

# Realising the Potential of Scrutiny

Research and Recommendations  
on the Overview and Scrutiny  
function in Local Government

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An NLGN report, supported by the Centre for Public Scrutiny

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## **Preface**

Case study research was undertaken over the summer of 2003 to explore and assess how a London Borough Council has implemented the new arrangements specified in the Local Government Act 2000, and the impact this has had on effective decision-making within the Council. The focus of the case study was on elected member roles.

The research took the form of a series of 10 face-to-face structured interviews with overview and scrutiny officers and Executive and non-Executive elected members of all parties. We also interviewed:

- Phil Swann, Director of Strategy and Communications, Local Government Association
- Hugh Maylan, Leader, London Borough of Croydon

The views expressed in this pamphlet are those of the authors alone. We would like to thank everyone who agreed to be interviewed for the project. We would also like to thank Jane Martin at the Centre for Public Scrutiny for her insights and colleagues at NLGN for their advice and support.



# Foreword

Although there is now much more clarity about the value and potential of the overview and scrutiny function in local government, it still presents a challenge to local councils. As the function which involves the majority of local authority elected members, the success of scrutiny will much depend upon how they grasp their new role and how councils support them in carrying it out successfully. The lack of prescription as to how scrutiny should be put into effect is both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength if it allows councils the freedom to experiment and innovate to create a function which ensures robust public accountability – in the public interest – in holding the Executive to account and in holding other providers of public services to account. This is entirely consistent with the local authority power of promoting community well-being. But it is also a weakness if the space it affords is commandeered by powerful executives or party groupings determined to frustrate the process and prevent change.

This report gives us a useful insight into how the scrutiny function is struggling to emerge as a rigorous element of the new political management arrangements in one London Borough. It points up both the lessons learned and suggests recommendations for improvement. The experiences and perceptions of members in this case study will resonate with many others across the country and should prompt us to pause for thought as to what are the key barriers to successful scrutiny and how we could do better.

**Dr Jane Martin**  
**Executive Director, The Centre for Public Scrutiny**



# 1. Summary of main findings

Despite a consensus across the board that new local government decision-making structures are a change for the better, the overview and scrutiny function still lacks the positive backing it needs from elected members to make the new system effective. This has both 'hard' and 'soft' aspects.

Good governance at the local level needs both the 'hard' aspects of implementation, such as the number and organisation of committees to be right, but also the 'soft' factors of culture and values to be in line. The two feed off each other and can create positive or negative cycles of outcome.

Within each authority, this requires a cultural shift of the whole organisation. We see this as having six major components:

1. Overview and Scrutiny must be given a high status within the local authority;
2. Overview and Scrutiny Committee members must take a clear lead in deciding the overview and scrutiny programme;
3. Overview and Scrutiny members must focus on policy considerations, and not always let party loyalties overwhelm them;
4. Overview and Scrutiny must be pro-active, and not only be about scrutinising decisions;
5. The Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee must communicate effectively and openly – with each other and with the public; and
6. Members and officers must take a 'whole organisation' view, so that Overview and Scrutiny is sustainable.

It is up to each authority to 'own' this transformation, as the Local Government Act 2000 does not give a clear 'route map' to achieving this. All local authorities should consider the progress they have made on each component. Over the following pages, we make specific recommendations for each component.



## 2. How did we get here?

### Overview and Scrutiny in the Local Government Act 2000

Under Part II of the Local Government Act 2000, all local councils in England and Wales were required to introduce an Executive/Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) split for the purpose of decision-making by June 2002, though a number had been involved in pilot schemes since 1999. The 2000 Act requires that councils formally recognise two different roles in decision-making: that of the Executive arm and that of the O&S arm. The executive role is to propose *'the policy framework and implement policies within that framework'* and the backbench role is to *'represent constituents, share in the policy and budget decisions of the full council, suggest policy improvements and scrutinise the Executive's policies and policy implementation'* ('In touch with the people', White Paper summary, 1998).

It was hoped that through greater transparency, clarity and public responsiveness the new system would reinvigorate local politics. It should increase public involvement by making it easier and more worthwhile (in terms of being able to effect change through the system) to be involved.

