



# National Park Scrutiny Toolkit – Draft List of Contents

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## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: TERMS OF REFERENCE**

### Role

1. To review existing policies and the effectiveness of their delivery in relation to the Authority's Corporate Strategy
2. To review proposed policies/decisions referred to the Committee by the three Review Committees (via the National Park Authority)
3. To review any other matter referred to the Committee by the National Park Authority
4. To make evidence-based recommendations to the National Park Authority and/or partners as appropriate

### Mode of operation

The Committee will comprise 9 Members of the Authority, to be selected and/or confirmed at the Annual General Meeting each year

The Committee will co-opt external advisers to assist in the scrutiny process as necessary

The Committee will meet as necessary and provide reports to the Authority on its performance

### Note

The exercise of such powers and duties exclude:

- matters specifically reserved to be exercised by the Authority, unless delegated to the Committee
- matters delegated to another Committee or Sub-Committee
- decisions taken where the full impact of that decision cannot as yet be correctly evaluated
- matters that the Chief Executive Officer considers should be referred to a meeting of the Authority for determination



## Scrutiny Chair – Draft Role Description

### 1. Accountabilities

- To the National Park Authority
- To the Public

### 2. Role purpose & activity

#### Providing leadership and direction

- To provide confident and effective management of the Member team
- To promote the role of scrutiny within and outside the Authority, liaising effectively both internally within the Authority and externally with the Authority's partners
- To demonstrate an objective and evidence-based approach to scrutiny
- To evaluate the impact and added value of scrutiny activity and identify areas for improvement

#### Managing the work programme

- To ensure development of a balanced Committee work programme which includes pre-decision scrutiny, policy development and review and investigative scrutiny
- To ensure the programme takes account of relevant factors such as the work programmes of other committees, strategic priorities and risks, and relevant community issues
- To ensure that the work programme is delivered
- To report on progress against the work programme to the Authority, and others as appropriate
- To liaise with officers, other Members and community representatives to resource and deliver the work programme

#### Effective meeting management

- To prepare adequately for the meeting beforehand
- To ensure that agendas contain clear objectives and outcomes for the meeting
- To manage the progress of business at meetings, ensuring that meeting objectives are met, and the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and other constitutional requirements are adhered to
- To ensure that all participants have an opportunity to make an appropriate contribution

#### Community engagement

- To help the Authority build understanding and ownership of the scrutiny function within the community
- To promote the full involvement of external stakeholders, for example service users, expert witnesses and partners, in scrutiny

Involvement and development of Committee Members

- To encourage effective contributions from all Committee Members in both Committee and Task and Finish Groups
- To assess the Committee's effectiveness in delivering the agreed work programme
- To champion the importance of learning and development

**3. Values**

- To be committed to the aims and values of the Authority and the following values of public office:
  - Openness and transparency
  - Honesty and integrity
  - Tolerance and respect
  - Equality and fairness
  - Appreciation of cultural difference
  - Sustainability

## Person Specification for Chair of Scrutiny

**To fulfil his or her role as laid out in the role description, and in addition to the requirements for a Scrutiny Committee Member, an effective Scrutiny Chair requires:**

### Provide leadership and direction

- A full understanding of the Authority's role, functions, priorities and risks
- A full understanding of the role of scrutiny, terms of reference for the Committee, role of Chair, and other aspects of the democratic arrangements
- An understanding of member support functions
- Objectivity
- An ability to negotiate and build consensus
- An ability to build constructive and 'critical friend' relationships with Members, officers and partners

### Managing the work programme

- An ability to manage people
- An ability to prioritise
- An ability to report progress to different groups in different styles

### Effective meeting management

- A full understanding and application of meeting protocols, Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and other constitutional requirements
- An ability to chair meetings effectively, manage the agenda and progress business
- An ability to facilitate effective discussions
- An ability to listen and question effectively

### Community engagement

- An ability to work effectively with all members of the community and build understanding and ownership of scrutiny

### Involving and developing of Committee Members

- A full understanding of the role and skills of the Scrutiny Committee
- An ability to support Members and the Committee
- An ability to identify any training and development needs to ensure the Committee's effectiveness



## Scrutiny Member Draft Role Description

### 1. Accountabilities

- To the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
- To the National Park Authority
- To the public

### 2. Role purpose & activity

#### Meeting participation

- To participate fully in the activities of the Scrutiny Committee, the development and delivery of its work programme and any associated Task and Finish Groups
- To make adequate and appropriate preparation for meetings through research and briefings
- To participate in a proactive, informed and effective manner taking account of the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and other constitutional requirements

#### Promoting the work of Scrutiny

- To promote the role of scrutiny within and outside the Authority, developing effective internal and external relationships
- To demonstrate an objective and evidence-based approach to scrutiny
- To add value to the decision making and service provision of the Authority through effective scrutiny

#### Reviewing and developing policy

- To assist in the creation, development, improvement and refinement of Authority policy
- To review policies on a sound basis of evidence, for example against legislation or local political priority
- To assess impact of existing policy
- To contribute to the identification and mitigation of risk

#### Community engagement

- To help the Authority build understanding and ownership of the scrutiny function within the community
- To promote the full involvement of external stakeholders, for example service users, expert witnesses and partners, in scrutiny

### 3. Values

- To be committed to the aims and values of the Authority and the following values of public office:
  - Openness and transparency
  - Honesty and integrity
  - Tolerance and respect

- Equality and fairness
  - Appreciation of cultural difference
  - Sustainability

