective at bedding down the learning.... The participants didn't

have any particular suggestions or comments, apart from rating the training highly and wanting more of their colleagues to take advantage of it.”

Jan Youngs, Acting Member Development Officer, Bristol City Council

“Tim provided an excellent half day session both explaining the new legislative requirements as well as facilitating discussion with the OS Chairs, helping to identify key themes, issues and next steps. The Chairs were unanimous in their positive feedback for his effectiveness, presentation style and pace of delivery, commenting ‘very good, very interactive’; ‘very good facilitating’. ‘Many thanks!’”

Alix Boswell, Democratic Services Manager (Overview and Scrutiny), Bath & North East Somerset Council

“Tim’s Questioning skills course provides an excellent mix of presentation and discussion, and Councillors agreed that the opportunity to then trial the new information through role play and feedback was extremely helpful.”

Alix Boswell, Democratic Services Manager (Overview and Scrutiny), Bath & North East Somerset Council

“Very good – dealt with many aspects of scrutiny that I had not previously thought of. Good approach, good facilitating – open-minded and responsive”

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham, councillor

“The feedback was excellent and the Members got a lot out of their day. There was a lot of content to pack into one session but it felt like the Members were gaining a good grounding in the general skills they need to operate as effective Chairs.”

Kay Sidebottom, Member Development Officer, Leeds City Council on West Yorkshire Scrutiny Improvement Programme training day

“Many thanks for your help yesterday which was much appreciated. You covered a lot of material in the time and managed a good balance between information giving and time for discussion. Thank you for your flexibility and care in tailoring the session to our (many!) requests. We’ll seek feedback from the chairs and deputies as we see them over the next week or so but initial reactions were very positive and there are some helpful issues arising that we can take forward in our development plan for next year.”

Adrian West, Performance and Scrutiny Manager, Coventry City Council

“Good presentation and to the point – a good learning experience”

Thurrock councillor

"We have had some good feedback from yesterday's session which we will take forward to decide on next steps and future training/support requirements."

Paul Johnson, Scrutiny and Democratic Services Manager, Hull City Council

"One of the best training courses I have ever attended – very helpful."

"An excellent [questioning skills] course which will undoubtedly improve our scrutiny function."

London Borough of Croydon councillors

"Many thanks as your [questioning skills] session inspired attendees to push for a change in practice and convinced OSC chair that they could 'up their game'"

Julia Regan, Scrutiny Manager, London Borough of Merton

"Thank you for providing the training session [on quality and performance] - it went down well with members with good interaction."

Christine Brain, Overview and Scrutiny Manager, Forest Heath District Council

"Thank you for your very useful session which I am determined to take some learning points from as we embark on a new council with new scrutiny structure."

St John Harris, Overview and Scrutiny Manager, Scarborough Borough Council

"Very enjoyable afternoon...Brilliant course...Need more courses like this, very interesting and informative...Extremely well presented and put across."

Comments from councillors attending questioning skills course organised by Local Government Yorkshire & Humberside, December 2011

"Very well presented, very informative, clear and concise information – well worth attending." "Very useful." "An excellent training session – I hope I'll be able to use the knowledge after 3rd May!" "Scoping exercise was really good and concentrated the mind."

Epping Forest DC and Harlow DC councillors, March 2012

"The work you clearly put into preparing the [procurement] session and your willingness to work closely with Kerry and Lisa in particular, to ensure that the

session was tailored exactly to our specific requirements was key and really appreciated.”

Paul Burkinshaw, Manager of Democratic Services, Basildon Borough Council

“Thank you for all your work with the members over the last few months. I know they have appreciated it, and many of them are putting into the practice the skills you talked them through. ”

Sarah Forsyth, Scrutiny Officer, Slough Borough Council

“Taking account the feedback I have received from Members and Officers I would say that the work you have done for us and with us was fit for purpose - the highest accolade as our members want the advertised sessions to do what it says on the tin – given how busy they are... Members liked the pace and the evidence of your knowledge of Scrutiny and how the facilitation helped bring members out of themselves.”

Solomon Agutu,
Head of Democratic Services and Scrutiny, London Borough of Croydon

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