At the early stages of implementation however, the two big headline-grabbing initiatives - of directly-elected mayors and local government's new 'power of well-being' - detracted from the debate on O&S. It almost appears that legislators naively considered that, once councils had a strong Executive in place, everything else would fall into line:

*"The debate on the new arrangements has tended, so far, to concentrate on the Executive and very little attention has been focused on the vast majority of members who will form the wider assembly"*

(LGA - 818/00, 2000 – covering memo)

*"The LGA was particularly concerned to ensure that the 'power of well-being' was retained in the Act. Partly due to this prioritisation the thinking on overview and scrutiny was, and still is, way behind the thinking on Executive arrangements"*.

(Phil Swann, LGA, interview, 2003)

With the priority of central government being to establish new, swifter, streamlined, corporate-style decision-making processes, the idea of retaining accountability through the establishment of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee came as an after-thought:

*"The idea of having executive mayors as a focus for local government arose, and you can't have a mayor without a check and balance mechanism: hence the overview and scrutiny element"*.

(London Borough Councillor, interview, 2003).

Of the thirty-eight sections within Part II of the Local Government Act 2000, only one deals with 'Overview and Scrutiny'. In contrast to the arrangements for directly-elected mayors, the Act is not prescriptive about how O&S should be organised or what powers it should have; all that is outlined is what O&S should achieve. It is thus up to the Executive to confer powers on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee rather than for O&S to have them automatically by right.

As such there appear to have been some teething problems in the implementation of the new arrangements: nervous executives do not have a great incentive to firstly grant, and secondly protect, the powers that O&S needs to be effective. The 2000 Act could have safeguarded O&S rather more through such measures as prescribing a level of party political proportionality within O&S, or limiting the proportion of Overview and Scrutiny Committee chairs who could be members of the majority party. However, the legislation is as it stands and so it has become the responsibility of local government to make it work. Common sense needs to be applied in discerning what balance of power is in the interest of the local residents and to ensure that this is achieved. The legislation relies on a culture of 'fair-play' and 'reasonableness' that it is in everyone's interest to uphold.



### 3. Findings from case study research

In our case study interviews, the overall feeling was that Overview and Scrutiny has had a positive impact on decision-making, but that it is certainly not yet being used to its full potential. In itself, this is not surprising, as all arrangements take time to bed down. The following quote is indicative of how councillors in our case study Borough felt about the new arrangements:

*"At the end of the day the depressing thing is that not many people could put their hand up and say that Overview and Scrutiny has really made a difference".*

(A London Borough Councillor, interview, 2003)

The 'fair play' culture referred to in the previous section appeared absent in the council we looked at, and we found the effectiveness of the new arrangements have been hampered by: low status perceptions of O&S; a lack of commitment and focus by elected members working within O&S; party-based 'machine politics'; and poor integration and information flows between the two arms of the council.

The main findings – specific to our case study authority rather than local authorities as a whole – are:

- O&S is able to achieve 'easy wins' that raise its profile – particularly through O&S of service areas for which the Council is not the service provider
- Local Government O&S is seen as having great potential, but none of the councillors interviewed felt that potential was being maximised.
- O&S is not respected as an essential partner to executive decision-making.
- O&S committee membership is not widely seen as an interesting role, though O&S councillors involved in O&S enjoyed being involved with detailed O&S 'commissions'.
- Non-Executive councillors feel less well-informed about the business of the Council since the implementation of the Local Government Act 2000.
- Some Opposition members of the Council feel that the Executive had deliberately hamstrung the O&S process to safeguard themselves from criticism.
- Many councillors felt that party politics inhibits the O&S Committee's potential.
- The 'call-in' procedure is rarely used: some councillors saw this as indicative of how the new arrangements have made decision-making more consensual in the case study Borough, others as an indicator that councillors do not yet understand the new system fully.
- Many councillors are concerned that the new system allows power to be concentrated in the hands of a small minority.
- The creation of deputies to the Executive can draw away much-needed talent from the O&S benches and dilute the effectiveness of the O&S function.
- Public involvement in O&S varies greatly with issues – meetings around planning and crime are well-attended, for example.
- The O&S Sub-Committees feel they have too few members to be able to have the time to be involved with policy development.
- The culture and practices within O&S varied by sub-committee: the chairperson has a very strong influence on this.
- A number of councillors felt that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee chairpersons were not skilled enough in leading the Committee and its Sub-Committees.