## **Person Specification for Scrutiny Committee Member**

**To fulfil his or her role as laid out in the role description, an effective Scrutiny Committee Member requires:**

### Participating fully in the activities of the scrutiny function

- A full understanding of the scrutiny remit and role, and terms of reference for their own Committee and others
- An understanding of member support functions
- A willingness to work within the guidance of the Chair
- An ability to negotiate and build consensus
- An ability to act objectively and on the basis of evidence
- A willingness to undertake training as necessary

### Reviewing and developing policy

- A knowledge of, and ability to evaluate, existing policy
- An understanding of best practice
- An understanding of national and local legislative and policy context

### Community engagement

- An ability to work effectively with all members of the community and build understanding and ownership of scrutiny

### Meeting participation

- An ability to interpret information and data from a range of sources
- An understanding and application of meeting protocols, Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and other constitutional requirements
- An ability to listen and question effectively
- A willingness to participate fully



## Brecon Beacons and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authorities

### Scrutiny Officer Role Description

#### 1. Accountabilities

- To the National Park Authority

#### 2. Role purpose & activity

##### Supporting the 'Scrutiny Committee'

- To provide support to the 'Scrutiny Committee' in its roles of policy development and scrutiny of existing services, contributing to the Authority's improvement agenda
- To work closely with Members of the 'Scrutiny Committee', providing help with defining the annual work programme and research and advice in relation to scrutiny work, which will include reviews aimed at improving services and developing policy
- To provide project management support to the 'Scrutiny Committee' on specific scrutiny reviews, including scoping the project, implementing and co-ordinating the actions, ensuring deadlines are met, and ensuring that the project is completed on time and within budget (where appropriate)
- To provide information and undertake/facilitate research into existing practice and performance at the Authority and best practice elsewhere
- To analyse information and research findings to enable development of options for improvement of a service or the development of a new policy for consideration by the 'Scrutiny Committee'
- To track the outcome of scrutiny activities in line with the process agreed by the Authority to enable both annual and periodical reporting so that the 'Scrutiny Committee' can review its effectiveness in improving services and developing policy

##### Supporting the scrutiny process

- To demonstrate an objective and evidence-based approach to scrutiny
- To provide administrative support to the scrutiny function, including convening meetings, assembling and publishing agendas, reports, minutes and action sheets
- To work closely and effectively with the Chief Executive (National Park Officer), Directors, Heads of Service and other officers on scrutiny projects as appropriate

- To promote the role of scrutiny within and outside the Authority, liaising effectively both internally within the Authority and externally with the Authority's partners/the community/stakeholders

#### Effective meeting management

- To ensure that agendas contain clear objectives and outcomes for the meeting
- To manage the progress of business at meetings, ensuring that meeting objectives are met, and the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and other constitutional requirements are adhered to
- To ensure that all participants have an opportunity to make an appropriate contribution

#### Community engagement

- To facilitate the engagement of community/interest groups, local residents, external witnesses, experts, partners or officers from other local authorities as appropriate in scrutiny projects

#### Involvement and development of 'Scrutiny Committee' Members

- To encourage effective contributions from all Members in both Committee and Task and Finish Groups
- To champion the importance of learning and development

### **3. Values**

- To be committed to the aims and values of the Authority and the following values of public office:
  - Openness and transparency
  - Honesty and integrity
  - Tolerance and respect
  - Equality and fairness
  - Appreciation of cultural difference
  - Sustainability

## Scrutiny Process

### Potential Topic Sources

- the Strategic Grant letter
- known weak performance – based on PIs, etc
- Value for money indicators – high cost, poor performance, poor satisfaction
- the community and/or partnership priorities
- Policy development
- a Response to regional/ national development
- an emerging issue, such as:
  - o a particular concern to residents (residents surveys/ consultation exercises)
  - o a request for investigation by either senior officers or partners into a problematic area
  - o source of a high level of complaints
  - o potential to deliver long-term financial benefits to the Authority



National Park Authority to consider schedule of scrutiny topics, accompanied by scoping documents



Topic Selection criteria to be applied, including consideration of whether issue can be addressed in some other way



NPA to establish Scrutiny Review Group(s)\*, set timescale and terms of reference



Scrutiny Review Group to carry out review using work programming guidance, produce report using template, and evaluate the success of the review on completion



NPA to consider report & approve action plan, delegating monitoring of this to relevant Committee

\*The specific structures for scrutiny will depend on decisions made by each National Park Authority



## Brecon Beacons and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authorities

### How to request a scrutiny review

The Pembrokeshire Coast / Brecon Beacons National Park Authority strives to deliver a service that is transparent, efficient and effective and is continually seeking to improve its performance. However, there are occasions when you may think otherwise; if this is the case you may request that the Authority looks at how it operates in more detail, and this document aims to help you do just that if there is a topic or service you think should be scrutinised.

The Authority focuses its scrutiny activities on the things that matter most and on outcomes that can make a real difference for local people. It simply has not got the resources to look at everything that might be suggested and therefore has to prioritise. In order to help in the scrutiny prioritisation process, the Authority has devised a Scrutiny Feasibility Checklist, which asks a number of questions of you under the headings of public interest, ability to change, performance, extent and replication.

For each review undertaken there should be:

- Key reasons for undertaking the review.
- An explanation of what the review is expected to achieve.
- Agreed measures for identifying a successful review.
- A project plan specifying the timetable and methodology (what evidence will be gathered, what consultation will take place).

Please bear in mind when suggesting a topic for review that the following information will be needed and that where possible you provide as much information for the Scope of the review. This will assist the Committee/Panel when considering which items will be selected for inclusion into the Annual Work Programme.

