

Review of Committees

This report was generated on 20/10/21. Overall 30 respondents completed this questionnaire. The report has been filtered to show the responses for 'All Respondents'

Section 2

This section focuses on Overview and Scrutiny Committees. These are classed as Scrutiny (Community Regeneration, Environment and Health and Well Being) Committee and the **Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Services) Committee**.

Q15 Which Overview and Scrutiny Committee(s) do you sit / have you sat on and what is / was your role on them?

Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Services) Committee - Former Committee Member (10)
33.3%

Scrutiny (Community Regeneration, Environment and Health and Well Being) Committee -
Committee Member (9) 30%

Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Services) Committee - Committee Member (9) 30%

Scrutiny (Community Regeneration, Environment and Health and Well Being) Committee -
Former Committee Member (6) 20%

Other Scrutiny Committees (past) - Chair / Vice Chair / Committee Member (5) 16.7%

Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Services) Committee - Chair (4) 13.3%

Scrutiny (Community Regeneration, Environment and Health and Well Being) Committee -
Chair (3) 10%

Have Not been a Member of the above Scrutiny Committees (2) 6.7%

Scrutiny (Community Regeneration, Environment and Health and Well Being) Committee -
Vice Chair (1) 3.3%

Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Services) Committee - Vice Chair (1) 3.3%

Q15a If Other Scrutiny Committees (past), please specify:

Apologies can't remember the title but it was the one involving health post 2019 and I was vice chair
I am a former Chair of Scrutiny of Value for Money Scrutiny Committee in a former iteration of Scrutiny Committees
Previous iteration of Scrutiny committees
Audit strictly a separate committee
Sat on Regen and Health as a County Councillor

Q16 Do you think that sitting on one of these Committees has made your role as a Councillor: (Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Services) Committee):

More appealing (8)	30%
Not applicable (6)	22%
Neither more nor less appealing (5)	19%
A lot less appealing (4)	15%
Much more appealing (3)	11%
Less appealing (1)	4%

Q17 How knowledgeable in the subject areas do you think that sitting on these Committees has made you? (Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Services) Committee)

Much more knowledgeable (9)	33%
More knowledgeable (7)	26%
Not applicable (7)	26%
Neither more or less knowledgeable (4)	15%

Q18 How much do you like being a Member of the below Committee(s)? (Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Services) Committee)

Not applicable (7)	26%
Somewhat like (6)	22%
Neutral (5)	19%
Like a lot (4)	15%
Somewhat dislike (3)	11%
Dislike a lot (2)	7%

Q19 How involved do you think you are within the business of the Committee(s) (Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Services) Committee)?

Not applicable (8)	30%
Very involved (7)	26%
Somewhat involved (5)	19%
Not involved at all (4)	15%
Not very involved (3)	11%

Q19a Is there anything you can think of that would improve your involvement?

