

Summary of responses and the conclusions following the scrutiny self-evaluation questionnaire exercise 2015

No. of questionnaires distributed:	64
No. returned:	15 (23%)
Returned by scrutiny members:	5
No. returned from Co-opted Members:	2
Returned by non-scrutiny members/unknown respondents:	4
Returned by officers (CET/SLT):	4

Main conclusions:

- 100% (15) of respondents felt that scrutiny has a clearly defined role in the Council's improvement and governance arrangements. All also felt that scrutiny's role is valued;
- 87% (13) felt that scrutiny had the dedicated officer support it needed to undertake effective independent research and to provide members with high quality analysis, advice and training. The remaining 23% (2) respondents did not know;
- 73% (11) were of the view that scrutiny operated in a methodical way and used a variety of methods to examine matters, the remaining 27% (4) were split between disagreeing with the above statement or did not know;
- 73% (11) felt that scrutiny meetings and activities were well-planned, chaired effectively and made the best use of the resources available to them, the remaining 27% (4) indicated that they did not know;
- 60% were of the view that scrutiny received effective support from the Council's corporate management team to ensure that high quality information is provided to scrutiny members in a timely and consistent manner;
- 60% (9) felt that scrutiny was member-led, 1 respondent felt that it was not and 5 responded 'do not know';
- 60% (9) also felt that scrutiny did effectively and regularly take into account the views of the public, partners and regulators, 2 respondents (13%) felt it did not and 4 (27%) respondents 'did not know';
- 53% (8) were of the view that scrutiny operated in a non-political way at all times, whilst 47% (7) felt that this was not the case;
- 53% (8) felt that scrutiny regularly used validated evidence to challenge decision makers and service-providers, the remaining respondents were of the view that this was not the case or that they did not know;

- 53% (8) respondents felt that decision makers give sufficient public account for themselves and their portfolios at scrutiny meetings, with only 1 respondent (7%) stating that they did not and 40% (6) indicating that they did not know;
- 53% (8) were of the view that scrutiny was recognised by Cabinet and Corporate Management as an important council mechanism for engaging with the community and as a facilitator of citizen involvement with the Council's work; whilst 33% (5) felt that scrutiny was not afforded such recognition. 13% (2) did not know;
- 53% (8) felt that from their experience scrutiny deal effectively and safely with sensitive political issues, tensions and conflict; 1 respondent (7%) felt that they did not and 40% (6) did not know;
- 40% (6) were of the view that scrutiny members were given appropriate training and development opportunities to enable them to undertake their roles effectively (the remaining 60% did not feel that this was the case, or indicated that they did not know);
- Only 27% (4) felt that scrutiny effectively balances and prioritises community concerns against corporate issues of strategic risk and importance, with 33% (5) stating that it did not and 40% (6) indicating that they did not know;
- Only 20% (3) respondents were of the view that scrutiny effectively communicated with residents to raise awareness of matters and to encourage their involvement with the democratic process, whilst 60% (9) of respondents were of the view that scrutiny was not effective in this area and 20% (3) did not know;
- Only 20% (3) respondents felt that scrutiny was successful in building up a level of trust and maintaining good relationships with a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders; 13% (2) felt that scrutiny was not successful in this area. However, the majority 67% (10) did not know.

Additional points raised or suggestions for improving scrutiny put forward by respondents

- The attendance of Cabinet Lead Members at scrutiny committee meetings to present reports and answer questions is well received and seems to be working well;
- Rotation of elected members on scrutiny would increase understanding for all members;
- Provision of regular training on understanding scrutiny and Corporate Governance Committees' roles would assist members to understand the various remits and processes, challenge them and support their role in the democratic process;
- Scrutiny is only as good as those who are on the committees and ask the questions;

- Scrutiny members should not solely depend on officer support they should also undertake their own independent research - – including using the Council's Corporate Performance, Information and Research Team as is done for Service Challenge;
- Committees, in addition to considering officers' reports should also invite stakeholders' views and triangulate evidence from a number of sources;
- Improve communication and feedback channels between Cabinet and Scrutiny and vice-versa (better use of current communication channels);
- Ensure that scrutiny deals with matters that affect and concern communities/residents;
- Closer attention should be given to Cabinet/Council's forward work programmes and forthcoming decisions to ensure that scrutiny is focussing on the right issues at the right time;
- Scrutiny needs to be more strategically focussed rather than focus on geographical matters or parochial/very local issues;
- Need to engage better with the communities, residents and the media – need be more proactive, ahead of the game, rather than reacting after the event to negative media coverage etc.;
- Ensure that scrutiny is not attempting to have an oversight of everything, that it develops a focussed work programme and sticks to it, building in sufficient time to invite stakeholders/residents comments and input and used various methods for the capturing input (not solely rely on officer reports). This should include an assessment of the wider implications of preferred solutions, including evidence triangulation and should lead to better decisions;
- Make better use of task and finish groups for detailed work, this should could be an effective way for engaging with the public;
- Improve members' attendance at meetings;
- Develop the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group function;
- Evaluate and review the effectiveness of scrutiny's role in the decision making process in relation to specific key decisions;
- Groups/Committees should identify members who have the right skill sets for specific subjects/areas with a view to enhancing the scrutiny of that specific topic;
- Scrutiny members should spend time with various Services/Departments in order to understand their processes and the challenges they face;
- Scrutiny needs to be more solution focussed than at present (it now tends to have a watching brief);
- More and better public engagement as this is an effective way to understand the concerns and opinions of the community and feed it into the democratic process.

Main areas for improvement seem to be:

- **Public engagement and communication;**
- **Aim to be apolitical at all times;**
- **Engaging more with stakeholders and triangulating evidence - through members doing their own independent research, utilising the Council's Business Improvement and Modernisation Service and where appropriate meeting with residents and service-users, instead of solely relying on officers' reports;**
- **Regularly review the effectiveness of scrutiny's input into certain decisions and their eventual impact on residents;**
- **Better use of members' skills, matching skills to the work in hand;**
- **Provision of regular and appropriate training for scrutiny members;**
- **Ensuring that scrutiny happens at the correct point in the decision making process through effective co-ordination of committee work planning, whilst striking an appropriate balance between strategic issues and those which are a cause of concern for residents.**