We welcome your interest in the work of the Authority, however it should be pointed out that scrutiny does not get involved in minor matters or individual concerns which are not of wider community significance – these need to be pursued through more appropriate avenues. Nor does scrutiny deal with individual complaints which are dealt with through the Authority's complaints procedure. Other topics not appropriate for scrutiny include: matters already being addressed, matters subjudice or prejudicial to the Authority's interests, individual disciplinary or grievance matters and matters unlikely to result in improvements for local people. Should your request be rejected, you will be informed of the reason(s) why this was the case.

**Request for a Scrutiny Review (Internal)**

<b>Details of specific topic area to be reviewed</b>
<b>Why do you make this request?</b>
<b>Which Corporate Objective will it support?</b>
<b>How do we perform at the moment?</b>
<b>What existing information is available? (E.g. background information, existing reports, etc)</b>
<b>Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (E.g. officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc)</b>
<b>How long do you think the review will take? Are there specific time limits that need to be taken into consideration?</b>
<b>What would be the desired outcome(s)?</b>

Name: (please print)

Signed:

Date:

## Request for a Scrutiny Review (External)

<p><b>Details of specific topic area to be reviewed</b></p>
<p><b>Why do you make this request?</b></p>
<p><b>How do you think the Authority performs at the moment?</b></p>
<p><b>Background information to support your request</b></p>

**Please complete and return this form to the Administration and Democratic Services Manager, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority, Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock, SA72 6DY. Alternatively you may fax the form on 01646 689076, or Email the form to [memberservices@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk](mailto:memberservices@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk) Should you have any queries about completing the form please telephone 01646 624834.**

### FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Date Received:

Decision Date:

Date Decision Notified:

Date Acknowledged:

Decision:    Accept    Reject    Defer

By:





**Draft Scrutiny Feasibility Checklist**

<b>General</b>	
1. Is the issue strategic and significant?	
2. Is there clear evidence to support the need for scrutiny?	
3. Is there a clear objective for scrutinising this topic?	
4. Is it timely (eg. is there expected new legislation?)	
5. Is there a required timescale for the review?	
6. Are there adequate resources available to do the review well?	
7. Is it likely to lead to effective outcomes?	
8. Can this issue be addressed in another way?	
<b>Public Interest</b>	
9. Is this issue of concern to local communities?	
10. Is this issue of concern to partner organisations?	
11. Does this issue have a potential impact on people living in, visiting or working in the National Park?	
12. What are the likely benefits of a scrutiny review to the Park and its customers?	
<b>Ability to Change</b>	
13. Will the Authority be able to make changes as a result of the review?	
<b>Performance</b>	
14. Is the request as a result of evidence of poor or reduced performance in a service area?	
15. Is the review likely to lead to improvements in performance?	
16. Does the issue relate to a current corporate goal and/or Strategic Grant Letter	
<b>Extent</b>	
17. Does this issue affect the whole Brecon Beacons National Park area?	
18. Is the issue relevant to any other Welsh National Park?	
19. Does the issue have implications for UK National Parks and or other protected areas?	
<b>Replication</b>	
20. Is this issue currently the subject of any or all of	

the following:	
➤ Internal Audit	
➤ External Audit	
➤ Internal Review	
➤ Other (please give details)	
21. Has it been reviewed less than two years ago?	



## Scoping Proforma for Scrutiny Review (please limit to one page)

Specific topic area	
Ambitions for the review (why is request made?)	
Which Corporate Objective will it support?	
How do we perform at the moment?	
Who should be consulted and how?	
Background information	
Officers to support review	
How long will it take?	
Outcomes	



## Brecon Beacons and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authorities

### Guidance Notes for External Witnesses

#### What are Witnesses?

Being asked to come to a Scrutiny Committee as a 'witness', simply means coming to talk to some Members of the Authority. This is because they feel that you have valuable opinions and/or expertise that will help them gain a better understanding of an issue they are looking at. The Members need to hear contributions from a wide range of people with a connection to the topic being scrutinised, if they are to come to a well considered decision. Being a 'witness' simply means coming along to answer some questions and to tell the Members what you think about a particular issue. Such sessions usually last for an hour, although they can sometimes be a bit shorter or a bit longer.

#### What are the aims of Scrutiny Committees?

- To assist the Authority in ensuring the continuous improvement of services in the National Park, with a particular focus on outcomes for the community.
- To ensure that the experience and knowledge of service users, community groups and other stakeholders/interested parties are used to develop the Authority's services.

In other words, the purpose of scrutiny is to examine how well the Authority is performing. Wherever possible it will concentrate on outcomes for the community, not on inputs. It is a mechanism for promoting the best interests and wellbeing of the National Park. Scrutiny Reviews should, therefore, adopt the role of 'critical friend', focus on strategic issues and take a community perspective.

#### How do Scrutiny Committees work?

Scrutiny Committees collect evidence from a wide variety of sources, including:

- Questioning 'witnesses'/ experts.
- Conducting literature reviews and undertaking surveys.
- Taking written submissions from professionals, stakeholders and community groups.

This guide refers to 'witnesses' and the 'giving of evidence', but this does not imply that Scrutiny Committees are courts or bodies convened with any legal power over those who attend them. It should be emphasised that the Scrutiny Committee has no powers to

compel the giving of evidence or to require the production of any documentation. Nevertheless, the Scrutiny Committee does perform an essential function in looking at Authority policy and practice. It is hoped that those invited to give evidence will agree to do so in the interests of the community which is intended to benefit by the activity of the Scrutiny Committee. Although at times the Scrutiny Committee will have difficult questions to ask they are always grateful for the help and co-operation they receive. 'Witnesses' can include:

- Voluntary sector representatives.
- Professional experts.
- Service users.
- Community Groups.
- Local employers.
- Members and officers.

