

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY IN WEST LANCASHIRE - QUESTIONNAIRE

Overview and scrutiny committees were introduced in 2000 as part of new executive governance arrangements to ensure that members of an authority who were not part of the executive could hold the executive to account for the decisions and actions that affect their communities.

Overview and scrutiny committees have statutory powers to scrutinise decisions the executive is planning to take, those it plans to implement, and those that have already been taken/implemented. Recommendations following scrutiny enable improvements to be made to policies and how they are implemented. Overview and scrutiny committees can also play a valuable role in developing policy.

Effective overview and scrutiny should:

- Provide constructive 'critical friend' challenge;
- Amplify the voices and concerns of the public;
- Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role; and
- Drive improvement in public services.

Current overview and scrutiny legislation recognises that authorities are democratically-elected bodies who are best-placed to determine which overview and scrutiny arrangements best suit their own individual needs, and so gives them a great degree of flexibility to decide which arrangements to adopt.

The prevailing organisational culture, behaviours and attitudes of an authority will largely determine whether its scrutiny function succeeds or fails.

While everyone in an authority can play a role in creating an environment conducive to effective scrutiny, it is important that this is led and owned by members, given their role in setting and maintaining the culture of an authority.

Under the Sustainable Organisation Review (SORP), the terms of reference of the Member Development Commission were extended to include:

"In order to give effect to the augmented Member role proposed within the Sustainable Organisation Review, to examine how cross-party scrutiny and development of strategy could be strengthened via either existing or new committee arrangements, reporting to Executive Overview and Scrutiny and (then) to Council by April 2020. Such activity to include the option of engaging external specialist advice with relevant expenditure being contained within the budget provided."

One aspect of this task is to look at current scrutiny arrangements and how it can be more strategic in its role.

The Member Development Commission would like to receive your views on the current scrutiny function and your suggestions for improvements.

If you could please take some time to answer the following questions:

* Please delete as appropriate

1. In your opinion, does Overview & Scrutiny work at West Lancashire?
Yes/No*

If no, please explain which aspects do you feel need improving:

2. Executive O&S Committee is responsible for post hoc scrutiny, which is undertaken by considering the minutes of the Cabinet meeting, in your opinion does this work well?

Yes/No*

If No, please give us your suggestions for improvements:

3. Executive O&S is responsible for Pre-decision scrutiny in your opinion does this work well?

Yes/No*

If No, please give us your suggestions for improvements:

4. Exec is responsible for 'Call In', which is undertaken when 5 members of that Committee submit a request for a different decision to be taken from the decision made at Cabinet.

Do you understand this process?

Yes/No*

If yes, in your opinion does this work well?

Yes/No*

If no, please give us your suggestions for improvements:

5. Exec is responsible for Policy & Development tied to the Cabinet cycle, this is undertaken by submitting reports that are being considered by Cabinet to that Committee for consideration, either prior to the meeting of Cabinet or following the meeting of Cabinet. In your opinion, does this work well?

Yes/no*

If no, please give us your suggestions for improvements:

6. Corporate & Environmental O&S Committee is responsible for in depth review or policy development. The Committee sets its own work programme in this regard and details of this can be found via Constitution 3.6.

(a) Topics are chosen via a consultation exercise, usually via a press release, and e-mails to Councillors and Corporate Management Team, there is also an option to carry out this exercise at a Workshop Session. Do you feel that this process for selecting topics works well?

Yes/No*

If no, please give us your suggestions for improvements:

(b) Topics submitted are scored for Importance and Impact on a scale of 1-4 using a scoring guide.

Importance – how well a topic fits with the Council's key aims and priorities. **Impact** – likely potential impact of outcomes from a scrutiny investigation of the topic in terms of community benefit.

The scoring guide can be found on the Council's website under Overview & Scrutiny. Scoring is undertaken by the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Opposition Spokespersons.

Do you think this process of scoring topic suggestions works well?

