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Foreword

“Scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that local government remains transparent, accountable and open, resulting in improved public policies and service”
Local Government Association (LGA) 2016

This toolkit has been drawn from a variety of sources and includes many recommendations of best practice selected from leading authorities and organisations in the field of overview and scrutiny.

This toolkit aims to provide guidance to everyone involved in overview and scrutiny in Cheshire East, by explaining what overview and scrutiny is and how it works in Cheshire East.

For those already familiar with overview and Scrutiny, this toolkit should serve as a useful reference tool for improving scrutiny skills to continue carrying out effective, engaging scrutiny that is focused on matters of importance to the residents of Cheshire East.

The toolkit should also help those who are new to local government to familiarise themselves with the key aspects of overview and scrutiny, and how they can be positive contributors to scrutiny in Cheshire East - whether as a councillor, officer, partner organisation or member of the public - to help to shape the future direction of our Council.

Councillor Margaret Simon
Chairman
Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee
An introduction to local government overview and scrutiny

“An effective public scrutiny committee can be a powerful vehicle for change. It can improve the delivery of services; it can connect the public to decision makers and politicians; it can improve efficiency.”
Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), 2008

What is overview and scrutiny?
Overview and scrutiny played a major part in the reforms introduced in 2001 under the Local Government Act 2000, intended to modernise the political management arrangements of local authorities.

Since then, all councils in England and Wales are required to have at least one overview and scrutiny committee to enable non-executive councillors to scrutinise the newly introduced ‘cabinet’ set-up by:

- investigating the decisions made and policies introduced
- questioning how and why decisions are made
- issuing reports and recommendations where shortcomings are identified

An effective overview and scrutiny function can play a pivotal role in the shaping of future council policies.

More recent passed legislation further enhanced the role and powers of overview and scrutiny committees, particularly in relation to the scrutiny of local health providers (see the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007).

Under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, local authorities are required to designate an officer to promote overview and scrutiny.

Overview and scrutiny should be an a-political function that focuses on matters of real concern to local authority residents, challenging decision makers with evidence-based reviews to drive forward better performance and more effective policies.

“The principal power of a scrutiny committee is to influence the policies and decisions made by the council and other organisations involved in delivering public services”
Local Government Association, 2016

Best practice for overview and scrutiny within local authorities suggests that committees should strive to follow and achieve the following four key principles:

1. provide a ‘critical friend’ challenge to the cabinet
2. Reflect the voice and concerns of the public
3. Be led and owned by the elected members of the Council
4. Make a positive impact on service delivery and policy development

What do overview and scrutiny committees do?
The focus of overview and scrutiny activity is on the quality of council services and other strategic borough-wide issues that affect the lives of people living and working in Cheshire East. In this respect, the committees’ work programmes must have regard to the corporate priorities of the Council.

Through their legislative powers, the overview and scrutiny committees at Cheshire East Council can and will:

- review and scrutinise delegated decisions taken by the cabinet, individual cabinet members or officers of the Council
- prepare reports and make recommendations to any of the Council’s Committees, Sub-Committees and partner organisations
- review any matters referred under ‘call-in’ and ‘Councillor Call for Action’ rules, and produce reports and recommendations as required
- review and scrutinise the performance of commissioned services, including those provided by Alternative Service Delivery Vehicles (ASDVs)
- respond to external organisations whose actions affect Cheshire East residents
• require cabinet members and senior officers to attend meetings to be challenged about matters within their remits of responsibility

• invite expert advisors, or other elected members of the Council and members of the public to take part in scrutiny reviews

• refer matters to task and finish groups, comprised of smaller numbers of councillors, to undertake in-depth reviews on specific matters

What overview and scrutiny is not
Overview and scrutiny does not get involved in minor matters, or matters affecting individuals. Nor will it deal with complaints or regulatory matters such as planning or licencing applications, or matters that are subject to review by another organisation or group within or outside of the Council.

Overview and scrutiny committees also cannot deal with matters that are still subject to court proceedings.

In the case that individual matters are referred to it, overview and scrutiny could look to see if the matter relates to a wider strategic issue that it could investigate.

Effective scrutiny
For scrutiny to be effective it needs to be seen as a 'critical friend' to the cabinet, and it should strive to identify where decisions could be improved and how mistakes could be prevented from being repeated.

The focus should be on forward thinking and making positive changes for now and the future, rather than apportioning blame and focusing on the negatives. This will help to foster positive and constructive relationships between overview and scrutiny, councillors and officers.

Scrutiny should also be constructive, focused on tackling issues of direct relevance to local people, challenging accepted ways of doing things, and acting as a champion for developing a culture of improvement in the local area.

Successful overview and scrutiny relies on effective work programming, as well as positive and engaging attitudes of all councillors, cabinet members and officers involved in the scrutiny process.

Measuring the impact of overview and scrutiny
The purpose of overview and scrutiny is ultimately to better the lives of local people through improved public services. As per the Local Government Association’s 2016 ‘Scrutiny for councillors’ guidance, a scrutiny review/investigation can be considered a success if it fulfils one of more of the following conditions:

• it meets the objectives set out by the overview and scrutiny committee

• feedback from the public shows that they think the desired service improvement has been delivered

• the work has helped to achieve corporate or partnership priorities

• there is a return on investment, demonstrating scrutiny’s impact and outcomes in financial terms

In their ‘Tipping the Scales!’ publication, CfPS argued that while carrying out reviews, overview and scrutiny committees should continuously try to estimate and evaluate the impact of scrutiny and test the ways in which a potential return on investment may be calculated.

More information and advice on understanding and following the return on investment principle can be found in CfPS’s full publication here.
The structure of overview and scrutiny in Cheshire East

Cheshire East Council has 82 locally elected councillors who represent residents across the 52 wards that make up Cheshire East.

The Council operates a Leader and Cabinet system. The Cabinet can be comprised of a maximum of ten councillors who can each be designated a particular portfolio area. Follow the links below to view more detail on the roles and remits of each portfolio holder.

Leader of the Council
Adult Social Care and Integration
Children and Families
Corporate Policy and Legal Services
Environment (including waste, highways, car parking and public rights of way)
Finance and Communications
Health (including leisure and libraries)
Housing, Planning and Regeneration

The Council has a number of committees to deal with such matters as licensing, planning, governance and staffing, in addition to its overview and scrutiny function.