The Committee will consider all the evidence they have collected before making recommendations to the National Park Authority on how services could be improved or developed to best meet the needs of National Park and its users.

### **Who will be at the Scrutiny Committee?**

Scrutiny Committees are held informally. The Committee will consist of #####. The Scrutiny Support Officer will be present (usually the person you've had contact with about attending the meeting) and will minute the meeting. Other officers with an interest in the scrutiny topic(s) will also be present, for example the Director, Head of Service or Manager.

### **What happens when I arrive to attend a Scrutiny Committee?**

Upon arrival at the venue for the Scrutiny Committee you will normally be met by the Scrutiny Support Officer. He or she will make contact with you prior to the meeting to confirm the arrangements, and where possible give you an indication of when your evidence is likely to be heard and explain the format for the meeting; this may be in writing or via email, alternatively you can contact the Scrutiny Support Officer by telephone on 01646 624804. If you have any particular anxieties or questions then you should not hesitate to raise these with the Scrutiny Support Officer. The Members of the Committee will also introduce themselves to you before the start of the meeting. After you have finished giving your evidence you may leave if you wish to do so, or you are welcome to stay if appropriate.

### **If I am asked to attend what will Members ask me?**

You will receive a written invitation to the meeting and this will include details of the areas on which you will be asked questions. Sometimes the Scrutiny Committee will prepare lists of questions in advance but witnesses should not expect the Scrutiny Committee to restrict itself to these. The Committee will have invited you along to provide them with information that will help them make evidence-based recommendations on the further

development of services. You won't have to answer questions which you feel unhappy answering and it's fine to tell the Committee when you don't know the answer to a question. The meeting is ordinarily open to the public but, if for any reason you want to give some or all of your evidence in private, please contact the Scrutiny Support Officer (see below) or speak to the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee to discuss this beforehand.

### How should I prepare to be a Scrutiny Committee 'witness'?

Following these easy steps will mean you use your time at the meeting to maximum effect:

- Read all the papers for the Committee meeting you have been sent. This will ensure that you have knowledge of the key concerns or developments being explored by the Committee.
- Prepare a list of information you would like to provide to the Committee, but do not bring prepared presentations (unless the Committee has specially requested one).
- As time for oral evidence may be limited, all witnesses are invited to submit written evidence beforehand. This helps to make oral evidence more productive, as Members have the witnesses' statements in front of them. Written evidence should be restricted to any factual information you have to offer from which the Scrutiny Committee might be able to draw conclusions (or which could be put to other witnesses for their reactions).
- Recognise that Committee Members may not be experts in your area. Try to avoid jargon/ professional speak when giving answers.
- Talk to officers supporting the Committee. These officers will be able to tell you the Committee's expectations of you.
- Remember, attending a Scrutiny Committee offers a good opportunity to present your organisation's knowledge and experiences directly to Members of the Authority.

### Remember:

- Take your time and speak slowly and clearly.
- Ask for questions to be repeated if you do not understand or cannot hear.
- If you are not sure of the answer, then say so.

When we invite you to attend please let us know if there is anything we can do to make it easier for you to attend and participate. If you have any suggestions for improving the process or if you want any further information on Scrutiny Committees please contact the Scrutiny Support Officer listed below.

To get in touch with the Scrutiny Team:

Telephone: 01646 624804

E-mail: [memberservices@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk](mailto:memberservices@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk)

By Post: Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority, Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock, SA72 6DY

Website: [www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk](http://www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk)



## Brecon Beacons and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authorities

### Guidance Notes for Staff called as Witnesses

#### What are the aims of Scrutiny Committees/Panels?

- To assist the Authority in ensuring the continuous improvement of services in the National Park, with a particular focus on outcomes for the community.
- To ensure that the experience and knowledge of service users, community groups and other stakeholders/interested parties are used to develop the Authority's services.

In other words, the purpose of scrutiny is to examine how well the Authority is performing. Wherever possible it will concentrate on outcomes for the community, not on inputs. It is a mechanism for promoting the best interests and wellbeing of the National Park. Scrutiny Reviews should therefore adopt the role of 'critical friend', focus on strategic issues and take a community perspective.

#### How do Scrutiny Committees/Panels work?

Scrutiny Committees collect evidence from a wide variety of sources, including:

- Questioning 'witnesses'/ experts (this can include Members and officers of the Authority).
- Literature searches/ deskbound reviews.
- Undertaking surveys and utilising focus groups.
- Taking written submissions from professionals, businesses and community groups.

Scrutiny Committees/Panels perform an essential function in looking at policy and practice which will often have a vital part to play in services provided to the community. It is hoped that those called to give evidence will do so in a positive and non-defensive manner in the interests of the community who may benefit from the scrutiny review. The Scrutiny Committee/Panel considers all the evidence it has collected before preparing a formal report making recommendations to the Authority on how services could be improved or developed to best meet the needs of users of the National Park.

#### What benefits can Scrutiny bring about?

The benefits of scrutiny include better informed Members which can enhance the strategic and policy setting work of Authority and improve decision making. Reviews can also provide an oversight of continuous improvement throughout the Authority through

monitoring performance management information and creating a culture of self challenge. In addition, the Authority can develop better relationships with partners and encourage greater public involvement in the Authority's work through their involvement in Scrutiny Reviews. Many managers and chief officers may also welcome the opportunity provided by a Scrutiny Review to learn more about their services performance and may find it instructive to hear how it is perceived by others. Indeed reviews are key to meeting the local authority agenda of continuous improvement, for any department that is ignorant of its strengths and weaknesses or will not, or cannot, face up to them, is neither robust nor well managed.

