

Report to: **Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**  
Date: **23 November 2006**  
By: **Director of Law and Personnel**  
Title of report: **Improvements to scrutiny arising from away days and peer review**  
Purpose of report: **To consider some practical suggestions for improving scrutiny in East Sussex**

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

**The Committee is recommended to consider the emerging themes and practical suggestions for improving scrutiny and prioritise for action.**

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**1. Background**

Scrutiny Committee Away Days

1.1 Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee, Children's Services Scrutiny Committee and Health Overview Scrutiny Committee have held away days this year. These sessions allowed Members an informal opportunity to discuss their experiences of scrutiny, consider what they want the role of scrutiny to be and to highlight ways to improve the committee in the future. The emerging themes and practical suggestions are listed for discussion in the attached appendix.

**2. Outcomes of the Peer Review**

2.1 The Peer Review took place during the week of 25–29 September 2006. Members of the review team interviewed scrutiny members and attended the Audit and Best Value Scrutiny Committee. They also discussed the work and outcomes of scrutiny with various Members, officers and other stakeholders during the week.

2.2 The Peer Review concluded that "scrutiny in East Sussex represents a model of good practice and operates in a constructive, cross-party way". They made a couple of suggestions to enhance scrutiny even further.

2.3 Over the coming months the implications of the Peer Review on scrutiny in East Sussex will be analysed and detailed proposals considered early in 2007. In the meantime, the scrutiny committee is recommended to consider some practical suggestions for improvement as outlined in Appendix A.

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Local Member(s): All

Background documents: Peer review report; scrutiny away day reports

## APPENDIX A

	Idea	Aims/expected outcomes/risk management
1	<p>Hold a members' pre-meeting with Scrutiny Lead Officer (SLO) immediately prior to each formal committee meeting</p> <p>(HOSC already does this and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee has just begun to hold them)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helps clarify objectives, possible approaches and questioning techniques</li> <li>• Helps focus the questioning and minimise omissions</li> <li>• Help clarify what is to be achieved</li> </ul>
2	<p>Involve the public more in the scrutiny process by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• encouraging other organisations or members of the public to interact with the committees (this has happened in some scrutiny reviews, but much less so at committees)</li> <li>• making greater use of existing forums to consult with the public (eg older persons forums and disability forums)</li> <li>• publicising scrutiny better through, say, the Web and press releases (HOSC has an independent website with 4,000 to 5,000 hits per month)</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><u>(based on peer review suggestion)</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase public knowledge of, and participation in, scrutiny</li> <li>• SLOs would carefully brief witnesses to ensure relevance and to divert 'complaints' as appropriate</li> <li>• Members of the public with considered views would help committees in formulating relevant lines of questioning</li> <li>• May generate completely new issues to scrutinise.</li> </ul>
3	<p>Possible more member opportunities to meet with staff at all levels within the departments. This could be through officer attendance at meetings to present items, or through member visits to departments or field visits.</p> <p>(This has happened occasionally by whole committees and more often as part of reviews)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase members' feel for key activities within the committee's remit</li> </ul>
4	<p>Greater dialogue with lead members at committee meetings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures the committee is alerted to key issues and developments within the department</li> </ul>

	<b>Idea</b>	<b>Aims/expected outcomes/risk management</b>
	(T&E Scrutiny Committee does this – lead member has standing invitation to all committee meetings and is encouraged to give his views at appropriate points in the discussion)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhances the 'critical friend' role of scrutiny</li> </ul>
5	<p>Greater involvement of committees in developing policy –scrutiny members would like to see themselves as a 'think-tank'.</p> <p>(Transport and Environment Committee is often alerted by the Lead Member to proposed new or amended policies to gain a scrutiny view before a decision is taken.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unforeseen implications of proposed policies could be highlighted</li> <li>• Minimises use of call-in</li> </ul>
6	<p>The Leader of the Council be required to appear before a public scrutiny committee meeting twice a year to answer questions about the overall stewardship of the Council.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><u>(peer review suggestion)</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good publicity for scrutiny</li> <li>• The ultimate example of “holding to account” type scrutiny</li> <li>• Questions provided in advance helps ensure effective engagement.</li> </ul>
7	<p>Greater individual Member involvement at committees by, say, feeding back on individual activities since the previous meeting.</p> <p>(HOSC does this in respect of each Member’s ‘buddy’ link with a Patient &amp; Public Involvement Forum)</p> <p>Improve feedback about scrutiny activities to all members.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual Member tasks extends the capacity of the committee</li> <li>• Feedback to all Members on progress with reviews and important committee items stimulates debate and should lead to better recommendations.</li> </ul>