Better chairs
Not on committee now. Mixed commitment of cllrs. A small number undertook most reviews. Need cllrs to commit to undertake a fixed number of reviews per year. Reviews tend to be high level and not as 'deep dive' as I would like.
I have only recently been put back on a scrutiny committees after a 3 year break so am finding my feet again.
Training, only sat on these for a short period but feel training was needed
Too many people on the committees Too many sub committees Disparate and disorganised
No longer a Member of either.
Smaller membership
<p>Scrutiny committees need to do more to empower the members of the committee and broaden the involvement of all councillors. This could take a range of different formats, including increased/specific training, improving understanding of committee members as to the requirements/expectations and role of the committees, splitting the roles of the committees to allow for more specialised/targeted councillor involvement (e.g. a health & environment scrutiny that allows members to almost become 'experts' in that area, rather than needing a breadth of knowledge on the current areas), using the committee powers to call cabinet members to question/updates, and increased involvement from relevant 3rd party bodies. I believe some of the above is within the gift of the committee chairs to implement, such as the involvement of 3rd party organisations which I'd implemented for the Scrutiny (CEHWB) Committee of which I've tried/trying. But without buy-in from committee members, it walks a fine line between a scrutiny committee conducting good and proper work, and 1 individual, e.g. chair, dictating the work and function of the committee with little say/input/resistance from the committee members as they just plod along. Currently, by only being chair-led, it also means that certain elements of these become inconsistent and highly dependant on the chair of the time, rather than being a more consistent and assumed function of the committees. I'm unsure how this currently works or if it's possible, but Scrutiny committees should also be able/expected to produce their own supplemental 'rules'/standing orders, in addition to the overarching council constitution. These should then cover things such as the parameters of sub-group proceedings, expectations of members/meetings, process for 'summoning'/calling cabinet members for updates/questioning. This would then also further enable scrutiny committees to define their own runnings, within the confines of the constitution, but enable them to adapt through ownership of the scrutiny members & in each individual scrutiny area. E.g. Clear rules for how/when internal/external auditors would participate in scrutiny meetings, but this wouldn't be something needed for the other scrutiny committee, as one example. Current capacity around ability to run sub-groups for reviews, or ensuring a breadth of experiences from various councillors, is limited by the willingness of members to get involved in these. Most are then conducted by the same core of councillors, which whilst not necessarily an issue, limits the nature of the input by differing councillors and political party perspectives. I believe this could likely be solved by increasing the involvement and passion in councillors for their chosen areas of scrutiny to empower them further and give a willingness to get involved more, especially as the develop there understanding. This is then also limited by the officer capacity, in both scale of work and other implications such as officer bias. This is due to the fact that for the most part, the areas a scrutiny committee often look at with their supporting officer teams are ultimately areas for which they are</p>

responsible. Whilst I'm sure that they still conducted the work in an impartial manor so much as civil servants can, it does mean that you get pushback and omissions in certain areas that I don't believe you otherwise would. Not that this is limited to any 1 individual, bus as an example, Mike Hovers work in helping lead scrutiny reviews into waste, community involvement, CCTV whilst also being the manager overseeing these areas. Ideally, I believe the scrutiny committees should be supported by an impartial officer/officer team that doesn't have the natural investment within the areas being scrutinised, which then means those currently involved, (Mike, Dan, James) are freed up to approach these scrutiny reviews from a purely functional officers perspective, rather than trying to double hat both sides. The current size of the committees also plays a role in this. I believe several councillors are likely there in a 'filling them numbers' capacity, rather than because it is an area that they are particularly interested or impassioned about. By creating smaller, more target scrutiny committees, it would enable an increased level of ownership amounts the committee membership, with them being there by choice rather than forced duty, and by extension produce better engagement, involvement and quality of work output by each individual scrutiny committee.

I think there should be a stand alone Audit committee that deals with internal and external audit, finance outturns and the accounts. Scrutiny should be a separate committee.

Reducing some of the routine reports which tend to create noise, possibly have subcommittees for things like leisure contract?

Narrower focus of terms of references, more specific groups with less generic content, smaller membership so people can use their expertise.

More recently sat as a County Councillor, the Chair is an important role as outside bodies may attend, they need to be competent and well informed.

I was involved in the former health scrutiny committee and think it should be reinstated as health affects everyone and is a huge issue.

As for the Value for Money Services Committee I felt I was unsuited, so my answers are probably a bit biased towards someone who does not have a good comprehension of financial matters. Not the Committee fault, just my personal experience/opinion. I struggled to understand some items, and therefore had very little input

Q21 How would you rate the following with regards to (Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Services) Committee):

(How well you feel the Committee works together)

Fair (8)	31%
Good (7)	27%
Not applicable (6)	23%
Poor (5)	19%
Excellent (-)	

(The effectiveness of the Committee meetings)

Fair (10)	39%
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Good (6)	23%
Poor (5)	19%
Not applicable (5)	19%
Excellent (-)	

(The quality of the questioning within the meeting)

Fair (9)	35%
Good (6)	23%
Poor (6)	23%
Not applicable (5)	19%
Excellent (-)	

