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# Guide to Strategic Overview and Scrutiny

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## **Summary**

To explain how Overview and Scrutiny operates at Rutland County Council and to help members, officers and the public understand the process.

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## **1.0 WELCOME**

- 1.1 This guide outlines the work of our Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The role of scrutiny is to look at issues that matter to Rutland residents, challenge decision takers and drive improvement.
- 1.2 Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee checks and reports on all areas of the council's work, including partnership work. It monitors the council's performance and investigates areas of concern. It also holds to account council decision takers and examines proposed strategies and policies.
- 1.3 Scrutiny councillors ask questions, gather evidence and report their observations and recommendations via a report to Cabinet/Council (see Appendix C), which then formally responds.
- 1.4 Meetings of the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committees are held 'in public' but are not a 'public meeting'. A 'public meeting' is an informal meeting where the public can take part as there are no rules regarding who speaks. A meeting 'in public' is a formal meeting, governed by procedure rules regarding who may/may not speak. As such, members of the public, press or any organisation can attend to observe a scrutiny committee meeting – or they can view via the live webcast – but they cannot participate within the meeting itself.
- 1.5 It is best practice for a scrutiny committee to only look at a few issues at a time. These topics could be Cabinet/Council decisions, service reviews or policy developments.
- 1.6 Scrutiny does not make decisions; it uses evidence to make recommendations to the Cabinet/Council to request changes.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Local Government Act 2000 required local authorities to set up new political management arrangements, replacing the previous committee system with an 'Executive' - or 'Cabinet' - and an independent 'Scrutiny' function.
- 2.2 Scrutiny members work together to implement the principles of good scrutiny as identified by The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, which are:
  - i. provide constructive 'critical friend' challenge

- ii. amplify the voice and concerns of the public
- iii. be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
- iv. drive improvement in public services.

### **3.0 HOW DOES SCRUTINY WORK IN RUTLAND?**

- 3.1 Rutland County Council has one Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee that has responsibility for scrutinising all areas of council and partnership working. This committee reviews and scrutinises decisions and actions taken by Cabinet/Council in relation to the delivery of services, to improve the wellbeing of residents. They also shine a light on the effectiveness of local partnership working in which the council plays a leading role.
- 3.2 It is important to be aware that the scrutiny committee does not deal with individual queries, concerns, or complaints.
- 3.3 The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee is made up of nine elected members. Membership details, meetings dates, agendas and previous minutes can be found on the council's website at <https://rutlandcounty.moderngov.co.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=429>
- 3.4 Full details about the scrutiny process including the committee's procedure rules can be found in the council's constitution on the council's website: Council Constitution.

### **4.0 WHAT DOES SCRUTINY DO?**

- 4.1 Scrutiny members contribute to the council's democratic work by representing the interests of citizens and stakeholders in Rutland and holding the council's decision-making bodies to account. They help shape policy, check resources are used responsibly and, critically, ensure that those in power hear the voices of Rutland residents.
- 4.2 The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee normally meets once a month but, very occasionally, the committee will hold an additional meeting, for example to deal with items 'Called-In'<sup>1</sup> by members.
- 4.3 Dates and times of the scrutiny committee meetings can be found on the council's website at:

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<sup>1</sup> Members can call-in an official decision if they think it has been made incorrectly. If their request is upheld, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will meet to examine the decision and whether it should be referred back for reconsideration by Cabinet or Full Council.

<https://rutlandcounty.moderngov.co.uk/mgCalendarMonthView.aspx?GL=1&bcr=1>

- 4.4 As well as attending committee meetings, scrutiny members can carry out the following range of scrutiny activities, if time and capacity allow:
- **Site Visits** to meet frontline staff and/or to see facilities used e.g. recycling centre, museum, library. These are held in private
  - **Listening Exercises** to hear from service users, carers, citizens and stakeholders. These are held in public.
  - **Budget Monitoring Panel** to help focus attention on savings required. These meetings are held in private.
  - **Task and Finish Group** which focuses in-depth on areas requiring attention. These meetings are held in private.
  - **Working Party** which studies and reports on a particular question and makes recommendations based on its findings. These meetings are held in private.
  - **Evidence Panel** which studies written statements and documents on a particular topic from internal and external experts and reports to Cabinet/Council on its findings. These meetings are held in private.

## 5.0 SETTING A SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

- 5.1 Setting the annual work plan for the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee is an important stage in the scrutiny process, as it identifies the key topics for consideration in the coming year.
- 5.2 Scrutiny members collectively agree the work they want the committee to undertake. They prioritise these topics and then agree how they will be scrutinised.
- 5.3 Ideas for the work plan come from a wide range of sources including suggestions made by members, senior managers and key stakeholders.