The rules governing the way in which overview and scrutiny committees operate, including legislative context, can be found in Part 4 of the Council’s Constitution.
Work programming

“One of the main pitfalls that will lead to the failure of overview and scrutiny is to have an unrealistic and unmanageable work programme. It is therefore important for members to not only be aware of this but to take the lead and “own” the individual work programmes of each committee”

Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS)

The setting of the annual work programme is an important part of the scrutiny process and supports overview and scrutiny committees in carrying out targeted examinations of council service provision, decisions and policies.

Each committee is responsible for selecting topics and setting its annual work programme. The Council’s cabinet members and officers have an influential role in this process by outlining their priorities for the year ahead.

Once set, overview and scrutiny committees need to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the organisation and as such, the work programme should be considered a fluid, living document that is adaptable and subject to regular review.

The programme must also be manageable with respect to the Council’s resources and should have sufficient capacity built into it, to deal with called-in decisions and to consider matters referred from Cabinet or another committee, partner organisations or members of the public.

Topic selection

Any councillor or member of the public can suggest that a particular issue be scrutinised. Suggestions can be made via the Cheshire East website or by contacting a member of the Council’s Scrutiny Team (details provided in Appendix 8).

There is also legislative provision for councillors to refer matters to overview and scrutiny through a Councillor Call for Action (CCfA). More detail on this can be found further along in this toolkit here.

Topics are suitable for scrutiny when:

- scrutiny could have an impact and add value
- the topic is of high local importance and reflects the concerns of local people
- the resources (manpower and budget) required to conduct the review are available
- it avoids the duplication of work elsewhere
- the issue is one that the committee can realistically influence
- the issue is related to an area where the council, or one of its partners, is not performing well
- the issue is relevant to all, or large parts, of the local area
- the review would be in the council’s interests

Topics are not suitable for scrutiny when:

- the issue is already being, or would be more effectively, addressed elsewhere and/or change is imminent
- scrutiny involvement would have limited or no impact upon outcomes
- the topic may be sub-judice or prejudicial to the council’s interest
- the topic is too broad to make a review realistic
- new legislation or guidance relating to the topic is expected within the next year
- the topic area is currently subject to inspection or has recently undergone substantial change

For every item on a work programme (including new referrals), it should be clear:

1. What is the issue/activity/project under consideration?
2. What is scrutiny wanting/being asked to do?
3. What are the reasons for/expected benefits of involving scrutiny in the matter?
4. Is there a specific deadline for the piece of work?
Setting a work programme

Step 1 – identify issues

- consult with all members of the overview and scrutiny committees, as well as cabinet members, senior officers and other council officers
- consider the corporate priorities, business plans and the Forward Plans of the Council (and those of neighbouring / similar authorities)
- consider events and decisions in the council’s calendar that could require an input from scrutiny, e.g. setting budgets
- evaluate previous council performance and identify any follow-up work required to previous scrutiny work
- engage with local people to learn about the issues that are impacting on residents

Step 2 – prioritise topics

- filter and prioritise each potential topic by measuring against the criteria of what is and is not suitable for scrutiny (and reject any unsuitable topics based on this)
- consider the balance between the resources required to scrutinise each topic and the level of impact they could achieve

Step 3 – plan scrutiny work

- confirm the topics that will be reviewed

Step 4 – review and evaluate

- regularly review progress and evaluate outcomes to demonstrate scrutiny’s value
- adjust the programme as necessary to remove redundant topics, and add subjects as new topics/suggestions are received via referrals or revealed through reports on underperforming services

“an effective work programme is central to effective scrutiny. But it’s no simple task. Consultation, prioritisation, challenging conversations, seeking agreement and then piecing it all together”
Centre for Public Scrutiny, 2018

Planned and responsive scrutiny

Planned scrutiny refers to the process of scrutinising matters that were identified during the development of the annual work programme, or were selected to be looked at over the coming year (either as a full committee or through task and finish work). The determination of topics should follow the four steps listed on the left.

Responsive scrutiny refers to the importance of regularly monitoring and evaluating the priorities for scrutiny throughout the year. This ensures that overview and scrutiny committees can be, and are, flexible and responsive to high-priority issues or policy changes that occur throughout the year.

Scrutiny Liaison Meetings are held within two weeks in advance of each formal meeting of the overview and scrutiny committees, the purpose of which is to discuss strategy and emerging items to ultimately inform that committee’s work programme.

They are not agenda setting meetings, but are an opportunity to ensure that work programmes are focused on the key upcoming strategic issues within their remit areas.

Appendix 7 attached to this toolkit sets out the checklist covered by those in attendance at Scrutiny Liaison Meetings.
How overview and scrutiny works

The ongoing formal business of scrutiny is usually carried out at scheduled committee meetings, the purpose and composition of which is defined by legislation and outlined in Chapter 3 ‘Procedure Rules’ of the Constitution.

Scrutiny work is also carried out in smaller, informal ‘task and finish’ groups, which are not covered in legislation. These are time-limited bodies established by overview and scrutiny committees to gather evidence and produce reports and/or recommendations on specific subjects.

Councillor-led

There are many different approaches to running overview and scrutiny; there is no "one size fits all" approach. What is clear, however, is that successful scrutiny relies upon the engagement of a wide number of enthusiastic councillors.

In order for the Council to maintain and develop a successful overview and scrutiny function, councillors must take a leading role in the process; it is not a task just for the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen.

Overview and scrutiny is an a-political function, meaning that councillors must act in a non-partisan manner, encompassing the appropriate skills and competencies required to be able to influence a wide range of public bodies with the aim of improving services for local people.

Councillors must take the lead, not only in work programming but in questioning witnesses, formulating recommendations and preparing reports for consideration by decision makers.

It is important that councillors make time for detailed involvement of topics under review and be free from party political pressure through their respective political groups.

Overview and scrutiny meetings

Overview and scrutiny committee meetings are formal and public, except for when the committee must consider information exempted under the Local Government Act 1972. In these cases, the proper notice will be provided on the agenda.

The meetings provide a forum whereby councillors can:
- discuss written information they have received, from within the council and external bodies
- hear evidence from witnesses, which can include other councillors, council officers, experts, representatives from other organisations and members of the public
- question witnesses to gain a better understanding of issues being discussed
- draw conclusions from discussions and evidence examined

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee has oversight of the activity of the other three overview and scrutiny committees, and is responsible for ensuring that they operate in a coherent and integrated manner.

Where a matter to be scrutinised falls within the remit of one or more overview and scrutiny committees, the decision as to which body will consider it, including any arrangements for joint working or sharing information, will be resolved by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Chairman’s Group

The Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of each overview and scrutiny committee meet on a regular basis as the 'Chairs Group'. These meetings act as an informal discussion forum regarding committee priorities and work programmes.