### **How will I know when a Scrutiny Committee is looking at a service I manage?**

During the scoping process the relevant service or services will have been approached by the Scrutiny Support Officer supporting the review with a view to obtaining some background information from departmental officers. This will have provided an opportunity to clarify any misconceptions and ensured that the Members involved are aware of some of the views of the service at the outset. Moreover, Scrutiny Committees/Panels will periodically agree work programmes and copies of these work programmes will be forwarded to the relevant Heads of Service/Managers. A briefing note outlining when and how the Committee/Panel will be looking at particular areas will be provided to the relevant service manager when appropriate.

### **What information must I provide?**

For convenience this guide refers to 'witnesses' and the 'giving of evidence', but this does not imply that Scrutiny Committees/Panels are bodies convened with any legal power to compel the giving of evidence or requiring the production of documentation from employees of the National Park Authority.

Scrutiny Committee/Panel Members will identify the people they wish to hear from at their scoping and planning meetings. Employees attending Scrutiny Committees/Panels must abide by the Code of Conduct governing employees of the Authority. Members should always conduct their relations with courtesy and respect for officers and are reminded to interrogate the information not the officer. All Scrutiny Committee/Panel meetings are ordinarily open to the public. It is inappropriate for Members to criticise individual officers personally in public forums where officers have no opportunity to respond. All parties are expected to conduct their relations in a way which promotes objectivity, accountability and openness (with the permitted exceptions around disclosure of confidential information).

### **If I am asked to attend what will Members ask me?**

You will be asked to attend a Scrutiny Committee/Panel meeting or hearing and be advised of the areas on which the Members will ask questions. You may be given a list of questions in advance but Members may ask supplementary questions in order to help them understand the issues. It would be helpful if you could answer all questions as fully as possible so that any recommendations to the Authority are based on evidence. If you

cannot answer a question please advise the Chairman or the Scrutiny Officer who is the best person to seek that information from. If you want to submit some or all of your evidence in private because you feel confidential or exempt information is like to be disclosed please contact the Democratic Services Manager to discuss this.

### **How should I prepare to be a 'witness'?**

Following these few easy steps will ensure that you use your time at the meeting to maximum effect:

- Read all the papers for the Scrutiny Committee/Panel meeting you have been invited to. This will ensure that you have knowledge of the key concerns or developments being explored by the Committee/Panel.
- Check with other officers in your department working on similar areas to ensure that the views you are bringing to the Committee/Panel are representative of your department's work.
- Do not bring prepared presentations (unless this has been specially requested).
- As time for oral evidence may be limited, witnesses might be asked to submit written evidence beforehand. This helps to make oral evidence more productive, as Members have the witnesses' statements in front of them. Written evidence should be restricted to any factual information they have to offer from which the Scrutiny Committee/Panel might be able to draw conclusions (or which could be put to other witnesses for their reactions).
- Be prepared to give your views honestly and with integrity.
- Recognise that Committee/Panel Members may not be experts in your area. Try to avoid jargon/ professional speak when giving answers.
- Remember that attending a Scrutiny Committee/Panel offers a good opportunity to present your department's knowledge and experiences directly to Members.



## Brecon Beacons and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authorities

### Questioning Techniques for Scrutiny

#### Introduction

The main focus of this paper is on the principles and techniques to be employed when considering what questions are appropriate for witnesses, to ensure that the interview session is useful and effective.

#### Preparation

Questioning sessions should come after the preliminary evidence gathering stage has been completed so that Members have had the chance to discuss that evidence and decide what else they need to know. There is no point in using valuable time in asking questions when the information is readily available elsewhere. A meeting will take place in advance of any questioning to explore potential questions and allocate them amongst members if appropriate. Members build up themed questioning, finding out if their initial thinking has validity. If ideas are drying up it can be helpful to try thinking “what matters most to local people?”

Before ‘witnesses’ are called they will be sent a copy of the relevant guidance for witnesses and be given an idea of the questions they will be asked. The purpose of questioning is to elicit useful information and not to try and catch people out. It should be remembered that witnesses should be invited as discussants. Members ask questions and pursue a point but there should be no hostility in the process. Questioning needs to be probing but not destructive – incisive but constructive. It is a real skill to develop being good at this.

Members may feel uneasy questioning ‘witnesses’ who may be experts in their field, and yet asking questions from a position of naivety is really a strength not a weakness. It better represents the ideas of the lay community; it is what they would want to know. The most powerful questions can often be the simplest and provoke the most interesting response.

#### Organising the Witness Session.

Some useful points to consider might include:

- Have the officers ensured that the dates for ‘hearings’ have been well publicised and circulated to all the members of the Scrutiny Committee and public concerned?
- Has the Committee the appropriate mix and range of experience?

- Are the location, reception and seating arrangements agreed and finalised?
- Has it been decided which roles the group Members will take?
- Who is going to cover which questions during the witness interviews?
- What criteria need to be applied to the questions to achieve the most useful responses?
- How will the groups' individual roles and contributions link together?
- How might questions from the witnesses be dealt with, what are the possible answers and who will deal with them?
  - How will the witness responses to questions be assessed and evaluated?

## The Styles of Questioning

When questioning witnesses, different techniques can be used to elicit the most useful responses. For easy reference, these have been divided into “do’s” and “don’t’s”.

### The Do’s

#### Open questions

Open questions have the greatest potential. Information is requested in a neutral way and the witness is encouraged to do most of the talking and to expand on relevant points.