## 6.0 CAN THE PUBLIC SUGGEST A TOPIC TO BE SCRUTINISED?

- 6.1 Yes, the public can suggest a topic for the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise. Suggestions can be made throughout the year as the committee keeps its work plan under constant review.
- 6.2 The different types of topics the committee can scrutinise are detailed in Appendix B.

- 6.3 If you would like to suggest a topic for scrutiny, please see the ‘Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee Item Request Form’, which is detailed in Appendix A and is available on the council’s Overview and Scrutiny webpage at:  
[www.rutland.gov.uk/my-council/how-the-council-works/overview-and-scrutiny/](http://www.rutland.gov.uk/my-council/how-the-council-works/overview-and-scrutiny/)

## **7.0 HOW MEMBERS SCRUTINISE A TOPIC**

- 7.1 The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee carries out scrutiny through formal, public meetings and informal, private meetings such as a budget monitoring panel, a working party or an evidence panel.
- 7.2 The work of the committee includes talking to the public and gathering evidence from relevant Cabinet members, officers and organisations, as well as commissioning research to support their inquiries.
- 7.3 Members work together to scrutinise issues, sharing the skills, knowledge and expertise that each member brings to the committee. They ask questions to learn from the witnesses, gather information and validate information previously provided.
- 7.4 Questioning helps to identify how efficient and effective services are, how fair they are in providing access to all citizens, whether services are performing well, what the key risks are and how they could be improved.
- 7.5 When members have finished their scrutiny, they agree what comments, observations and recommendations they wish to make. These are detailed in a report to Cabinet/Council for a formal response – see Appendix C.

## **8.0 SCRUTINY AT A COMMITTEE MEETING**

- 8.1 The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings are an opportunity for scrutiny members to hear from Cabinet members and senior officers, ask questions, explore issues and make recommendations. Committee meetings are held in-person but can be accessed virtually. The public can view the committee meeting live via Zoom but a recording is also kept on the council website alongside the minutes of the meeting: Calendar of Meetings.
- 8.2 The date and time of the meeting, as well as the agenda and report papers for the items being considered at the meeting, are available on

the council's website five working days before the committee meeting is held: [Calendar of Meetings](#).

- 8.3 The formal committee papers provide background information, details of the service or policy being considered and the key challenges facing the authority in relation to that service or policy. Where appropriate, these may include benchmarking and good practice information.
- 8.4 The meetings are formal with an agenda, which starts with apologies, declarations of interest and the approval of minutes from previous meetings. These are followed by the main scrutiny topics for discussion with contributors in attendance to answer any questions.
- 8.5 Contributors usually include the relevant Cabinet member, senior officers and key stakeholders, such as partner organisations.

## **9.0 CAN THE PUBLIC ATTEND A STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING?**

- 9.1 Yes, the public can attend a Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. They can attend in-person to observe the scrutiny committee meeting or they can view the meeting via the live webcast but as stated previously (see Item 1.4), they cannot participate within the meeting itself.
- 9.2 The only time the public will not be allowed is when the committee are considering exempt or confidential information at which point the public will be asked to leave the meeting and the live webcast halted.
- 9.3 The scrutiny committee meetings are formal meetings of the council and follow the rules of the council, as set out in Part 4 of the council's Constitution – the [Procedure Rules](#).
- 9.4 Whilst members of the public can attend to observe and listen to the debate, the public has no express right to speak in the meeting unless they have previously requested to submit a petition, deputation or question.
- 9.5 Details on how to submit a petition, deputation or question to the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee can be found on the council's [Overview and Scrutiny](#) webpage.

- 9.6 Full details about the rules and regulations regarding the submission of a petition, deputation or question are detailed in Procedure Rule 28 and Procedure Rule 216 of Part 4 of the council's constitution.
- 9.7 It is within the discretion of the Chief Executive to determine any requests for public speaking at meetings and the requestor of any petition, deputation or question not accepted will be notified in writing.
- 9.8 Once the petition, deputation or question has been approved, the requestor will be sent details on how to present their item at the committee meeting. These details are also available from the council's Overview and Scrutiny webpage as the 'Guidance on Attending the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee'.