The role of the Chairman

The membership, including the appointment of a Chairman and Vice-Chairman, of each overview and scrutiny committee is determined by the full Council on an annual basis.

The Chairman has a pivotal role in maintaining the focus of scrutiny activity on issues that are of concern to the residents of Cheshire East. They must encourage the committee to operate in an open, robust manner, but make certain that witnesses and visiting officers are treated with respect and courtesy.
An effective Chairman will possess a range of abilities including good communication, listening and analytical skills in order to balance the desire for committee members to have full and frank discussions, whilst ensuring that the committee makes the best use of its time and resources at meetings.

The Constitution Committee approved a job description for committee chairmen, which can be found here.

The role of councillors
The role of councillors in the overview and scrutiny process has already been discussed in this toolkit. In addition to what has already been stated, overview and scrutiny presents councillors with an opportunity to experiment with the way in which they conduct business and to have a powerful role in policy initiation and development.

It is important that the widest possible range of councillors are involved in scrutiny activity in order that the views of residents from across the 52 wards of Cheshire East are represented and taken into consideration at all stages of the overview and scrutiny process.

Councillors will:
- agree a manageable work programme
- participate in overview and scrutiny reviews, either as a member of a committee or a task and finish group
- hold cabinet members and senior council officers to account
- take part in training and development programmes

The role of co-opted members
People from outside the council may be co-opted onto overview and scrutiny committees (as voting or non-voting co-opted members) and/or on task and finish groups.

The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a statutory responsibility to include co-opted members from the Diocesan Board and Governor representatives, where education matters are being dealt with.

The role of officers
Councils are required to designate a statutory scrutiny officer who is responsible for protecting and promoting the scrutiny function. Along with the monitoring officer, these two officers are ultimately responsible for securing good governance within an authority.

The overview and scrutiny committees are supported by a dedicated team of officers based in the Democratic Services section of the Council. It is their responsibility to support councillors throughout the overview and scrutiny process, which involves:
- advising on relevant processes and procedures
- providing background information
- researching and sourcing professional and technical information from a variety of sources to support specific reviews.

The Scrutiny Team also provides administrative support at meetings and ensures that they are held in accordance with the Council’s rules and procedures set out in its Constitution.

Other council officers may be called to give evidence to an overview and scrutiny committee and/or task and finish group. This could be in the form of a written or oral statement, or responding to members’ questions.

Officers are only usually required to provide factual statements and explanations relating to policies and decisions as appropriate, based upon their professional experience.

Officers should not be drawn into politically contentious matters. Likewise, councillors should be aware that an officer’s role at an overview and scrutiny committee meeting is to provide objective, factual information and it would therefore be inappropriate to ask officers to comment on politically sensitive matters.

The Scrutiny Team will provide officers with details in advance of a meeting, where possible and appropriate, of the subject under review and an indication of the issues likely to be the subject of members’ questions.

Officers are expected to fully cooperate with scrutiny inquiries, and should attend committee meetings on the understanding that the aim is to deliver service improvements.
The role of the cabinet

“Public scrutineers should be confident of the ground on which they stand – which does not need to be approved or sanctioned by the executive (Cabinet). This formal independence from the executive an important principle which underpins the scrutiny role” – CfPS

As stated earlier in this toolkit, the Council’s Cabinet can be made up of a maximum of 10 councillors. Each member of the Cabinet has certain powers to take delegated decisions set out in the Constitution.

The Cabinet can be assisted by deputy cabinet members who, although have no powers to take decisions themselves, do act in an ‘executive capacity’ and therefore are treated in the same way as Cabinet members in relation to overview and scrutiny.

In its ‘Good Scrutiny Guide’ the Centre for Public Scrutiny advises that “non-executives and executives need to agree appropriate working arrangements or ‘ground rules’.”

It is the role of cabinet members and deputy cabinet members to develop relationships between overview and scrutiny and the Cabinet and inform of the key strategic priorities of the Council.

Cabinet members and deputy cabinet members that are invited to attend overview and scrutiny committee meetings, do so strictly in an advisory role to listen and, as appropriate, contribute to the discussion and help to build constructive relationships with the committees.

It is at the discretion of the Chairman of the committee as to whether cabinet members and deputy cabinet members may contribute during a meeting, but they may not partake in any debates.

When dealing with a called-in decision, cabinet members or deputy cabinet members may attend the meeting to explain the background to the decision and answer members’ questions, but must not attempt to influence the committee in any way.

“The responsibility for scrutiny working well is shared with the council’s executive, which has a duty to ensure its members do not undermine or denigrate scrutiny” – LGA
Working with partners
Councils are increasingly establishing partnership working arrangements to deliver effective public services whilst managing smaller budgets and fewer resources. It is therefore likely that any scrutiny review will involve one or more partner organisations in some way. Scrutiny has statutory powers set out in legislation to investigate the work of partners.

Health
The Health and Adult Social Care and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee may investigate any health-related issue in the Cheshire East area, and is obliged to invite interested parties to attend meetings when carrying out investigations.

The committee also has the right to require a response to any recommendations made to NHS bodies within 28 days.

In certain circumstances where scrutiny finds issues around substantial developments or reconfigurations of local health services, the health scrutiny committee has the power to refer a particular matter to the Secretary of State for Health.

Community safety
Under the Police and Justice Act 2006, a committee of a council when designated as a community safety scrutiny committee has the power to ask local community safety partners for information, request that those partners attend meetings (given reasonable notice) and require that those partners consider recommendations submitted to them.

Flood risk management
Following recommendations made by the Pitt Review, overview and scrutiny committees have a formal role with regard to flood risk management, which allows for the review and scrutiny of such functions to be carried out by upper tier authorities. As Cheshire East Council is a unitary authority, it possesses these powers.

Other partners
There are not legal powers in relation to other organisations working in partnership with councils to deliver public services. Other partners can be asked to attend meetings, provide information and have regard to recommendations made to them, however, there is no legal obligation for this.

It is therefore important to foster positive working relationships with partners, set out mutual expectations, and encourage these partners to engage in scrutiny, in order that overview and scrutiny can achieve its objectives.
The overview and scrutiny process

Carrying out scrutiny inquiries

Each council has its own process for conducting an overview and scrutiny review and all will generally be influenced by resource availability. The seven-step process outlined on the following page sets out the generic process followed by overview and scrutiny committees at Cheshire East Council.

