



South Derbyshire District Council

South Derbyshire District Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee Self-evaluation framework

Introduction

This self-evaluation framework aims to provide a mechanism for the Council to demonstrate the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny and to identify potential areas and means for improvement. The questions posed aim to provide objectivity by asking the “evaluator” to identify evidence in support of their answers. They are asked to consider examples of how it has been used in practice, and what might be done to improve its use.

Self-evaluation can be undertaken by any individual or group and does not presuppose an existing level of achievement. Rather, within a given set of principles, it requires the “evaluator” to:

- demonstrate evidence of achievement,
- identify areas for improvement, and
- highlight potential barriers to improvement

Once completed, the framework will provide a clear picture of how overview and scrutiny operates in our authority. This can then be used to:

- communicate the potential of scrutiny to local communities
- encourage involvement in the process of those being scrutinised
- build confidence of those undertaking scrutiny activities
- demonstrate scrutiny’s value to auditors and inspectors

It is for Members to decide how to use this framework in the future. However, we might consider some of the following suggestions from the CfPS:

- use this as a basis for an external assessment.
- use the framework as a survey to be sent to key stakeholders and use results to develop an action plan
- hold a workshop with key stakeholders to review the framework, using the results to develop an action plan

Key stakeholders might include:
scrutiny Members; policy committee chairmen;
senior management; the public; community groups;
area forums; the local strategic partnership; other
partnerships; etc

This adapted framework is in four sections, reflecting the principles set out CfPS' Good Scrutiny Guide. For each principle there is a set of questions to help complete the evaluation table.

1. Provide 'critical friend' challenge

1.1. Does scrutiny provide an effective challenge?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • invite other Members of the Council to contribute to the committee's work • external reviews - involving people from other organisations • questions circulated in advance, to give contributors time to prepare responses • recommendations are made to Policy Committees and other bodies. There is a high rate of acceptance and implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The call-in mechanism has been used rarely - this is due to the external scrutiny focus • The scope of some previous reviews was too broad • lack of performance monitoring role
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External focus means less likely to be challenging our own policy committee. Exceptions are the budget scrutiny role and partnership projects like that for the Rosliston forestry Centre. • The performance monitoring role is conducted by policy committees 	

1.2. How does scrutiny have an impact?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• reports to policy committees are generally well received and recommendations adopted• This has resulted in further review areas being recommended for scrutiny to examine	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We should continue to develop our relationships with external organisations
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New legislation provides opportunities to work with other Derbyshire authorities - primarily on the Local Area Agreement and the community call for action.• There is less ability for scrutiny to influence private sector companies or external service providers	

1.3. How does scrutiny routinely challenge the authority's corporate strategy and budget?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget scrutiny is undertaken each year and this role is enshrined in the Council's Constitution • Last year's budget scrutiny work led to two separate projects, which are being undertaken in the current work programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No specific challenge has been made to financial priorities, as part of budget scrutiny • There is no challenge to corporate strategy or performance monitoring role presently for scrutiny
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to look at performance against the New National indicator set. Possibly to look at areas of consistent poor performance. • To work with other Derbyshire authorities on a joint committee approach for scrutiny of the Local Area Agreement 	

1.4. Are external partners involved in scrutiny and how are they included?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
<p>Examples:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willington Parish Council included in Transport review, together with DCC and franchisees • Severn Trent Water and Environment Agency involved in flooding review • BT representatives involved in review of broadband • NHS representatives to participate in the health scrutiny reviews this year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The arrangements under the 2007 Act strengthen powers for external challenge • LAA scrutiny will come on board in next 12 months, together with the community call for action
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our external focus means we look at others rather than our own services • The 2007 legislation should create a more 'joined up' approach to scrutiny • The Government white paper 'Communities in Control: Real Power, Real People' will potentially provide further roles for scrutiny in the future 	

1.5. Does scrutiny work effectively with Policy Committees?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reports from Scrutiny to Policy Committees are well received, with the majority of recommendations taken on board. This is demonstrated by the recent reviews on flooding and public transport• There is high-level management support for the scrutiny process and for specific reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Better monitoring to ensure that reviews are followed up and/or that policy committees report back, to complete the loop on reviews• Increased liaison with policy committees on future reviews for the work programme
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are other dimensions to scrutiny that presently are not utilised at South Derbyshire. These include performance monitoring and policy development. It is acknowledged that policy committees undertake the performance monitoring role.	

2. Reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities

2.1. How is the work of scrutiny informed by the public?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Several review areas have been influenced by the public and parish councils - particularly the public transport and broadband reviews.• This has resulted in lobbying, based on public responses to press releases and inviting parish council representatives to contribute at O&S Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raise the profile of scrutiny, possibly by making presentations to Area Forums or the LSP.• Seek to promote scrutiny by revising our section of the Council's website
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Previous efforts to engage the public on the broadband review were successful. This opportunity, using the press and other publicity could be developed and used for other review areas• The next level would involve seeking public input, to shape the review areas on the future work programme	

2.2. How does scrutiny make itself accessible to the public?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meetings are held 'in public'• Press releases seeking feedback on a review area, to raise interest.• press attendance and coverage at several meetings over the last year.• Now taking meetings out into the community, using other venues than the Council Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scrutiny publications• Attendance at Area Forums
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The subject matter under consideration is the key to attracting public interest. Targeting reviews on subject areas that are of public concern should generate interest in and attendance at scrutiny.	

2.3. How does scrutiny communicate?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny is well established in the Council and makes an Annual report to Full Council. • The Minutes of every Scrutiny meeting are submitted to Council, with the opportunity for Members' questions on them. • On relevant reviews, invites are extended to all Members, or e.g. specific policy chairmen to attend. • External scrutiny lends itself to working with partners in all sectors. • The involvement of CMT and Heads of Service generates high-level officer awareness of the scrutiny function and its work programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicity internally- particularly to raise awareness for other Officers • Use the Area Forums to reach the wider community and parish councils • Involve the LSP to reach other partner sectors.
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	
<p>Scrutiny of the LAA will give new opportunities for working with partners. This is likely to be with other Derbyshire authorities through an informal joint committee approach.</p>	

3. Take the lead and own the scrutiny process

3.1. Does scrutiny operate with political impartiality?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decisions are generally made without a formal vote – a consensus is reached.• There are no group meetings prior to scrutiny – the party whip is not used.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue the self-scrutiny approach. Perhaps a good way of doing this is to look at some form of external assessment of how we deliver scrutiny at South Derbyshire.
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Political impartiality has not been an issue• Engaging all Members of the Committee to ensure the ‘consensus’ approach is maintained. This is best demonstrated through pre-circulation of scoping documents, which all Members have an input to, before discussing formally.	

3.2. Does scrutiny have ownership of its own work programme?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Committee agrees its work programme at the start of the municipal year and reviews the work programme at each meeting.• A consensus is reached on the scope of each review area, before the matter is determined formally in Committee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is a need to ensure capacity within the work programme, to enable scrutiny to undertake responsive reviews, should issues arise mid-year.
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Managing expectations and being realistic on the likely outcomes from external scrutiny. Members and others may become disillusioned otherwise.	

3.3. Do scrutiny members consider that they have a worthwhile and fulfilling role?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members invited to lead on specific review projects, of interest to them. This is a section best completed by Members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The new Scrutiny areas, stemming from the 2007 Act and the Government White Paper, give the potential for additional work areas and responsibilities.
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

3.4. Is there a constructive working partnership with Policy Committees and Officers including support arrangements for scrutiny?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-referral of items between policy committees and scrutiny. • Officer support allocated to each review area. • Leading policy committee Members are invited to contribute at scrutiny on areas under their respective policy committee's remit. • Specialist officers also attend where required to give technical support e.g. on flooding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An area for improvement is championing the value and potential of scrutiny. • Scrutiny training has been provided for only a few Members and this could be rolled out.
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No external evaluation has yet taken place of our scrutiny arrangements. 	

4. Make an impact on service delivery

4.1 What evidence is there to show that scrutiny has contributed to improvement?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">On the Broadband review, publicity resulted in considerable public feedback, which has resulted in an ongoing dialogue with BT about broadband issues in our area. This review has attracted national interest.The Council's Constitution provides a timescale for Policy Committees to consider and respond to Scrutiny recommendations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Extending the remit of scrutiny to include some performance monitoring, policy development or internal scrutiny work.
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">The external focus to South Derbyshire's Scrutiny has an impact. It is less easy to influence other service providers, when compared to making recommendations on District Council services.	

4.2 How well is information required by scrutiny managed?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The scoping arrangements, introduced this year seem to be working well and ensure all Members have a timely input.• Members receive information by both post and email, to ensure they are able to contribute, before key documents reach the formal Committee.• Minutes and Agendas are produced in a timely manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do Members have any suggestions?
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• External evaluation of our scrutiny function may highlight potential improvements.	