## **10.0 SCRUTINY VIA A TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

- 10.1 Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee members use an assessment process, known as 'PICK', to decide which topic(s) under consideration best lend themselves to a Task and Finish Group during the year. Further information regarding the 'PICK' process is detailed in Appendix D.
- 10.2 The terms of reference for a Task and Finish Group are tightly scoped so that the inquiry is achievable and useful. A Task and Finish Group gathers evidence from a range of sources, including site visits, visits to other organisations, expert evidence, workshops, listening exercises and research, as well as the usual committee meetings with Cabinet members and senior officers. Members identify key findings and develop recommendations for Cabinet/Council that are evidence based and clearly link to the main messages arising from the key findings.
- 10.3 A final report is presented to Cabinet/Council (Appendix C) for its consideration and they respond within an agreed timescale. The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee will monitor the implementation of the recommendations on a regular basis. This helps ensure that the recommendations are being acted on and implemented to the timescales identified and helps to evaluate the impact the Task and Finish Group has had.
- 10.4 The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee may choose to revisit the topic or specific elements of the topic, if the impact is not as significant as it was expected to be, or progress is not satisfactory.

## **11.0 SCRUTINY OF PERFORMANCE**

- 11.1 Scrutiny has a key role to play in ensuring the council has a strong performance management framework and culture.
- 11.2 The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinises performance across areas that fall within its remit, to facilitate challenge and public discussion and to drive improvement in service delivery. This includes partnership arrangements such as:
- The Safer Rutland Partnership
  - The Children and Young People's Partnership
  - The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated Health & Wellbeing Partnership
  - The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Police and Crime Panel
  - The Rural Community Council (Leicestershire and Rutland)
- 11.3 Members receive copies of the relevant performance reports containing targets, results and the direction of travel.
- 11.4 Members can scrutinise performance at the committee meetings or via a Performance Panel. Members may decide to undertake a 'deep dive' into particular areas of concern, to highlight reasons for under-performance and to make recommendations to improve policy and practice.
- 11.5 Members hear from the relevant Cabinet member and senior officers, who explain the actions taken to improve performance and emerging pressures on performance. Members can also hear from service users, carers, advocates, and relevant stakeholders about their experiences regarding service delivery and their ideas for improving outputs and outcomes. Members may also decide to look at benchmarking information to contextualise the council's performance.

## **12.0 SCRUTINY OF FINANCE**

- 12.1 Scrutiny also has a key role to play in ensuring the council has a strong financial management framework in place.
- 12.2 The committee gathers and uses evidence to consider whether the financial plans and strategies of the council are sound and have taken into consideration all relevant factors.

- 12.3 It also uses evidence to hold the council to account for its expenditure or to investigate pertinent financial concerns.
- 12.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee works alongside the Audit and Risk Committee, which oversees the financial reporting process and provides independent scrutiny of the authority's financial and non-financial performance.

## **13.0 MAKING AN IMPACT**

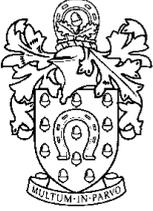
- 13.1 Scrutiny is able to make an impact in several ways:
- Raising awareness of issues, bringing them onto the policy agenda
  - Highlighting areas of under-performance or poor service delivery
  - Recognising areas of good performance and excellent service delivery
  - Ensuring citizens voices are heard
  - Questioning policy direction
  - Questioning resource allocations
  - Investigating innovations and good practice.
- 13.2 Scrutiny's ability to have an influence on the decisions taken to develop and improve policies and services relies on how robust and practicable its recommendations are. Recommendations need to be appropriate, achievable and add value.
- 13.3 The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the response to its recommendations and regularly monitors the implementation of agreed recommendations. This ensures that recommendations are acted on and helps the committee to evaluate the impact its work has had. The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committees may choose to revisit the topic or specific elements of the topic, if the impact is not as significant as it was expected to be, or progress is not satisfactory

## **14.0 REGIONAL AND JOINT SCRUTINY**

- 14.1 Leicester City Council, Leicestershire County Council and Rutland County Council have joined together to create the LLR (Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland) Joint Health Scrutiny Committee. This committee scrutinises the delivery of services by providers that cover more than just the one county of Rutland and examines issues which cut across the geographical boundaries.

- 14.2 The East Midlands Scrutiny Network meets four times a year and provides a forum for non-executive local councillors and officers to share good practice and experiences of overview and scrutiny. It also enables the dissemination of relevant information and national policy developments and assists in the identifying of any learning/training needs.

## APPENDIX A



### Proposal Form for the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Plan

(This form should be completed when proposing an item for discussion at the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee and sent to [governance@rutland.gov.uk](mailto:governance@rutland.gov.uk))

Note: The matters detailed below have not yet received any detailed consideration and the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee reserves the right to reject suggestions for scrutiny that fall outside the County Council's remit.