There is a legal requirement for the executive to respond to recommendations made by overview scrutiny within two months of them being made. Partner organisations have a responsibility to ‘have regard’ to any recommendations addressed to them. Some health partners can be required to respond to recommendations within 28 days of them being issued.

The response to a recommendation from a decision-maker should consist of:

- a clear commitment to delivering the measure within the timescale set out
- a commitment to be held to account on that delivery in six months and/or a year
- detailed, substantive reasons why a recommendation is proposed to not be accepted/adopted

Pre-decision scrutiny

- Pre-decision scrutiny is usually planned during the work programming activity
- It could take place immediately before a decision is made, or a more significant amount of time beforehand
- By challenging assumptions and assessing risks that might arise from the implementation of a decision, scrutiny provides the opportunity to influence and improve decisions before they are finalised.
- Overall, pre-decision scrutiny can help the decision-making process by:
  - providing an impartial perspective
  - challenging assumptions and making evidence-gathering more robust
  - developing realistic plans and targets
  - securing ownership and buy-in to the final decision
  - engaging with and satisfying the public

Post-decision scrutiny

- Post-decision scrutiny takes place in response to decisions that have already been made
- It is particularly useful for influencing policy changes in the medium to long term
- Scrutiny has the power to ‘call-in’ a decision that has been made but not yet implemented, to ask the cabinet to revisit a decision and delay its implementation
- More information on the uses of call-in and how it can and should be used can be found here
Step 1 – Topic selection

Topics to be inquired about are selected by the overview and scrutiny committee and are usually drawn from its annual work programme. Items can be suggested for consideration by members and officers of the Council, another of the Council’s committees, or the general public.

Inquiries will either be undertaken by the full overview and scrutiny committee or, as in the majority of cases, be allocated to a task and finish group.

Step 2 – Scoping/planning the inquiry

The scoping exercise is completed by the task and finish group undertaking the inquiry. Through this, the group should determine the:

- objectives and desired outcomes of the review
- terms of reference
- methodology for how the review will be carried out
- key issues and areas of focus
- risks involved (and how they might be minimised)
- who might/will be required to give evidence
- timescales for delivery

Step 3 – Collecting evidence

An array of information could be required to allow challenging, evidence-informed recommendations to be made. Task and finish groups could consider:

- Researching best practice from other local authorities or through local government organisations (e.g. LGA, LGID)
- Holding public meetings
- Attending site visits
- Calling on expert witnesses
- Hearing evidence (in oral or written form) from councillors, officers, members of other groups from the public, business and voluntary sectors
- Consulting service user groups and local interest groups
- Consulting existing partnership groups (e.g. local area partnerships and local strategic partnerships)
- Joint working with other authorities and partner organisations (for cross-cutting issues)
- Commissioning research

Step 4 – Evaluating the evidence

Scrutiny officers will collate the evidence received and support councillors in their review and analysis, and in constructing their formal review findings and recommendations.

Step 5 – Reporting findings

A draft report based on councillors’ findings and recommendations, prepared by the supporting Scrutiny Officers, will be submitted to the task and finish group for approval before being reported to the parent overview and scrutiny committee for final adoption. The report should receive the approval of the committee before being referred to Cabinet, Council, or partner organisations for consideration.

A good recommendation is:

- evidence-informed and realistic
- specific about the change recommended
- related to corporate priorities / developed in partnership with the executive, council officers and council partners
- focused on measurable outcomes
- addressed to a specific person or group
- realistic about resource/financing requirements

In the event of dissent arising from the recommendations, a minority report will be allowed to be forwarded to Cabinet, Council or partner organisations proposing an alternative course of action. Final reports will be published on the Council’s public website, following approval by the appropriate overview and scrutiny committee.

Step 6 – Feedback

It is important that feedback is given to the inquiry’s contributors and concerned stakeholders. The feedback should make it clear what actions are proposed as a result of the inquiry and that responsibility for ensuring these are carried out lies with Cabinet.

Step 7 – Monitoring

Each overview and scrutiny committee must make suitable arrangements to monitor the implementation of the adopted recommendations; request progress reports from officers and portfolio holders. In the case that unsatisfactory progress reports are received, the committee may undertake additional scrutiny activity to ensure adopted recommendations are acted upon.
Task and finish groups

Task and finish groups may be established by an overview and scrutiny committee for the purpose of conducting an in-depth review of any service, policy or issue that affects the borough and falls under the remit of that committee.

The parent committee will determine the number of members for the task and finish group and first seek volunteers from within the committee’s membership to join the group. In the instance that a cross-cutting issue (i.e. one that involves matters covering the remits of more than one overview and scrutiny committee) is to be reviewed, volunteers will first be sought from all relevant overview and scrutiny committees. In some instances, the membership of a task and finish group will be opened up to any other councillor that is not a cabinet member or deputy cabinet member.

It is at the discretion of the overview and scrutiny committees as to whether membership of a task and finish group will be opened up to other councillors, or whether co-opted members from relevant partners, organisations or community groups will be asked to join.

Once membership has been determined, the committees will agree a timescale for the review process. This can vary dependent upon the matters being scrutinised, although most task and finish groups will complete their work within six months.

It is the responsibility of a task and finish group to determine its own methodology for carrying out their work and developing a scope that outlines objectives for the review and detailing how evidence will be gathered (e.g. who will be asked to attend meetings and where members can attend site visits). This is usually done in conjunction with the appropriate executive directors and cabinet portfolio holders, to ensure that their input as the strategic and political drivers for a particular service or policy is incorporated in the review.

At the conclusion of its investigation, the task and finish group (with the support of a Scrutiny Officer) will prepare a report and/or recommendations for consideration by its parent committees.

Spotlight reviews

A spotlight review presents overview and scrutiny committees with an opportunity to work in a different way, in the style of a government ‘select committee’, and carry out an in-depth investigation in a single day.

Spotlight reviews should be focused on one item and incorporate all key partners and players in the review process. The committee will likely spend a full day carrying out interviews, following which the evidence will be gathered, collated and analysed before a final discussion is held and the report findings and recommendations are put together.

Reporting procedures for task and finish work

At the conclusion of its investigation, the task and finish group (with the support of a Scrutiny Officer) will prepare a report and recommendations for consideration by its parent committees.

This final draft report will be considered at a validation meeting comprised of the head of service, portfolio holder and financial and/or legal representatives as required. This meeting allows for the key stakeholders to meet with the task and finish group to ‘sign off’ on the report. It should not be seen as an opportunity to challenge or shape the conclusions and recommendations of the task and finish group, unless they have been founded upon a lack of legal, financial or professional information or advice.