## **Cultural Shift**

As members were interviewed in a single London Borough, we do not claim this as a representative survey. Some of the findings – positive and negative – are due at least in part to local factors. However, it does enable us to identify the key issues, and challenge all authorities to make progress on them. On this basis, we have identified six components to the cultural shift that we believe is required for O&S to be successful:

- **Status**  
Elected members need to respect the legitimacy of the O&S function as essential for local accountability and democracy and accord it the high status it deserves.
- **Independence**  
Overview & Scrutiny Committee members must take a strong lead on O&S matters. They must not let the Executive define, directly or by default, what their agenda should be.
- **Policy over Party**  
We do not expect local government to be non-political or non-party political, but O&S requires that party dogma can be put to one side, so that issues can be judged on their merit in terms of improving the life of the community. It requires that councillors from differing party backgrounds learn to work together on O&S to analyse the policies and decisions of their own party without undue deference to the 'party line'.
- **Pro-activity**  
Post-decision reviews should be only one element of the work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. If O&S works on a purely responsive basis it may neglect the very areas of policy delivery which are most in need of reassessment. This overview work is vital.
- **Communication**  
Now that not all councillors are directly involved in decision-making, it is paramount that the Executive communicates its decisions and rationale to the O&S function, full council, stakeholders and the public. It is also important that O&S communicates effectively to engage the public and ensure that it is widely understood and supported.
- **Sustainability**  
As council leadership is wont to change between the major political parties in any one council – and within the majority party – O&S arrangements must work for any administration. The practices and arrangements must be initiated with a long-term 'whole organisation' view in mind, with councillor and officer roles developed and supported accordingly. An administration which does not allow its Overview & Scrutiny Committee autonomy and influence may suffer when they are themselves in opposition and find their avenues for holding the Executive to account are curtailed.



## 4. Six components of change: lessons and recommendations

On the following pages, we examine each of our 'Cultural Shift' themes in a little more detail and make practical recommendations for how local authorities can address them.

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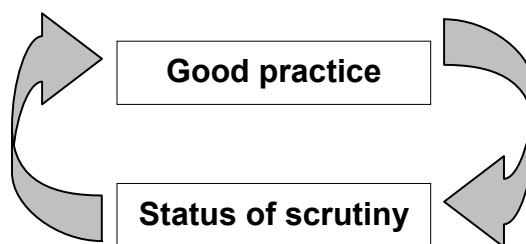
### **Status: 'Overview and Scrutiny' matters**

First and foremost for O&S to be effective it must be valued and given status. O&S is more than a legally necessary component for successful decision-making: it is also paramount in safeguarding local democracy and can be a useful tool for promoting public involvement. Indeed it should be respected for the powerful tool that it is. However, throughout the interviews there appeared limited respect among elected members for the O&S process. Not only was O&S viewed as secondary function to the Executive, but it was seen as 'peripheral', and to have little or no impact on decision-making - a 'fig leaf' for the Executive. This is a far cry from the 'critical friend' O&S was envisaged to be by central government: an equal partner to complete the whole. One Executive member in our case study Borough summed up the general feeling of many councillors with the following comment:

*"Scrutiny is not highly valued at all – the evidence being that I don't value it myself at the moment".*

(A London Borough Councillor, interview, 2003)

Without a real shift in councillor perceptions and a strong commitment from them to the scrutiny agenda, O&S will continue to have a peripheral impact on decision-making at the local level. However good O&S arrangements may be, unless they are accepted and owned by elected members, their achievements will remain marginal. Obviously this is a two-way street – perceptions of status and councillor commitment to the programme are highly unlikely to progress without adequate and efficient systems in place.



There is evidence to suggest the negative influence of self-fulfilling prophecies in O&S: many councillors believe that it can achieve little, and so it has.

### **Recommendations:**

- Member allowance levels can send out strong signals to councillors: ensure that the member allowances for O&S chairpersons are inline with those of the Executive.
- Members involved in O&S need to 'talk-up' the work that they do and communicate their successes to the Full Council.

- The level of officer support for O&S members has to be appropriate to the function – and members of O&S need to feel that it is appropriate.
- Councils need to adjust their existing hierarchies: placing all those councillors who are perceived to be the 'hard-hitters' within the council on the Executive and leaving the Overview & Scrutiny Committee places to be filled by the less experienced, less confident or less ambitious members will perpetuate the view that O&S is not valued.
- Regular reviews of implementation are needed to ensure that the recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee which are taken on board by the Executive are implemented as intended. Poor implementation leads quickly to demotivation.
- A measure of the status of O&S is how Executive members feel about being part of an O&S meeting. Appearing before an Overview & Scrutiny Committee should be regarded as an important opportunity for Executive members to give an account in public.

