

Draft Characteristics of Effective Overview & Scrutiny

The characteristics below have been developed following initial discussions at a meeting of the Wales Overview & Scrutiny Officers Network where it was felt that the possibility of developing some form of benchmark/criteria for use as part of a self-assessment / peer assessment process should be examined further.

The draft characteristics have drawn upon a number of existing documents/references including the Centre for Public Scrutiny's principles of effective scrutiny, the Welsh Government / Wales Audit Office Factors of Successful Scrutiny and the properties of 'Credible Scrutiny' that were developed through the Cardiff Council-led project that examined the interface between external regulation and overview & scrutiny.

The characteristics have been further developed through discussions with officials from WLGA, Welsh Government and Wales Audit Office and are currently in draft form for the purposes of generating further discussion and debate, and consultation.

Overview and Scrutiny Environment

1. There is a clear and shared understanding and application of the role and purpose of overview & scrutiny amongst executive and non-executive members, senior officers, scrutiny officers and key local partners.
2. Overview & Scrutiny is held in high esteem, enjoys a high status and is trusted and respected both within and outside the Authority.
3. There is a well defined and constructive relationship between overview & scrutiny, the executive and senior officers.
4. Overview & scrutiny has a clearly defined and valued role in the Authority's self-evaluation, performance management and improvement arrangements.
5. There is regular and effective two way communication between overview & scrutiny and external/internal auditors, regulators and inspectors.
6. Overview & scrutiny has clear governance arrangements that are understood and applied effectively.
7. Overview & scrutiny chairs and executive members actively promote the role and value of the scrutiny function to a variety of internal and external stakeholders.

8. Overview & scrutiny members have access to development and training opportunities focused on need, as part of the Authority's wider commitment to member support and development
9. Overview & Scrutiny has a sufficient level of dedicated support from officers who are able to research independently, and are able to provide overview & scrutiny members with high quality, objective analysis and support.
10. The role of officers directly supporting scrutiny activity is well-understood and valued within the organisation. Scrutiny officers have skills, knowledge and resources to support members in delivering effective scrutiny.
11. The overview & scrutiny process receives effective support from the council's wider officer corp as and when required.
12. Information provided to overview & scrutiny is relevant, robust, balanced, meaningful, responsive to requests, is of high quality and is provided in a timely and consistent manner.

Overview & Scrutiny Practice

13. Overview & scrutiny provides evidence-based, constructive challenge, operating objectively, apolitically and independence from executive decision-makers.
14. Overview & scrutiny members identify appropriate topics for challenge or policy review / development and develop outcome-focused forward work programmes
15. Overview and scrutiny members constructively yet robustly challenge policy and decision-makers and implementers (including partners etc) through effective questioning, listening and analysis, and have developed a good understanding and knowledge of the subject under scrutiny.
16. Overview & scrutiny inquiries/reviews are in-depth, rigorous and draw upon independent and objective perspectives from a wide range of sources (including making use of benchmarking information) within and outside the authority.
17. Overview & scrutiny regularly engages with members, officers, the public and other external stakeholders in planning and conducting its work. It seeks to reflect the views, needs and aspirations of the county and its people and community in helping to improve the priorities of the authority. Forward work programmes are available and accessible

to stakeholders and are used to manage the work of scrutiny committees.

18. Overview & scrutiny has a balanced and focused work programme that is developed by overview & scrutiny members, following consultation with the public and partners and discussions with executive members and senior officers. Work programmes take into account local priorities, improvement objectives and key risks and make best use of the resources available to it.
19. Overview & scrutiny members plan their work considering the appropriateness of a range of scrutiny methods/methodologies, use of clear terms of reference and realistic project plans. Work programmes are flexible enough to respond to changing priorities whilst ensuring that aspirations are proportionate to the resource available to it.
20. Scrutiny forward work programmes are routinely shared with auditors, inspectors and regulators to influence the planning of improvement activity.
21. Overview & scrutiny plays a key role in the authority's self-evaluation and assessment arrangements and regularly evaluates itself to ensure that it continues to learn and improve how it adds value and impact.

Overview & Scrutiny Impact

22. Overview & scrutiny regularly contributes to the improvement of proposed/existing policies for the benefit of the area and its local communities.
23. Overview & scrutiny identifies instances where agreed policies are not being implemented effectively and recommends appropriate remedial action to whomever is responsible within or outside the Council.
24. Overview & scrutiny challenges poor performance and its causes and alerts senior officers, the executive, full council or partners to instigate remedial action as appropriate whilst continuing to monitor progress to remedy this.
25. When overview & scrutiny conducts in-depth inquiries/reviews into areas of poor performance it helps shape responses to improve performance and the performance of other public sector providers.
26. Overview & scrutiny ensures that the 'voice' of local people and communities across the area is heard as part of local decision and policy-making processes.

27. Overview & scrutiny enhances democratic accountability through regular, robust, constructive and public challenge of local decision-makers/delivers of services in the local area (including other public service providers / providers of 'shared services').