The final report will be considered for approval by the parent overview and scrutiny committees before being submitted to Cabinet and/or the appropriate partner organisations for their consideration. Scrutiny can ask that the recommendations arising from the review be considered, and that the portfolio holder provide a written response to these within two months of them being reported for consideration.
Terms of reference for task and finish groups

- Any task and finish group will be established by one or more of the Council’s overview and scrutiny committees, who will act as the parent committees to the group.

- The Chairman, Vice-Chairman and membership of a task and finish group is decided upon by its parent committee, or committees.

- Membership of a task and finish group will be made up of members of the parent committee except for when, at the discretion of said committee, it is determined that membership should be opened up to other councillors, or co-opted members from relevant partners.

- In the event that a task and finish group member submits apologies for a meeting, another councillor will not be allowed to represent them as a ‘substitute’ at the meeting in their stead. The reasoning for this is that task and finish groups are detailed pieces of work that are sometimes carried out over a long period of time, and it would be considered inappropriate and potentially detrimental, for the membership to change between meetings.

- Other councillors that are not members of a task and finish group may attend task and finish group meetings at the discretion of the Chairman, or in their stead, Vice-Chairman. This will only ever be in an advisory role to provide information on a topic or to assist the group with a particular expertise.

- Responsible for reporting to parent committee as required throughout the review process to report progress and advise on proposed report/recommendations.

- A final report should be written outlining the findings of the review, as well as any proposed recommendations to be made to Cabinet, the relevant portfolio holders or senior officers, or partner organisations.

- Parent committees agree report and recommendations before report is discussed at a validation meeting.

- Validation meetings should be convened once the final draft report has been finished and before it is presented to the parent committee for approval.

- A validation meeting should involve all key stakeholders (head of service, portfolio holder, financial and legal representatives) to allow them to discuss the report with the task and finish group and provide an unofficial ‘sign off’.

- Task and finish groups will be supported by at least one Scrutiny Officer, who will be responsible for administrating and arranging meetings, liaising with councillors, officers and external partners and assisting in the writing of the report and recommendations.
Call-in

Why is call-in important?
Call-in provides a mechanism for councillors to intervene when they feel that a decision being made by the cabinet needs to be revisited (or possible changed). It provides a key check and balance in the leader/cabinet system of governance.

“[call-in] should be regarded as a measure that is only needed in exceptional circumstances, rather than day-to-day”
Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS)

Call-in procedure
Any six councillors (that are not Cabinet Members or Deputy Cabinet Members) may call-in a decision that has not yet been implemented. The call-in period lasts for five working days after the formal record of a made decision has been published.

A call-in request form should be completed and signed by the ‘call-in group’ and be returned to the Director of Governance and Compliance and Monitoring Officer, who must then review the evidence provided against a specific set of criteria (see the call-in request form on page 21) before either validating or rejecting the call-in.

Although the decision cannot be changed, scrutiny can refer the matter back to the decision maker and ask that the decision be reviewed and alternative courses of action be considered.

The decision will be referred to the first available meeting of the overview and scrutiny committee for consideration, at which the committee then has two options:

(1) to offer no advice, in which case the decision may be implemented with immediate effect

(2) to officer advice, in which case the matter must be referred to Cabinet in order for a decision to be made upon it

Cabinet is not bound to accept any advice offered to it and will have sole discretion on any further action to be taken in respect of the called-in decision. Cabinet could, for example:

• defer the matter pending further investigation; or

• make a different decision

In most circumstances, the committee will deal with call-in at a public committee meeting, however, there may be occasions when, dependent upon the confidentiality of the subject matter being called-in, all or part of the discussion will have to be held without the press and public present.

Where an overview and scrutiny committee decides to offer advice, this must be clearly documented in the Minutes of that meeting.

Call-in and urgency
The call-in procedure does not apply where the key decision being taken by Cabinet is ‘urgent’. A decision will be considered urgent if any delay, caused by the call-in process, would be likely to seriously prejudice the interests of the Council and public.

In order for an urgent decision to be taken, the Chairman of the appropriate overview and scrutiny committee must agree that the decision should be treated as urgent and that the call-in procedure should not apply.

In the absence of the Chairman, the Mayor must agree that the decision should be treated as urgent, and the Vice-Chairman’s consent shall also be required. In the absence of both the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, consent shall be required from the Chief Executive or their nominee.

Where an agreement is reached to take a key decision through urgency procedures, all members of the Council will be notified by electronic means.

The full details of the Council’s call-in procedure can be found at Paragraph 12 of the ‘Scrutiny Procedure Rules’ section of the Council’s Constitution.
The call-in process at meetings

(1) The appropriate cabinet member and officer will attend the meeting to explain the background and reasons for the decision, as well as to answer any questions the committee may have.

(2) The Chairman will introduce the report of the Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer regarding the called-in decision.

(3) A spokesperson for the signatories on the call-in request will explain the reasons the decision has been called-in.

(4) The Chairman will seek clarification on any issues arising from the spokesperson’s statement.

(5) The cabinet member will explain the reasons for the decision.

(6) Members of the committee will then have the opportunity to question the cabinet member; officers will be able to assist the cabinet member on any technical issues.

Note that councillors who are not members of the overview and scrutiny committee have no legal right to question the persons called before the committee. If they wish to put any point, they should direct their question to the Chairman, who may in their discretion, put the question themselves.

(7) The Chairman will confirm that there are no further questions for the cabinet member.

(8) Finally, the Chairman will open the matter for debate at the conclusion of which, the committee may resolve to offer no advice (in which case the decision may be implemented with immediate effect), or officer advice (which will then be submitted to Cabinet for a decision to be made upon the matter).
**Call-in diagram**

**Decision taken** (by Cabinet, cabinet member or officer with delegated authority)

**Record of decision published** (usually within 2 working days of the meeting and notified to members)

**Decision cannot be called-in** because it is both reasonable and urgent and any delay caused by the call-in procedure would likely seriously prejudice the interests of the Council and/or public

**Decision takes effect immediately**

Any six councillors may ask for the decision to be called-in within five working days of the publication of the record of decision, and submit their request to the Director of Governance and Compliance and Monitoring Officer. The request and its supporting evidence is then reviewed by the proper officer against the specific criteria (see the call-in request form overleaf) and is then either validated or rejected. If validated, the called-in decision is then usually deferred to the first available meeting of specially convened meeting of the appropriate overview and scrutiny committee.