- Q What do you consider is best about...e.g., .the service?
- Q How did you establish x, y priority(ies) in the service?
- Q How did you decide which aspects of the service to delegate/ to focus on as a key priority etc?

The key prefixes are What? How? Why? The following phrases are also useful:

- Q Tell me about a time when ...
- Q Explain to me about how you ...

Follow up responses with probing questions to yield additional clarity. This technique can also be used to help you get beyond superficial or rehearsed answers to questions. It may even be necessary to help you to form a balanced picture by seeking contrary evidence. Probing questions use the answer received for one question as the basis for taking the discussion further with your next question. For example:

- Q You say that you did ... Can you give me a specific example of how you carried that out?
- Q I was interested to hear you say ... can you tell me more about that?
- Q Can you enlarge on the statement you made about ...?

#### Hypothetical Questions

This can be useful in obtaining good evidence for the Review, as well as testing possibilities to formulate new ideas and solutions. They can be valid in testing knowledge such as whether someone is familiar with a certain procedure or process.

Q How would you set about changing your/Council's strategy for doing X?

### Behavioural questions

This sort of question can provide guidance as to how a service provider or an organisation might do a task (which may be central to the Review) in future. The question obtains an accurate example of past behaviour.

Q What did your organisation do on this issue before, to ensure outcomes x, y, z?

### **The Don't's**

#### Closed questions

A question which can be answered in a single word, can actually be very useful in clearing up points of fact. However if it is over-used, it will close down the witness and restrict the amount of information which the witness may be able to give.

Q Did you know/are you aware that x priority identified in this service was achieved/will be achieved?

#### Leading questions

These questions are phrased in such a way as to make it clear to the respondee what answer is expected. The technique is poor because it may force people into a false position because they are aware how they are expected to respond.

Q Presumably, from knowledge of your organisation's position, you agree that service/policy x successfully achieves.....?

#### Double-Headed questions

These ask more than one question at a time and should be avoided as they are confusing. Moreover they offer witnesses an easy strategy to defend themselves by simply selecting the bit of the question they are comfortable answering whilst ignoring the rest.

Q In your role/your organisation's role there is a responsibility for doing/achieving/monitoring etc X,Y ,.... and what is the system for communicating these to the Authority in relation to the service or policy under review?

Whilst these "two questions in one" might both be valid lines of enquiry, they would be more productive if presented one at a time

#### Multiple Choice questions

The witness is presented here not only with a question but also 2 possible answers, neither of which may provide a real explanation.

- Q Do you or does your organisation believe/do etc x, y or do you/your organisation instead do x, y, z,?

### Discriminatory questions

- Q How would you react to this service being managed by women only?

As well as being a leading question, it runs counter to equal opportunity considerations, and this type of question is unacceptable.

### **Controlling the flow**

It is sometimes necessary to control the flow of the 'hearing' so that it keeps to time and the most useful information is gleaned from witnesses. This may involve opening people up more, probing and encouraging them to speak, or it may mean shutting them down and preventing waffle. A useful technique for probing is to use the respondee's exact words back to them. Reflecting in this way helps you to explore a point further and enables you to probe points of interest in a less obtrusive way. Techniques for shutting people down vary from subtle body language cues to direct statements that you've heard enough and need to move on.

Remember, the witness should be talking for 80 – 90% of the time. Try to avoid getting drawn into a dialogue with them (you learn nothing about their views from listening to your own voice!)

### **Five ways to ask difficult questions**

Asking challenging questions is a skill that comes from practice and experience and works best when you can simultaneously create a relaxed and comfortable environment. The following pointers may help you probe what people actually say to uncover the real meaning behind it.

1) **Open wide and close in**

When you begin to ask questions make them as open as possible. The object of an open question is to get the other person to say as much as possible. Ask it in an open and friendly way. Then use subsequent questions to focus in on the detail.

2) **Listen for avoidance words**

One way people deal with difficult questions is to use phrases to duck the question and avoid answering it fully. Examples include, 'we are looking into', 'we are considering', 'we will do this in the future'. Focus on these avoidance techniques and force the other person to define what they mean by each of the phrases they use – when are you looking into this, how, who is doing it, how will you know, etc.

3) **Listen for doubt**

One of the reasons people avoid difficult questions is that they expose the truth. And the truth is often that we say one thing and really think another. It takes a very

polished performer to avoid giving away true feelings about a subject. It's just a question of actively listening and carefully watching.

4) **Be charming**

Recognising the hard work that people do can help create a rapport. Disarming techniques will open up people keen to keep certain issues at a distance. We are more likely to reveal our true feeling when we can empathise with the questioner.

5) **Repeat the question & be silent**

Two very powerful techniques are repetition and silence. Repeating the question says, "I am not prepared to take no for an answer and I will keep on asking this until I get a reasonable answer to my question". Be careful as this technique is likely to annoy or intimidate the other person. And finally using silence can be golden. Ask a question and say nothing. Just listen and wait. What you'll find (probably after practice) is that the other person will speak, stop, speak some more, stop, and then say all sorts of really interesting things that they probably hadn't planned to say.

### **Key Questions for Scrutiny work**

The following issues provide a list of some of the potentially key points to consider when formulating questions for witnesses. This list is in no way comprehensive and will not fit for all Scrutiny work. Before any witness session, ask yourself two questions: (i) What information do I want? (ii) What questions do I need to ask to get it?