(The appropriateness of agenda items)

Fair (11)	42%
Good (7)	27%
Not applicable (5)	19%
Poor (2)	8%
Excellent (1)	4%

(Quality of member engagement (other than yourself))

Poor (8)	31%
Fair (7)	27%
Good (6)	23%
Not applicable (5)	19%
Excellent (-)	

(Quality of the Cabinet Portfolio engagement in the meeting)

Poor (9)	35%
Good (8)	31%
Not applicable (5)	19%

Fair (4) 15%

Excellent (-)

(Quality of the officer support within the meetings)

Good (10) 39%

Excellent (5) 19%

Not applicable (5) 19%

Fair (4) 15%

Poor (2) 8%

(The amount of reading/preparing that you undertake prior to the meeting)

Good (14) 54%

Not applicable (6) 23%

Fair (4) 15%

Excellent (2) 8%

Poor (-)

(Your preparedness during the committee meeting)

Good (15) 58%

Not applicable (6) 23%

Fair (3) 12%

Excellent (2) 8%

Poor (-)

(Your level of understanding of the reports)

Good (15) 46%

Not applicable (6) 23%

Fair (3) 19%

Excellent (2) 8%

Poor (-) 4%

(Your contribution within the meetings)

Good (11)	42%
Not applicable (6)	23%
Fair (4)	15%
Poor (3)	12%
Excellent (2)	8%

(Your overall satisfaction with the meetings)

Fair (9)	35%
Poor (6)	23%
Good (5)	19%
Not applicable (5)	19%
Excellent (1)	4%

(Your opportunity to fully scrutinise the overall working of the Council)

Poor (8)	31%
Good (6)	23%
Not applicable (6)	23%
Fair (4)	15%
Excellent (2)	8%

Q21a Are there any other comments you would like to make?

As above
The meeting seem officer led. Reviews tend to be high level. Not enough scrutiny undertaken. slow
As above, training would have been useful
Too many members
Same comments as for Question 20
Too big and unwieldy. Audit should be separate and a small function.
Currently, I think that overall member engagement could be significantly improved for this committee. I think this likely stems from 2 broad problems of the committee; the members ability/understanding in a technical heavy area of council work and current scope of the

committee agenda. Technical Heavy Area - Owing to the nature and complexity of council finances, I think this largely alienates members from wanting to get involve, either through a lack of understanding, time or a belief that because the committee is so large, other members will themselves cover it so they don't need to (particularly if they're less interested in this area of council scrutiny). My guess of how many councillors actually read the 100+ pages of the statement of accounts audit would be very small, which in part is the problem, but one not easily solved given the complexity of the area. I think this can partly be solved by additional training, but this function is already largely in place for the committee. I don't have an answer, but I wonder if outside external training/speakers on the topic (e.g. LGA) or sending members to view similar scrutinise for other councils to see how they handle it might prove beneficial for members. Or, as mentioned above, creating a smaller committee focused on VFM that then enables those with the greatest interest to get involved and become more 'specialised' within the area. Current scope of the committee agenda - I think for too long this committee has primarily focused on its technical functions to approve the relevant accounts/audits/statements as and when needed, and spent less time on actually scrutinising the council for VFM than it should have. This has meant that over the years, the committee has fallen into a habit of almost nodding through reports, without much questioning around them, which you can see in the current levels of participation. By looking to include a variety of agenda items outside of these, and encouraging committee members to broaden their considerations of what this committee is for, I'd hope that this then leads to greater levels of participation and ultimately, a better output of work. As above, I think overall, cabinet members should be more involved in directly answering questions or attending to give updates to the scrutiny committee, as currently, this is an area lacking. But most of the fault for this should lie at the door of the scrutiny committees themselves for not calling up Cabinet Members, rather than a lack of willingness for them to actually attend.

See above. Also maybe four smaller committees and split the services between them to improve overview and encourage scrutiny of services that may benefit from a review instead of plucking topics out of the mix.