**Decision can be called-in**

**No call-in made** meaning the decision will take effect five working days after publication of the record of decision

**The decision will be considered by the appropriate overview and scrutiny committee**

**Concerns addressed satisfactorily**

**Decision takes effect** five working days after publication of the record of decision

**Decision maker reconsiders** (they may or may not amend the original decision before adopting a final decision)

**Decision is challenged by Council**

*Council has no power to make decisions in respect of a Cabinet decision unless it is contrary to the Policy Framework or contrary to/not wholly consistent with the Budget Framework.*

**Decision takes effect from the date of the last occasion it was discussed**

**No objection to decision**

**Referred back to decision maker for reconsideration** setting out in writing the nature of the committee’s concerns

**Referred to Council** (only when matters refer to budget policy framework)

Source for diagram: LGG training materials on overview and scrutiny (amended for Cheshire East Council)
Call-in request form

Decision taken by: Cabinet/Portfolio Holder/Officer *(please indicate)

Date of Decision…………………………

Title of agenda item/report ………………………

Reason for Call In**

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Call In Signatories (to be signed by 6 Members)

Signed by Councillor………………………… Signed by Councillor…………………………
Signed by Councillor………………………… Signed by Councillor…………………………
Signed by Councillor………………………… Signed by Councillor…………………………

Date of call in notice…………………………

**The Call-in rules as set out in the constitution stipulate that any 6 or more Members of the Council may submit a call-in notice in writing to the Monitoring Officer within 5 days of the decision being taken and recorded for one of the reasons set out below. In giving reasons for the call in, Members should consider the following criteria AND explain how any of them apply. Failure to provide sufficient detail may lead to the call in being refused:

1. Decision is outside the policy/budgetary framework
2. Inadequate consultation relating to the decision
3. Relevant information not considered
4. Viable alternatives not considered
5. Justification for the decision open to challenge on the basis of the evidence considered

Director of Governance and Compliance and Monitoring Officer signature

………………………………………………………….

Date received…………………………
Councillor Call for Action

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) is an initiative to help councillors to resolve issues and problems on behalf of their residents on a ward basis. Individual councillors can refer matters raised under CCfA, but only as a last resort, with issues being raised at committee only after other avenues have been exhausted. This means that only those issues that would benefit from scrutiny rise to the surface for intervention at a formal committee level, while most issues are best dealt with through other means.

CCfA was introduced as part of wider changes to provide overview and scrutiny with greater powers to work more closely with partners and across organisational boundaries. It enables councillors – as the democratic representatives of their communities – to raise issues that may not have been able to be resolved through other means.

Cheshire East Council has produced a protocol setting the rules of CCfA in Cheshire East. This can be found in Part 5 of the Council’s Constitution.

CCfA Suitability Checklist

Are the concerns individual complaints?  
Scrutiny is not appropriate for individual complaints. If it is a complaint, advice can be given about the Corporate Complaints procedure.

Do the concerns relate to individual ‘quasi-judicial’ (e.g. licencing) or regulatory (e.g. planning) decisions or to council and non-domestic rates?  
Scrutiny is not appropriate for dealing with these kinds of concerns as they are subject to their own statutory appeals processes.

Are the concerns related to the quality of public service provision at a local level?  
CCfA should not only look at issues of concern relating to council services, but also issues relating to other public services and service areas.

Is the focus of concern on a neighbourhood or locality issue?  
CCfA should focus on neighbourhood or locality issues, where ward councillors can help resolve issues of concern in their wards. If the concern is of a more general nature, issues can still be referred to scrutiny in the usual way.

Is the issue a genuine local concern?  
There is a need to be sure that the concerns in the ward are genuine and not just an individual ‘hobby horse’. Finding out the views of other community members can help to clarify this.

Will an apology, explanation or an assurance about a particular problem be enough to satisfy a community concern?  
Research has shown that an apology, explanation or an assurance that a problem will not be repeated can help to address concerns.

Resolving an issue

Once a councillor has agreed to champion a CCfA, they will be made aware of the variety of ways in which they might seek to resolve a concern, including:

- discussing the issue with officers from relevant council services and/or external organisations and agencies
- raising the issue with locality based arrangements (e.g. Neighbourhood Management Groups or residents groups)
- formally raising the issue with partnerships or partner agencies such as the Police, Clinical Commissioning Groups or NHS England

The issue is persistent and unresolved by ward councillors

When a councillor feels that they have done everything within their power to remedy a CCfA, then they are able to refer the issues to overview and scrutiny. This should always be treat as a last resort.
Public participation

Public participation is an important to overview and scrutiny. Members of the public can get involved by:

- suggesting topics to be reviewed by overview and scrutiny
- attending meetings and making statements
- submitting written evidence when invited to do so
- appearing as a witness when invited to do so

Overview and scrutiny committees may request a range of individuals to give evidence and answer questions on a particular topic (e.g. cabinet members, senior officers, external partners, experts), which can also include members of the public.

Most overview and scrutiny committee meetings are held in public session, meaning that they are publicly recorded and the press may be in attendance. Task and finish groups are not held in public; however, their final report will be a public document.

Appendix 6 of this toolkit provides further guidance for witnesses and members of the public attending overview and scrutiny meetings. Guidance will be made available to the public at the beginning of an overview and scrutiny committee meeting.

Media relations

Purpose of good media relations

Effective media relations are essential for keeping the public informed about overview and scrutiny activity, to highlight the benefits of the scrutiny function within the council, external partners and the general public.

Where scrutiny suggests a course of action that is different to, or challenges a decision made by Cabinet, or any other Council decision-making body, this will be made clear in any publicity – together with the process for resolving the differences.

Scrutiny press releases may contain non-political quotes from the relevant committee Chairman

Proactive media releases

Proactive media releases may be issued when a task and finish group is formed, and again to report the findings of the group. No media releases will be issued around subjects yet to be considered by the overview and scrutiny committees, or where all relevant material is not available.

The role of media relations

The Communications Team works on behalf of the Council and the purpose of its work is to provide high quality information about the Council, its policies and services, to maintain public confidence and, where appropriate, to protect and promote the Council’s reputation.

Publications will highlight why the Council is proposing to, or has made, certain decisions, and why other proposals are rejected.

The Communications Team, in consultation with the Scrutiny Team, will prepare all media releases.
Appendix 1 - Scoping a review

When a task and finish group has been set up, a thorough scoping exercise should be carried out to establish clear aims, objectives and methodology for the review.