#### Basics

- Q Why do we do x at all? Why do we have to offer this service?
- Q Why do we do x like this?
- Q What are the parameters of the service? What does it include?
- Q How much and how many? (budget, staff, premises, contracts)
- Q What are the levers for change?
- Q What is its standing against other council/ service priorities?
- Q If you were starting again with a blank sheet what would you do differently?
- Q If x occurred, how would our response be different from that of last year?
- Q What difference has this made?
- Q Why don't we do y instead of x?
- Q How does this fit with our existing plans/ budget priorities?
- Q How well does this reflect community priorities/ community strategies?
- Q What are the strengths/weaknesses of doing x in this way?
- Q What are your views on doing x/y?
- Q What knowledge do you have of how x is being carried out elsewhere?
- Q What are the three things you would do to make a difference?
- Q What are the main barriers that you want to break down?

#### Strategy

- Q Is there a clear strategy for delivery based upon organisational priorities?
- Q How were its objectives arrived at?

- Q Is there an overall vision statement for the service?
- Q Is the strategy translated effectively through to operational teams and individuals?
- Q Is the structure appropriate to support the strategy and meeting customer need?
- Q Are effective management information systems being used by managers?
- Q What research has been carried out into what the needs of service users are?
- Q Does it reflect the needs of different groups (BME, older people, asylum seekers, disabled, etc)?
- Q Are anticipated future needs accounted for?
- Q Does it reflect the recommendations of other reports into the same services? What are these?
- Q Is there any national guidance/ standards for this area?
- Q What local standards or policies are in place for this area?
- Q What best practice is used in this area by top performing authorities?
- Q What lessons were learned from the previous strategy? (was there one?)
- Q What involvement of the voluntary sector is there in delivering the strategy?
- Q How do other Council policies impact on it (Cultural, Educational, Environmental, Transport, etc)?

### Outcomes

- Q How well is this service performing?
- Q Is the performance of teams reviewed and responded to effectively?
- Q What actions arise from the strategy?
- Q How will this be monitored? What are the performance measures?
- Q How will the strategy be reviewed?
- Q Who are the customers and what do they want both now and in the future?
- Q What are the customer's perceptions of the service at this point in time?
- Q What impact is this service having on its customers and the community?

Starting from a lay perspective means that questioning should challenge “jargonistic” language and enable intelligible communication with the general public.

### **Active & Empathetic Listening Techniques**

A critical (and sometimes underdeveloped) technique for interviewing witnesses is active listening, which means ensuring the talker feels s/he is being heard and understood.

### Levels of Listening

IGNORING – not listening at all and making this obvious

PRETENDING – not listening but trying to look as if you are

SELECTIVE LISTENING – listening to most of what speaker has to say, but only paying close attention when you feel it is particularly important to you

ACTIVE LISTENING – paying close attention to everything speaker says, encouraging them to continue & thinking about how to respond

EMPATHETIC LISTENING – listening actively, encouraging speaker to continue, concentrating solely on speaker and their message, and not thinking about your own response

### Good listening behaviour

Messages are conveyed not only with words but also through non-verbal cues. Reading body-language means you are much more likely to get the whole message. Active listening builds rapport and involves:

- Looking Attentive – the Lead Member Review Groups will need to show that they are listening through appropriate ” body language”.
- Giving Encouragement – give appropriate verbal and non-verbal responses.
- Keeping an Open Mind – Members should seek not to over-react to initial responses! Continue to pay attention as the witnesses develop their responses and probe as necessary.
- Controlling the Flow – when sufficient information has been received.
- Not Thinking Ahead – everyone thinks more quickly than they can talk. Good listeners listen carefully to hear what the witnesses say rather than allow themselves to run ahead and make assumptions.
- Checking it Out – effective listening involves understanding by paraphrasing and reflecting what has been said by witnesses.
- “Listening Between the Lines” – this involves not only listening to the words but also to the way that they are said and to the feelings behind them. This will lead to a clearer understanding of the responses.
- Summarising – at the end of the main element of a response to a question the Lead Member Review Group may find it is useful to summarise the main points which the witness has made.

### Summary of Guidelines for Questioning

- 1) Decide what type of question will get the information you want.
- 2) Think about the specific question you need to ask.
- 3) Ask specific, clear open or closed questions – probably using the former more often.
- 4) Avoid leading, multiple and judgemental questions.
- 5) Give the other person time to hear and understand the question, and think of the response.
- 6) Live with the silence, a silence is often an indication that a thoughtful question has been asked.
- 7) Concentrate on listening to answers rather than thinking of your next question. It is often very effective to summarise the response as a way of checking understanding.

Many concerns can be allayed by adequate preparation by the Committee. Scrutiny Officers and the Chairmen will play a major role in ensuring that witness sessions are used to best effect.



## Brecon Beacons and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authorities

### Guidance for Scrutiny Chairs

Chairing Scrutiny Committee is very different from chairing traditional service committees due to the high volume of work, use of a wider range of activities and processes and the need to work across the organisation and externally. Also there needs to be a degree of objectivity as Members could be considering policies which they have previously agreed.

The Chair will need to provide leadership and direction for the Committee/Panel, ensuring that the work is Member led. It is important to ensure that the Committee has the necessary skills to undertake the review before them and that they are engaged with the review – the Chair cannot do everything themselves and will therefore need to delegate and use the skills of Members of the Committee to carry out specific jobs. Adequate resources (financial and officer support) will be needed and the work of the Scrutiny Committee should be coordinated with that of other Committees/Groups within the Authority.

Constructive 'critical friend' relationships also need to be developed with officers and relevant partners/interested parties and the Chair will need to work to minimise any barriers to scrutiny. Remember, you need to avoid the process becoming a personal scrutiny; it's a scrutiny of a subject or process and not of a person!