Yes/No*

If no, please give us your suggestions for improvements:

(c) In depth Scrutiny is usually undertaken by the main committee, however it may also be carried out by informal cross party member working groups. Members of these informal groups can include Cabinet Members, although they should not take a lead role. The only informal group under O&S is the Member Development Commission. Informal Working Groups of this type have been established under Cabinet (Local Plan, Leisure, Grants to Voluntary Bodies, Community Wealth Building, Estates Regeneration, Flooding & Drainage, Landlord Services Committee), which do allow Cabinet Members to take a lead role.

Can you give the Member Development Commission your views in this regard?

7. Any Councillor is able to submit an item or Councillor Call for Action on to the agenda for Corporate O&S Committee. The Protocol can be found at Constitution 18.3.

(a) Do you feel that this process works well?

Yes/No*

If no, please give us your suggestions for improvement:

(b) What would your views be in relation to including another option ie. 'Officer Items', which could provide an opportunity for officers to submit 'One hit items' for scrutiny? If this something you would like developing for the future?
Yes/No*

8. General Information Items (not including planning and licensing matters) are circulated via the Corporate & Env O&S Members Update. This includes items in relation to delegated decisions, performance monitoring, One West Lancs, LCC Health Scrutiny and Police & Crime Panel meetings. Any Councillor can request these items to be included on the Corporate O&S Committee agenda for discussion. Do you think this process works well?
Yes/No*

If no, please give us your suggestions for improvement:

9. The Corp O&S Committee considers Performance Management Reports, including the Annual reports from West Lancs Community Leisure/Serco and BT Lancashire Services Ltd. Do you think this works well?
Yes/No*

If no, please give us your suggestions for improvement:

10. The Corp O&S Committee acts as the Council's Crime & Disorder Committee (See Constitution 18.1) and it receives a presentation annually from representatives of the West Lancashire Community Safety Partnership. Do you think this works well?
Yes/No*

If no, please give us your suggestions for improvement:

11. The Overview and Scrutiny terms of reference are contained at Constitution 9.1, and, as described above, these duties are split across 2 Committees (Executive and Corporate & Environment), further details in relation to the split of duties can be found at Constitution 3.6: Article 6 – Overview & Scrutiny Committees

(a) In your opinion, does this work well?

Yes/No*

If no, please explain why:

(b) In your opinion, do you think that the roles of each Committee should be combined and that the number of Overview & Scrutiny Committees be reduced from two to one?

Yes/No*

If yes, please give your reasons:

If no, given the imbalance of work across the 2 Committees, are there any elements of the Corporate & Env O&S Committee work programme you feel could be moved over to the Executive O&S Committee: (please tick)

- In Depth Review
- Member Items/Councillor Call for Action
- Member Update Items
- Performance Management Reports (including Annual reports from West Lancs Community Leisure/Serco and BT Lancashire Services Ltd)
- Crime & Disorder responsibilities

(c) Are there any elements of work across the 2 Committees which you feel do not add value and should be removed from the work programmes?

Yes/No*

If yes, please provide details:

12. O&S Committees have a legal right to request Executive Members and Officers to attend meetings to answer questions. At West Lancs, this only happens on special request, in your opinion does this work well?

Yes/No*

If no, please give us your suggestions for improvement:

13. Officer support of the overview and scrutiny function is provided by a variety of sources: Member Services, Partnership/Performance and officers from

Services across the Council. These roles are detailed in the Annual report which can be found on the Council's website under Overview & Scrutiny.

(a) Do you feel this type of support works well?

Yes/No*

If no, please can you explain your reasons:

(b) Do you require any further level of support?

Yes/No*

If yes, please provide further details:

(c) Combined Authorities, upper and single tier authorities are required to designate a Statutory Scrutiny Officer, West Lancashire Borough Council is not required to provide this appointment. Do you feel that this Council would benefit from such an appointment?

Yes/No*

14. Best Practice Scrutiny training has recently been provided to Members in relation to Committee Work, the Annual Report and Effective Review Groups and a further scrutiny workshop/training session on the Council Plan – Corporate Priorities is scheduled.

Do you feel that you have any further training requirements?

Yes/No*

If yes, please advise what they are:

15. Do you have any views on how scrutiny members could take a more strategic role?

16. Do you have any further suggestions for making improvements to scrutiny in general?