All group members, executive cabinet members and senior officers involved in the scoping process should have regard to the seven questions set out on the left.

The clearer and more precise the answers to these, the more targeted and focused the review should hopefully be.

- **Why are we undertaking this review?**
- **What is the objective of this review?**
- **Who do we want to influence?**
- **What are the desired timescales for starting and completing the review, and submitting the final report to overview and scrutiny and then Cabinet?**
- **What are the main issues and areas of focus related to this topic area?**
- **How will the inquiry and investigation be approached? What sources of information will be required?**
- **What is the expected/desired output?**
## Appendix 2 - Scrutiny project initiation document

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<td>Project manager</td>
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<td>Project initiator</td>
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<td>Corporate objectives</td>
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### Background and reasons for undertaking the project

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### Project objective

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### Project deliverables / outcomes

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### Benefits expected

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### Witnesses

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### Site visits

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### Publicity

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Appendix 3 - Scrutiny project plan

**OBJECTIVE:**

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<th>Information required</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>How? (i.e. meetings, site visits etc)</th>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
<th>Status (R.A.G.)</th>
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Appendix 4 - Questioning techniques

“Questioning is a crucial component of the ‘critical friend’ challenge and an important principle of good public scrutiny. The key to successful questioning is balancing the need to get answers with the need to build strong relationships”

Local Government Association, 2016

Witnesses are often the most valuable sources of information that councillors rely upon when undertaking scrutiny reviews. Effective questioning will help to ensure that councillors make the best use of witnesses, whose time be limited.

Witnesses do not attend overview and scrutiny or task and finish group meetings to hear personal speeches from councillors, nor to enter into arguments about the merits of the information they have provided. They attend to impart their knowledge in their particular areas of expertise. It is then the job of the councillors to debate evidence gathered from all sources and formulate a view and/or recommendations from these.

Open and closed questions

A closed question usually receives a single word, or short, factual answer. For example:

Q: “Are you thirsty?”
A: “Yes”

Open questions elicit longer answers. These are usually prefaced with “what”, “why” or “how”. An open question asks the respondent for their knowledge, opinion or feelings. “Tell me” and “describe” also effective ways to begin an open question.

Open questions are good for:

- developing an open conversation
- finding out more detailed information
- finding out the respondents' opinions or issues

Closed questions are good for:

- testing your understanding, or the other person’s
- concluding a discussion or making a decision
- frame setting

A misplaced closed question has the potential to end a conversation and/or lead to awkward silences, so are best avoided when a conversation is flowing.

Funnel questions

This technique involves starting with general questions, honing in on a point in each answer, and asking for more detail at each level. This style of questioning is often used by detectives when taking a witness statement. For example:

Q: “How many people were involved in the incident?”
A: “About ten”

Q: “Were they children or adults?”
A: “Mostly children”

Q: “What sort of ages were they?”
A: “About 14 or 15”

Q: “Were any of them wearing anything distinctive?”
A: “Yes, several of them had red baseball caps on”

Q: “Can you remember if there was a logo on any of the caps?”
A: “Now you come to mention it, yes, I remember seeing a big letter N”

Using the funnel technique can help a witness to re-live a situation and gradually focus on particular details. It can help to obtain more detail from a witness than a single open question.
Funnel questions are good for:
- finding out more detail about a specific point
- gaining the interest or increasing the confidence of the person you’re speaking with

Probing questions
Asking probing questions is another strategy for finding out more detail. Sometimes it is as simple as asking your respondent for an example to help you understand a statement they have made. At other times, you need additional information for clarification, or to investigate whether there is proof for what has been said.

An effective way of probing is to use the “five whys” method, which can help you to quickly find the root cause of an issue.

Probing questions are good for:
- gaining clarification to ensure you have the whole story and that you understand it thoroughly
- drawing information out of people who are trying to avoid telling you something

Leading questions
Leading questions try to lead the respondent to a certain way of thinking. This can be done in several ways:
- with an assumption (e.g. “how late do you think that the project will be?”)
- by adding personal appeals to agree at the end (e.g. “Lori is very efficient, don’t you think?”)
- phrasing a question so that the easiest response is yes (e.g. “shall we approve Option 2?”)
- giving people a choice between two options that you would be happy with

Rhetorical questions
Rhetorical questions are not really questions at all, in that they don’t expect an answer. They are essentially statements phrased in the form of a question. People use rhetorical questions because they are engaging for the listener as they are drawn into agreement with something, rather than feeling like they are being told something.

Rhetorical questions are good for:
- engaging the listener

Tip:
When using funnel questioning, start with closed questions. As you progress through the funnel, start using more open questions.

Tip:
Use questions that include the word “exactly” to probe further, e.g. “what exactly do you mean by fast-track?”

Tip:
Use leading questions with care. If they are used in a self-serving way, or one that harms the interests of the other person, then they can, quite rightly, be seen as manipulative and dishonest.
Using questioning techniques
You have probably used all of these questioning techniques before in your everyday life; at work and at home. By consciously applying the appropriate method of questioning, you can more effectively gain the information, response or outcome that you desire.

Questions are a powerful way of:

Learning – ask open and closed questions, and use probing questioning also.

Building relationships – people generally respond positively if you ask about what they do, or enquire about their opinions. If you do this in an affirmative way, you will help to establish, build and maintain an open dialogue.

Managing and coaching – with regards to managing and coaching, rhetorical and leading questions are useful too. They can help people to reflect on, and commit to, courses of action that you have suggested.

Avoiding misunderstandings – use probing questions to seek clarification, particularly when the consequences are significant. And to make sure you avoid jumping to conclusions, the “ladder of inference” tool can help too.

Diffusing a heated situation – you can calm an angry customer or colleague by using funnel questions to get them to go into more detail about a particular situation, e.g. a grievance. This might not only help to distract them from their emotions, but will often help the questioner to identify small practical things that can be done to help the person to feel less emotional.

Persuading people – nobody likes to be lectured, but asking a series of open questions will help others to embrace the reasons behind a particular point of view (e.g. “what do you think about bringing the sales force in for half a day to have their laptops upgraded?”)
Appendix 5– Guidance for officers attending

Senior officers (namely CLT, Heads of Service or nominees at a suitable level to answer member questions) may be asked to make a significant input into a scrutiny committee’s work from time to time. They may be asked to attend as witnesses, to write and present reports, or to give evidence on issues within their remit. They may be asked to explain any particular decision or decisions, the extent to which actions taken implement Council policy and/or about the performance of the service.