To ensure that the Committee achieves its aims and objectives for a particular scrutiny review, it is worthwhile referring to the following 'checklist', which has been reproduced from *30 Training Sessions for Effective Meetings* by Tony Bray, Gower, Aldershot (and which has been adapted to suit the needs of the Brecon Beacons and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authorities):

## You're in the Chair

### Preparation Checklist

- Question – do we need a meeting at all? If so, can we do this via telephone or video conference?
- Clarify the purpose of the meeting and objectives.
- Liaise with the Scrutiny Officer beforehand to:
  - Formulate an effective agenda.
  - Ensure the right people are invited to attend.
  - Ensure all necessary documents are produced.
  - Check the venue is suitably equipped in every way.
- Develop some contingency plans.

- Prepare yourself – mentally and physically.

### **Opening the Meeting**

- Create a powerful first impression.
- Start the meeting on time.
- Welcome people and set them at their ease, clarify roles and responsibilities of those present.
- Focus on what the meeting must achieve.
- Establish ground rules and enforce them.
- Gain commitment to the agenda.
- Agree usage of time and when the meeting will end.
- Outline support and ‘comfort’ issues.

### **Managing the business**

- Steer discussions in a logical, structured way.
- Avoid becoming personally involved in the TASK – concentrate on managing the PROCESS.
- Use problem solving to work through complex issues.
- Manage time to ensure that agenda items receive the appropriate level of discussion.
- Ensure the meeting ends on time.
- Manage the personalities – control the extroverts and encourage introverts.
- Use body language to influence people.
- Use questions skilfully to achieve results.
- Handle conflict positively to channel energy or commitment.
- Encourage a wide variety of views and opinions.
- Summarise to confirm agreement and ownership of action points.
- Ensure the notes record key agreements, facts or opinions, or verbatim quotes.

### **Close the Meeting**

- Summarise the key points – *who* will do *what* and by *when*, and set out the next steps.
- Clarify how outstanding issues will be resolved.
- Confirm arrangements for follow up documentation, if necessary.
- Agree the details for the next meeting, if any.
- Thank everyone for their contribution.
- Leave the place tidy.

### **Post-Meeting follow-up**

- After the meeting, liaise with the Scrutiny Officer to:
  - Review the effectiveness of the meeting.
  - Identify opportunities for improvement.
  - Review the action points and develop implementation plans.
  - Follow up progress on action points with those who accepted ownership.
  - Ensure the timely distribution of minutes, papers or other documents.
- Keep people informed of progress and so maintain their support.
- Refer to the *Preparation Checklist* – and start again!



**Report No. \*\*/10**  
**Scrutiny Committee**

**REPORT OF \***

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**SUBJECT:**

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Purpose of Report

For example, to ask Members to:

- consider the evidence presented and make recommendations to the National Park Authority; or
- agree the proposed work programme for the year.

Introduction/Background

To include:

- an explanation, together with any relevant facts/figures, of what/who prompted the review;
- what outcome is expected of the review.

Evidence/findings

To include details of:

- Meetings held (include minutes as appendix/appendices);
- Additional reports/information sourced;
- Witness statements;
- Site visits made.

Conclusion(s)

Following an analysis of all the information and data collected, set out the conclusions concisely.

Recommendation(s)

What action do you want Members to take? Set out the recommended course of action(s) clearly, grouping them into actions to be taken by the Authority, Members and/or external partners if appropriate.



## Brecon Beacons and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authorities

### Further Sources of Information

Below is a list of websites which provides useful information to Members and officers. The list is not intended to be comprehensive, but highlights some key sites from which further information can be accessed. All links were correct at the time this document was produced.

Name	Link	Description
Welsh Government	<a href="http://www.wales.gov.uk">www.wales.gov.uk</a>	
Welsh Local Government Association	<a href="http://www.wlga.gov.uk">www.wlga.gov.uk</a>	
Wales Audit Office	<a href="http://www.wao.gov.uk">www.wao.gov.uk</a>	
Improvement & Development Agency	<a href="http://www.idea.gov.uk">www.idea.gov.uk</a>	Local Government (LG) Improvement and Development supports improvement and innovation in local government. "Overview & Scrutiny – a practitioners guide" is an overview of scrutiny booklet published by IDeA
Centre for Public Scrutiny	<a href="http://www.cfps.org.uk/home/index.php">www.cfps.org.uk/home/index.php</a>	The Centre for Public Scrutiny has been set up to meet the demands scrutiny makes on elected representatives and the professionals who support them.
LGiU	<a href="http://www.lgiu.org.uk">www.lgiu.org.uk</a>	The LGiU is an independent policy and research think-tank. It provides an information, advice, training and lobbying service, representing the interests of local authorities.



## Brecon Beacons and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authorities

### Internal Evaluation Form

<b>Review Title:</b>	
Panel:	
Scrutiny Lead Members:	
Scrutiny Officer :	

Good practice would suggest that every review which is undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, standing or task and finish panels should be subject to evaluation within 6 weeks of completion of the review

<b>LEARNING FROM SCRUTINY</b>	
What went well?	
What did not go so well?	
What would we do differently next time?	
Was the scoping for the scrutiny exercise adequate?	
Were the objectives clear?	

Did we achieve our objective/s?	
Did we have the right witnesses?	
Did we ask the right questions?	
Did we have the right information & sufficient information to form a judgement?	
Were the recommendations smart?	
Have/will the recommendations or findings be accepted?	
How will we know whether the scrutiny exercise has made a difference?	

Did we have the right skills & resources to conduct this review?	
What would make our next scrutiny exercise more effective?	
What follow up should there be and by whom?	

Completed by:	Date:
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