

14 Steps to Scrutiny Success

1. Explicitly discuss and agree a definition of overview and scrutiny within the authority
2. Select scrutiny chairs and vice-chairs who will provide effective leadership to their committees and have comprehensive role descriptions to guide their work
3. Ensure that members selected for overview and scrutiny are aware of the time commitment, are committed to making scrutiny work and have comprehensive role descriptions to guide their involvement
4. Design a structure which fits the purpose, relates well to the cabinet and officer structure and suits the culture of the authority
5. Develop a member-led, realistic, flexible work programme for each committee
6. Move away from traditional service committee processes by developing a wider range of activities
7. Prioritise a small number of items to investigate in-depth and ensure that these are effectively project managed
8. Finish investigations on time and produce member-led reports which concisely summarise the evidence gathered and the recommendations of the committee
9. Ensure that there is adequate officer support
10. Create a separate budget for overview and scrutiny to fund site visits and other non-meetings-based activities; buy in external advice and pay for training and development and the expenses of external witnesses
11. Develop cross-party working, ensuring that no party group applies the whip to overview and scrutiny
12. Ensure that the opposition has a significant role to play in overview and scrutiny by allocating some chairs and vice-chairs to the opposition
13. Provide training and development for scrutiny councillors, officers directly supporting overview and scrutiny and any co-optees. Provide awareness training for all other councillors and officers down to middle managers
14. Develop and implement a system for continuously monitoring what is working well and what needs improving and undertake a more comprehensive evaluation at least every two to three years (and more frequently in the early stages)

Dr Stephanie Snape 2002