 Appearing at a scrutiny meeting should not be an intimidating experience. Meetings will be conducted in the spirit of openness, and members will not seek to “catch officers out”. Members of the committee are bound by a Code of Conduct and meetings will be conducted fairly. Those giving evidence will be treated with respect and courtesy but will be expected to be accountable and to speak on behalf of their Directorate.

The majority of overview and scrutiny committee meetings will be recorded and available on the Council’s website.

Providing written evidence/reports

Written reports to the overview and scrutiny committees must comply with the usual “Access to Information” requirements. Guidance on deadlines and report format will be given by the Scrutiny Officer. Authors are requested to produce reports that:

- contain the information which has been requested
- are concise and factually accurate
- are in the correct template
- explain any jargon, abbreviations and technical terms used
- avoid the use of irrelevant information

Officers will be given as much notice as possible of requests for reports and other written information – normally a minimum of ten working days.

Reports must be published with the agenda; only in exceptional circumstances with the approval of the Chairman and relevant director can reports be marked to follow.

The content of reports should be fully discussed with the CLT member responsible for the area of work in question. The appropriate Portfolio Holder should also be briefed.

Providing oral evidence / presenting written reports

When attending a meeting, please make yourself known to the Scrutiny Officer, who will introduce you to the Chairman and show you where to sit.

When your item is being considered you will be asked to sit at the “invitees” table. The Chairman will ask you to introduce yourself and make your presentation/introduce your report. The Chairman will then lead the session, although all members of the committee may ask questions. The expectation is that officers attending Committee meetings will be able to answer all reasonable questions on the matter in question. Occasionally, a question may need more detailed consideration than can be provided on the day and in these circumstances, the Chairman may agree that a written response be provided.

Depending on the situation, lines of questioning may be probing and firm, and those officers called to give evidence should do so in a non defensive manner.

The committees are supported by Scrutiny Officers, who will be the first line of contact and provide advice on any issues or concerns you may have.
Appendix 6 - Guidance for witnesses

Where and when are the meetings held?
Meetings usually take place at 10.30am or 2.00pm in the Committee Suite, Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach.

Occasionally, alternative times and venues may be used. For an up-to-date schedule of meetings please visit our website or contact us.

Who will be there?
Membership of the Scrutiny Committees is made up of elected Councillors from all political parties on the Council on a proportionate basis. In some instances, individuals are co-opted to participate in the business of the Committees, as they have special expertise in certain areas of work.

A Scrutiny Officer will be present to provide advice to the Committee and take minutes at the meeting. Other officers who are presenting reports will also be present.

As Scrutiny meetings are open to the public (unless otherwise stated – eg confidential matters are being discussed), members of the public are welcome to attend, and the press and media may also be present.

Meetings may involve contributions from a wide range of sources, including members, officers, representatives from other public bodies, local businesses, voluntary groups, specialists and other members of the community.

What happens when I arrive to attend a meeting?
If you are attending the meeting as an observer you will be greeted by one of the Scrutiny Officers who will show you to the public seating area and provide you with a copy of the agenda.

Recording of Meetings
The meeting will be recorded and where possible broadcast live on the Council’s website. If it is not possible to broadcast the meeting live, then the recording will be made available shortly after the meeting.

Will a written record of the meeting be produced?
Minutes of the meeting will be taken. These will include a summary of the matters discussed and any decisions or recommendations made.

Who Can Speak?
Anyone is entitled to make a statement at a meeting of one of the Council’s Scrutiny Committees but may not ask questions. The statement must relate to the remit of the Committee.

When Can I Speak?
A total period of 15 minutes is allocated for members of the public to make a statement on any matter that falls within the remit of the Committee. Individual members of the public may speak for up to 5 minutes, but the Chairman will decide how the period of time allocated for public speaking will be apportioned, where there are a number of speakers.

Members of the public can only speak during the agenda item relating to public speaking/open session. You can not take part in the debate or speak during any other item of the agenda.

Where do I sit?
When it is your turn to speak, the Chairman will call you forward to the Committee table. Once you have spoken, you will be asked to return to the public gallery.

Chairman’s Discretion
The Chairman of the committee will have the discretion to stop a speaker before their allotted time has concluded if, in the Chairman’s view, the speaker is making any comments that are, or appear to be, defamatory, vexatious, discriminatory, contain offensive language, or behaviour otherwise not appropriate for a Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Do I Need to Register to Speak?
It would be helpful if you could let the scrutiny officer know if you would like to speak and what you will be speaking about. The scrutiny officer will be able to advise you on the appropriate scrutiny Committee to speak at.

General Disturbance
It is recognised that some matters to be discussed may be controversial. However to ensure that business is conducted in an orderly fashion, it is essential that procedures are followed. In the event of disorderly conduct, the Chairman will warn the person concerned. If they continue to disrupt, the Chairman will request them to leave the meeting.

Mobile Phones
Please turn off your mobile phone or put it on ‘silent’ during the meeting.
Appendix 7 - Overview and scrutiny work programme topic selection checklist

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(1) Does this issue have a potential impact for one or more sections of the population?

(2) Is the issue strategic and significant?

(3) Will the scrutiny activity add value to the Council’s and/or its partners’ overall performance?

(4) Is it likely to lead to effective outcomes?

If “no” is the answer to any of the above then the topic should not be entered into the work programme.

(5) Will scrutiny involvement be duplicating some other work?

If “yes” then the topic is added to the work programme as a LOW priority to be monitored

(6) Is it an issue of concern to partners and stakeholders?

(7) Is it an issue of community concern?

(8) Are there adequate resources available to do the activity well?

(9) Is the scrutiny activity timely?

If “no” is the answer to any of these questions then the topic is added to the work programme as a LOW priority to be monitored

If “yes” then the topic is added to the work programme as a HIGH priority

Decision

This item is confirmed as a ________________________________

Signed by Chairman ________________________________ Date __________________
Appendix 8 - More information

This guide was compiled by Cheshire East Council’s Scrutiny Team. Please contact a member of the team if you have any questions or need further information.

Contact information

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Useful web links

Find out more about the overview and scrutiny function by following these links:

Information on the scrutiny function of national government – select committees
http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/committees/select.cfm

The Centre for Public Scrutiny – national body which supports the work of overview and scrutiny functions in government and public services
http://www.cfps.org.uk/home/index.php

Department for Communities and Local Government
http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate

Protocols

- Task and finish group protocol
- Protocol between the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Safer Cheshire east partnership
- Cheshire and Merseyside joint health overview and scrutiny committee protocol
- Cheshire east health scrutiny protocol