<b>PROPOSER'S NAME</b>	
<b>DATE OF REFERRAL</b>	
<b>TOPIC</b>	
<b>What needs to be scrutinised and why?</b>	
<b>Is the matter of concern to residents/local businesses/ partners and/or stakeholders?</b>	YES/NO
<b>Does the matter relate to an underperforming service or area?</b>	YES/NO
<b>Does the matter affect many residents, a specific group or a large geographical area of the County?</b>	YES/NO
(if 'yes' please give an indication of the size of the affected	

group or area)	
<b>Is the matter linked to the Council's Corporate Plan?</b> (if 'yes' please X which priority/priorities apply)	YES/NO
<b>Priority 1: A Special Place</b> Sustaining a vibrant rural county that harnesses the enterprise of its businesses, the ambition and creativity of its residents, and the passion of its local communities.	
<b>Priority 2: Sustainable Lives</b> Living sustainably and combatting the climate crisis through the power of choice, the removal of barriers, and real collective action.	
<b>Priority 3: Healthy and Well</b> Promoting health, happiness and well-being for people of all ages and backgrounds.	
<b>Priority 4: A county for everyone</b> Celebrating diversity and ensuring everyone has the opportunity to live well, be heard and overcome any challenges they may face.	
<b>Priority 5: A modern and effective Council</b> Transforming the way we work to deliver services fit for the future.	
<b>To your knowledge is anyone else looking at this matter?</b>	YES/NO
(If 'yes,' please say who is looking at it)	
<b>What evidence has been gathered and what additional evidence needs to be gathered for the Strategic Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee to make an informed</b>	

**recommendation**

**What do you want the Committee to achieve?**  
(List the main points the report should cover)

**What degree of priority is this issue?**

1 = Urgent

2 = High

3 = Medium

4 = Low

## APPENDIX B – DIFFERENT TYPES OF SCRUTINY TOPICS

Topics for the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work plan fall into five main categories:

- 1. Policy Review and Development** – where a topic is identified for scrutiny because of changes to legislation/government guidance or a policy is recognised as needing updating or reviewing locally.
- 2. Monitoring Performance and Progress** - where the committee undertakes monitoring of the council's performance and progress in implementing previously agreed actions. Such topics are often identified during scrutiny of regular performance reports. A panel of the committee can undertake this work.
- 3. Pre-Decision Scrutiny** – where a topic on the Cabinet's forward plan is considered by the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee to inform the Cabinet's decisions by making evidence-based recommendations.
- 4. External Scrutiny** – where a topic involves scrutinising the work and impact of external agencies on the council's community e.g. local NHS Trusts and other partners.
- 5. Call-ins** – where a member invokes the call-in procedure under the council's constitution, to review a Cabinet decision prior to implementation.

## APPENDIX C

### Rutland County Council

Catmose Oakham Rutland LE15 6HP

Telephone 01572 722577

Email: governance@rutland.gov.uk

### **Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Report to Cabinet/Council**

<b>Date of Strategic Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee Meeting</b>	
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<b>Agenda Item</b>
<b>Issues to be highlighted to Cabinet/Council</b>
<u>Issues/Feedback:</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>
<u>Recommendations:</u>
1)
2)

## APPENDIX D

### ‘PICK’ ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Members use a ‘PICK’ assessment to ensure issues are suitable for a Task and Finish Group.

Each item is scored from 0 - 2.

No = 0            Somewhat = 1            Yes = 2

The items that score the highest are prioritised for review by a dedicated Task and Finish Group

This will help Rutland in prioritising scrutiny resources for key pieces of work to maximise effectiveness, rather than spreading efforts too thin.

<b>Public Interest</b>	<b>Score</b>
• The topic is of concern to the public	
• It is a ‘high profile’ topic for specific local communities	
• This is an area where a lot of complaints are received and/or bad press	
• The topic has been identified by members/officers as a key citizen issue	

<b>Impact</b>	<b>Score</b>
• The Scrutiny will lead to improvements for the people of Rutland	
• The Scrutiny will lead to increased value for money	
• This could make a big difference to the way services are delivered	
• This could make a big difference to the way resources are used	

<b>Council Performance</b>	<b>Score</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The topic does support the achievement of the corporate priorities</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council and/or other organisations are not performing well in this area</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do we understand why our performance is poor compared to others?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are performing well, but spending too much of our resources in this area</li> </ul>	

<b>Keeping in Context</b>	<b>Score</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is new government guidance or legislation that will require a significant change to services and Scrutiny can positively influence change</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the issue been raised by the external auditor in the annual letter?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are inspections planned in the near future</li> </ul>	

**A large print version of this document is available  
on request**



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