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### **Owning the Programme**

The interviews also suggested a lack of confidence on the part of Overview & Scrutiny Committee members with regards to their work programme and an ensuing lack of focus and control.

*"There's no great strength of talent within the Administration's Scrutiny Members so they tend to be dominated by the Executive".*

(A London Borough Councillor, interview, 2003)

O&S committees at Local Government level must be able to shape their own agenda: define clearly how they are going to move forward and stick to their plans. Simply reacting to the Executive's Forward Plan is not enough: O&S committees must be pro-active in choosing which subjects to scrutinise and then carefully control the agenda once it has embarked upon a work programme. In our case-study council, O&S councillors complained of their O&S meetings being Executive-dominated, indicating that the power dynamic between the two arms is wrong: how is the Overview & Scrutiny Committee going to hold the Executive to account if the O&S members feel manipulated by them in their own meetings? In our case study Borough, O&S members had to request that members of the Executive Committee only attend O&S meetings when invited to ensure that the non-Executive members retained control of the agenda. This is indicative of a deeper problem which needs addressing. We would suggest that if this is what it takes for O&S meetings to be successful it should be considered as a short-term solution.

### **Recommendations:**

- Chairing skills are paramount in keeping a committee focused. O&S needs experienced chairpersons if it is to hold the Executive to account. The Council should support the development of these skills.
  - O&S needs skilled members for cross-examination and maintaining control of its agenda.
  - Executive members should not be allowed to dominate O&S meetings; they should be invited to give evidence at the request of the committee.
  - O&S teams should make use of public knowledge and suggestions, to ensure that O&S exploring the issues of most importance to the public and not being directed by the priorities of the Executive.
-

## ***Policy over Party***

In carrying out this role, O&S members may be required to be critical of their own party in reviewing the decisions of the Executive. It is important that O&S members are able to be objective about the policies of their party. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee must be seen as being capable of being 'above party politics' when needs must.

This does not mean we advocate taking the politics out of local government – far from it. Councillors are, of course, political animals and at times will want – legitimately – to use the democratic system to make political points. Occasionally, members will indulge in some grandstanding for the local media. Equally, O&S will sometimes divide along party lines. But good scrutiny does require a more consensual approach to local politics than many are used to, and, if progress is being made, those involved should at least feel that the culture is becoming more consensual.

There does not need to be confusion over the distinction between 'Opposition' and 'Scrutiny'. The boundaries will be blurred – opposition members of O&S do not lose their duty to oppose – but there is a distinction between the opposition's freedom to criticise the administration's goals, strategies, policies and implementation; and O&S's duty to influence policies and implementation mechanisms and to scrutinise detail, even where they are not in favour of the overall policy.

We should also recognise that some of the more petty aspects of party politics affect the effectiveness of O&S. One councillor cited 'petty party politics which never seem to be overcome' as the least satisfying aspect of the work. It is rather telling that the most successful O&S report by our case study Borough was not a critique of the Executive but was a review of the policy of an external public agent: the Overview & Scrutiny Commission set up for the particular issue was well supported and could work unhindered.

### **Recommendations:**

- Informal occasions should be arranged to help councillors develop cross-party working relationships with respect to O&S.
- Councillors should be encouraged to recognise that there is a role for an issue-based, not just party-based, focus in their work.
- Create a culture of reciprocity, 'conceding' and compromising on some issues will help build trust – for example allowing the opposition first refusal on which sub-committees they would like to chair.

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## ***Pro-activity: shaping decisions***

As stated previously, it did appear in our case study Council that the O&S team were not taking the lead. 'O&S' entails the reviewing of past decisions (scrutiny) as well as a more strategic look at existing policies (overview), and the balance between the two needs to be right. By their very nature, Executive decisions should be relatively swift: thus, for the time-limited Executive, O&S committee findings can be a useful information tool in helping to explore potential decisions in-depth as well as post-decision scrutiny. In our case study borough it was admitted that:

*"There's not enough people pushing forward areas of policy within O&S".*  
(A London Borough Councillor, interview, 2003)

O&S could be seen to be at its most powerful in its ability – through the overview function - to shape the agenda: not just its own agenda but also the Executive's through its dissemination of information. Well-researched policy reviews can define the Executive's work programme if their findings are communicated clearly and represent a body of evidence from across a range of parties. This is a matter of balance: O&S should not be dominating the Executive any more than the Executive should dominate O&S.

