

Overview & Scrutiny - selecting work programmes

Introduction

Overview & Scrutiny (O & S) is the check and balance to the Executive and is responsible for determining its own programme of work.

The principles of effective scrutiny outlined by the Centre for Public Scrutiny are that O&S should aspire to be:

Member-led

This means that each O&S Committee and Sub-Committee determines its own work programme and decides what evidence to seek. Members take an active role in the scrutiny process, for example by going on visits and taking part in consultation activities with service users, residents and local organisations.

Consensual

Effective O&S works towards developing a non-party political, consensus-based view of the service or issue under consideration, focussed on the needs of service users and residents.

Evidence-based

O&S takes evidence from a wide and balanced range of sources in order to enable them to develop a rounded view of the service or issue under consideration. Recommendations made by O&S should be firmly supported through the evidence received.

There are three key roles scrutiny plays:

Policy review: where a policy or service has been identified for consideration, O&S can conduct a detailed review and make recommendations to Cabinet before final decisions are taken.

Policy development: O&S can play a part in developing and recommending new policies, often at the request of the Executive but sometimes under scrutiny Members' own initiative.

Hold the Executive to account: asking Cabinet Members or senior officers to attend O&S committee meetings provides the opportunity to assess performance of services against agreed standards and, where necessary, make recommendations for improvements. As a last resort, scrutiny committees can require the Cabinet, or a Cabinet Member, to reconsider a decision not yet implemented through call-in.

Overview & Scrutiny work programmes

Each O&S sub-committee decides its own work programme. The aim is to prioritise issues for in-depth work where O&S can make an impact, add value or contribute to service development. Items for the programme are drawn from a number of sources, including:

- Issues arising from discussions with members of the public and other interested stakeholders
- Issues that the committee is required to consider by virtue of its terms of reference
- Decisions due to be made by the Executive (the Statutory Forward Plan);
- Items requiring follow up from committee reviews and recommendations

This checklist draws upon the following external guidance sources as an aid for helping members determine their scrutiny work programme:

1. "Statutory guidance for overview and scrutiny in local and combined authorities" (MHCLG, 2019)
2. "Overview and scrutiny in combined authorities: a plain English guide" (CfPS, 2017)
3. "Pulling it all together: a guide to legislation covering scrutiny and governance in English local government" (CfPS, 2018)

Question Number	Question
1	What is the area of focus for the scrutiny: Is the issue in the public interest?
2	Is the Area of focus on the Statutory Corporate Forward Plan or other?
3	Is there a change to National Policy that impacts or is there an associated Policy? If yes, has it been agreed/reviewed recently?
4	Does it affect people across Havering? If only some residents are affected, what is the impact?
5	Are there performance concerns or is it a safety issue?
6	What impact will scrutiny have on the issue/outcome: e.g. how will it promote community well-being?
7	Is this pre-decision scrutiny or post-decision?
8	If pre-decision scrutiny, this is unlikely to be able to be called in, as Members will have inputted their recommendations/comments into it already.
9	Is it within the Terms of Reference for the O&S Board? Should the matter be considered by the Board or by a Sub-Committee?
10	What form will the scrutiny take: agenda item, topic group, single issue committee meeting, short sharp review?
11	Is the matter better potentially better suited to a call-in or to pre/post decision scrutiny?
12	What information/evidence will be needed and how will this be acquired: audit report, performance information, other means?
13	Which Council Officers and/or Partners will be required to support the scrutiny?
14	Is the item being considered as part of another process - what takes priority?