Same as above, lots of jargon and little time make sense of things.

Q22 Do you believe that you have had the appropriate level of training made available so that you can participate in the committee meetings?

Yes (17) 63%

No (10) 37%

Q23 Do you think training for these committees should be mandatory?

Yes (27) 93%

No (2) 7%

Q23a Do you have any suggestions as to how Scrutiny Committee training could be improved?

fewer cllrs who show a real interest in this area should be on the committee, More training, on scrutiny techniques
Since having a break from scrutiny I have not received any further training. New members are thrown in with no understanding what they could be scrutinising.
Use more outside bodies to give better understanding around the MTFs and treatment of reserves
I think the committees cover such a broad area, it difficult to have a training programme that covers all the topics that could come up
Members being held to account for their involvement - or rather lack of involvement - in reviews. It is always the same few Members who are committed to work. Others are on sub groups but do no work.
LGA run plenty of courses particularly for leading members. This training should be mandatory
It should be mandatory in more technical areas such as audit & finance. I think using third parties to provide the training (such as the LGA or Local Government Lecturers) would improve the quality of it, not just in providing an outside opinion/perspective, but also being better equipped to know how to deliver such training in an engaging and relevant way for members.
not at this time
External training essential. Glossary of terms, cut the jargon out.
role playing introduce unknown third party to the committee a third party to adopt a focused challenge and be challenging

Q24 Do you think that the Scrutiny (Audit & Value For Money Services) Committee should continue to have Independent Members in its membership?

Yes (23) 85%

No (4) 15%

Q24a Could you please indicate why you have chosen this way?

Because they make zero contribution
Independent challenge
To make it open and transparent
Transparency
We are scrutinising the council not an individual party
It helps with transparency
Providing the independent members have the appropriate knowledge, skills and training they are an invaluable asset to the committee
As not on the committee not sure i follow this question?
Provided they contribute and offer impartial advice/suggestions. The Council should be open and transparent at every opportunity, Independent Members have the potential to oversee this.

Provided they contribute and offer impartial advice/suggestions. The Council should be open and transparent at every opportunity, Independent Members have the potential to oversee this.
External questioning is good but sadly input in the past has been poor
Yes, but largely depends on the quality of willing applicants. Vacancies or independent members not getting involved doesn't really add anything to the committee. But this is a challenge of those applying and not one easily solved.
If you split out Audit then yes for Audit committee but not for scrutiny and overview.
Helps prevent groupthink
There needs to be transparency and no bias
If they have enough members justify one seat proportionally, then yes.
I've not given it much consideration before other than perhaps un-elected members should not have full voting rights. They can and should advise, going outside the committee if appropriate if something is wrong.
They add no value.

Q25 How would you rate your understanding of the following: (Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Services) Committee

Your role within the committee

Not applicable (10)	39%
Excellent (7)	27%
Good (7)	27%
Fair (2)	8%
Poor (-)	

The role of the committee

Good (9)	33%
Not applicable (7)	26%
Excellent (6)	22%
Fair (3)	11%
Poor (2)	7%

The relationship between Overview & Scrutiny committees and the executive

Good (9)	33%
Not applicable (7)	26%

Excellent (6)	22%
Poor (3)	11%
Fair (2)	7%

The current model of the committee

Good (7)	26%
Not applicable (7)	26%
Excellent (5)	19%
Fair (4)	15%
Poor (4)	15%

Q26 Has your involvement in the Committee(s) so far increased your knowledge and understanding of the Council and its services? (Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Services) Committee)

Yes (18)	67%
Not applicable (5)	19%
No (4)	15%

Q27 How would you rate the following: (Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Services) Committee):

The frequency of the meetings

About right (16)	59%
Not applicable (6)	22%
Too few (4)	15%
Too many (1)	4%

The number of members on the committee

Too many (11)	41%
About right (9)	33%
Not applicable (6)	22%
Too few (1)	4%

(The number of Overview & Scrutiny committees)