Councillors in our case study Borough felt O&S to be separate from, rather than part of, the Council's decision-making process; when asked questions on decision-making they immediately assumed that they related only to the Council's Executive. This can be a barrier to high status, high quality O&S, and is at least partly addressed by having a substantial overview programme.

It is also worth noting that the nature of post-decision scrutiny is more adversarial – and therefore more likely to be subject to 'machine politics' – than 'decision-shaping' through overview. We believe that the less adversarial decision-making is, the more likely it is that O&S - and the whole decision-making culture - can be sustainable within an authority, even when there are changes of leadership or administration.

### **Recommendations:**

- O&S reports should be more than sets of normative recommendations based on political principles: they should be evidence-based.
- O&S meetings should not be run on the old committee system basis – they should be exploratory and include where possible stakeholder and public representatives.
- Ensure that O&S is not too adversarial, opening informal channels of communication between the Executive and O&S arms should allow O&S to inform and shape policy decisions.
- There should be sufficient budget to enable O&S to commission experts or consultants where needed.

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### **Communicating**

There appears to be a certain amount of misunderstanding and ignorance about O&S: our research found that those most heavily involved in O&S had the strongest belief in the benefits it can bring. Confidence-building and whole organisation support is important to new initiatives like formal O&S. This can be greatly facilitated through effective communication. There is likely to be greater support for the O&S agenda if it is well understood and there is a belief that it can make a difference. Successful communication is key to getting all groups 'on side'.

Furthermore, information sharing aids the Executive in decision-making and helps use backbench knowledge to the full. Two Executive members in the case study Council complained of it being a 'lonely' position – better communications and relationships with O&S could, in part, address this.

Lack of communication, on the other hand, can lead to disaffection on the part of members who are not part of the Executive: the new decision-making arrangements can leave them feeling 'out in the cold' if information flows are not managed carefully. Similarly, relationships may need to be carefully cultivated between elected members and officers now that decision-making structures have changed:

*"Now fewer officers come in regular contact with councillors: the Executive arrangements exclude the opportunity for officers to come in contact with us in a regular way".*

(A London Borough Councillor, interview, 2003)

O&S is essential for democracy: a streamlined decision-making process does not mean one where seventy-percent of elected members (i.e. all backbenchers) have no say in the decision-making of the council. Overview and Scrutiny is one key avenue for non-Executive members to be involved in council decision-shaping, and for this to happen there must be effective two-way communication:

*"Scrutiny is not having the impact that it could be having. One problem is that the sheer information flow is not available. We need a robust dialogue between the Executive and scrutiny".*

(A London Borough Councillor, interview, 2003)

Communication is also important for transparency. In our case study Borough it was felt that:

*"There continues to be a lack of transparency, especially for backbench members. Even if you are an Executive member you know less than you did under the last system".*

(A London Borough Councillor, interview, 2003)

External communications need the same care as internal ones. In our case study, the Council had had one large O&S 'win' which was important to the general public in the Borough. As a result, getting local press coverage was not an issue. The success of the review was great PR for the Council as a 'people's champion'; and it is still held up now as an example of good practice even though the review was some years ago. It is important that information released to the public remains contemporary and that councils do play to their strengths in communicating about O&S.

Communicating any successes that O&S has under its belt will reinforce trust and the status of O&S. Councillors must bear in mind that they should both communicate to be successful and communicate any successes achieved.

