

Appendix 3: principles proposed by the scrutiny chairs

Best ways of doing scrutiny

Scrutiny reviews are the most productive and engaging way to do scrutiny, with an emphasis on the quality rather than quantity of reviews. But, choosing what to scrutinise is key:

- Forward-looking scrutiny topics, aligned to what the Council is trying to achieve, are desirable compared to 'blue sky' topics which are less helpful primarily because of a lack of resources
- Scrutiny should aim to look at issues from residents' viewpoint and consider 'value to residents'; there is scope to increase the engagement scrutiny has with users and residents as part of its work
- Scrutiny should not over focus on 'value for money' which is a natural tendency given the Council's financial position and yet involvement in RPPR is an important role for scrutiny
- Scrutiny should be clear about specific questions it is looking to answer – this will result in more focused and informative reports and discussion.
- There remains an important place for 'reactive', 'holding to account' type scrutiny but this should be part of a balanced work programme which includes a larger proportion of forward looking topics and reviews.

Members and scrutiny

Members' attendance is sometimes an issue leaving much scrutiny work being done by only a few Members.

'Politicisation' of scrutiny is relatively rare in ESCC, but to the extent that it happens, it tends to occur around budget scrutiny and 'reactive' scrutiny – we should continue to find ways to keep politics out of scrutiny.

The role of Lead Members, alongside senior officers, is important in scrutiny. Scrutiny committees have an important role in being a resource and a critical friend to the Cabinet and in holding Lead Members to account. In practice, effective scrutiny is about asking the right questions to the right people.

Scrutiny benefits from Member training; generally training works best in regular bursts, say, before or after scrutiny committee meetings. Questioning skills are key.

A possible approach – options for discussion

A scrutiny committee structure with fewer but larger scrutiny committees would address a number of the above issues. A possible option might involve grouping functions into committees as follows:

- Adults and Children's services in a 'people' based scrutiny committee
- Communities, Economy and Transport in a 'things' based scrutiny committee
- HOSC unchanged (due to its unique role and high effectiveness)

Audit Committee responsibilities and the scrutiny of the 'back-office' functions of Governance and Business Services would need to be incorporated, taking account of their support for front line services and ensuring a valid and interesting role.

Opportunities: such an approach scrutiny structure could address a number of issues including:

- Simplifying the complex alignments between scrutiny committees, Lead Member portfolios and departmental responsibilities outlined in Appendix 1

- Reducing the need for some complex inter-committee arrangements that currently handle complex issues such as East Sussex Better Together and libraries
- Providing for bigger pools of interested
- Members who can undertake more scrutiny investigations.

Challenges: the main challenges presented by such an approach would include:

- Workload management and overcoming the potential for long scrutiny committee agendas
- Less 'direct' scrutiny being undertaken by scrutiny committees and more being undertaken by smaller groups of Members delegated to investigate and report back – with committees playing more of a 'commissioning' role.