Too few (13) 48%
About right (10) 37%
Not applicable (4) 15%
Too many (-)

Q28 Do you think the timing of the meetings should (Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Services) Committee):

Stay the same (24) 100%
Move to another part of the day (-)

Q28a Please state which meeting:

stay as evening meeting
Evening
Evening
evening
Start at 1900
as is
evening

Q29 Do you agree with the following with regards to (Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Services) Committee)

(The Committee is able to influence Executive Decisions)

Agree (10) 48%
Disagree (7) 33%
Strongly disagree (4) 19%
Strongly agree (-)

(The Committee acts independently of the Executive)

Agree (9) 45%
Strongly agree (5) 25%
Disagree (3) 15%

Strongly disagree (3) 15%

(The Committee provides opportunities to question Executive Members)

Agree (11) 55%

Strongly disagree (6) 30%

Disagree (2) 10%

Strongly agree (1) 5%

(The Committee devises appropriate work programmes)

Agree (12) 60%

Disagree (5) 25%

Strongly disagree (2) 10%

Strongly agree (1) 5%

(The Committee is structured to ensure there is no duplication of activities)

Agree (13) 65%

Disagree (4) 20%

Strongly disagree (2) 10%

Strongly agree (1) 5%

(The Committee is structured to ensure all necessary Scrutiny activities can be undertaken)

Agree (13) 65%

Disagree (4) 20%

Strongly disagree (3) 15%

Strongly agree (-)

Q31 Considering the relationship with the role of Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committees and the role of the Leader and Cabinet:

Do you have any thoughts on how the O&S process could be improved:

Cabinet removal from approving recommendations

more, smaller and better focused committees more 'deep dive' reviews of areas of concern annual workplans (subject to change when items come up as urgent)
Difficult to answer the above as had very limited experience
Split Health away from the rest of the scrutiny committee, to ensure that it has enough time for its own agenda items.
By having dedicated scrutiny committees with less members who all have appropriate training and understanding of the subjects see above
The Executive Members need to attend meetings, at every meeting at least one Member of the Executive needs to be in attendance.
Periodic select committee style opportunities to question Cabinet members.
As mentioned above, in some detail. Regents & Environment is too broad in scope and suffers from it in the amount and quality of work it can produce. Audit & VFM is too narrow in what it looks at, tied too closely to statutory or financial timelines, that means it doesn't fully engage with the topic of VFM. Both would likely benefit from a reduction in members, that allows the full membership of the committee to want to be there and become more specialised within their chosen topic areas, rather than needing to be broad brushed or felt like they're just making up the numbers.
Please see previous suggestions.
I would like to see an opposition member as chair, which seems to be the case in other councils.
Decisions outside CP should come to Scrutiny for a none binding discussion before being signed.
More than 1 dedicated officer to support the committees - - that officer should be independent, have no involvement with the item be scrutinised.

Do you have any thoughts on how the Leader / Cabinet process could be improved?

Better quality members who listen not jus pay lip service
Leader/cabinet accept scrutiny recommendations. If not, a written explanation why they reject recommendations
I think that this works well and keeps members informed
It is my belief that the Chair to both Groups are directly influenced by the Executive as to the works programme and nature of the reviews. The Executive, in my view, simply ignore the findings/recommendations of reviews which renders them completely pointless.
Scrap call in procedure and replace with a necessity to seek a veiw from scrutiny first.
More engagement from the exec in terms of questioning and updating the committees. Several of the topics raised in recent council meetings for political stunts could have been done at a scrutiny level and would have produced more productive responses by allowing more engagement between members and the exec. But, a large part of this rests on the members of the committees fully understanding their roles and ability to call up cabinet members for updates/questioning, as well as the chairs facilitating this, rather than it being an unwillingness of the exec to appear at the meetings.
I think it works ok
Direct questioning of Cabinet members, quarterly.

not understanding the question in the context of scrutiny, appointment is in the gift of the leader.