### **Recommendations:**

- O&S teams should make formal links with the local press: use them to publicise O&S findings and 'wins' to increase public awareness and interest.
  - Elected members complained that they were no longer aware of all the major issues within the council since the change in decision-making practices: regular newsletters to councillors could be a good tool for addressing this.
  - O&S sub-committee reports should be included in the papers for every full council meeting, and should be concise and accessible, with contacts for further information should councillors require it.
  - Council websites are great for free and easily accessible publicity. They need to be updated regularly and articles must be clearly signposted. A council's website is now one of the most important sources of information on local issues for the public and stakeholders.
  - 'Talking up' the work of O&S in the media can be supported by officers from the corporate communications team.
  - Find ways of involving non-Executive, non-O&S members in O&S projects, to help embed O&S more across the full range of members.
-

## ***Sustainability: the 'whole organisation' view***

Once a good system is in place, it is important that it can be maintained: our research found that the London Borough Council we investigated had altered their O&S arrangements a number of times since their inception. The ultimate aim of all councils should not just be the development of good practice but the maintenance of those practices: pulling out all the stops for one term is not good enough. O&S may be seen as a threat to a new administration, especially if the majority party is inexperienced. This makes it important that O&S arrangements are protected under the council's constitution, and that there is cross-party consensus in regards to the arrangements. Arrangements imposed against the will of an opposition party are unlikely to be sustainable.

Sustainability also requires that members have clear career paths open to them: experience of the O&S role should be regarded as a strength, not as 'second prize'. Likewise, the role must be interesting and hold real power to maintain commitment from members; all the councillors we interviewed felt that the most satisfying part of their job was being able to help others and effect positive change in their ward, the following quote being representative of the answers we received when we asked elected members about job satisfaction:

*"The most satisfying aspect is getting things done, I like to make a difference".*  
(A London Borough Councillor, interview, 2003).

Also, ensuring that any scrutiny recommendations accepted by the Executive are implemented expediently is an important element in retaining the interest of non-Executive councillors involved in O&S commissions. Councils which praise the work of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and then never use that work to influence change will inevitably have low morale and low productivity amongst backbenchers. If Overview & Scrutiny Committee members doubt the potential impact of their work, they are unlikely to be able to maintain commitment to their role.

Developing a continued training programme can help members remain focussed and sends out positive signals to those members about the importance of O&S, whilst ensuring that councillors and officers have the required skills to be a part of Local Government's primary accountability mechanism.

### **Recommendations:**

- O&S arrangements should be safeguarded in the council's constitution.
- Ensure mixed political group membership of committees, so that policy recommendations are non-adversarial.
- Develop a training programme to meet the skills needs of O&S, and ensure attendance is mandatory.
- Give all members a voice - whether it is through full council, area committees or other means - so that they do not feel frustrated and lose commitment to the work of the council.
- Rotating officer staff between O&S and Executive functions could aid fuller understanding of O&S and keep the commitment of staff fresh.
- O&S Committee chairpersons should ensure that committee members have support in developing interesting and challenging roles which can impact on council decision-making.
- The co-opting of local stakeholders can help embed community involvement in O&S.



# Appendix I: Bibliography and further reading

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# Appendix II: Discussion guide

## Interview questions for Elected Members

Hello. I am conducting a small-scale case-study research project with the support of the New Local Government Network and the Centre for Public Scrutiny. Thank you for agreeing to take the time to answer my questions. I am interviewing a number of your colleagues to look at the experience of local government decision-making in the age of scrutiny.

Nb. The final report will not quote any elected members or officers by name, all information you are able to give me will be treated as confidential.

NAME: .....

PARTY: .....

WARD: .....

POSITION: .....

---

### Introduction

1. How long have you been a councillor?

.....

2. What are the most satisfying aspects of being a councillor? And the least satisfying?

.....

.....

3. What is your role within the decision-making structure of xxxxxxxxx Council?

.....

.....

#### ASK IF SCRUTINY MEMBER

4. What are the most satisfying aspects of being a member of the Scrutiny Committee? And the least satisfying?

.....

.....

.....

**Member understanding of Scrutiny**

5. What do you see as the key characteristics of a good scrutiny process in practice? IF IT NEEDS REPHRASING: Can you think of any attributes which the process should have to ensure it is effective? (IF RESPONSES ARE ABOUT OUTCOMES – e.g. GOOD DECISIONS – THEN PROMPT: I am thinking more about how scrutiny works in practice ...)

- a. ....
- b. ....
- c. ....
- d. ....

6. How well are each of the above done in xxxxxxxxx Council?

- a. Very well / Fairly well / Not very well / Not at all well  
.....
- b. Very well / Fairly well / Not very well / Not at all well  
.....
- c. Very well / Fairly well / Not very well / Not at all well  
.....
- d. Very well / Fairly well / Not very well / Not at all well  
.....

7. And thinking about decision-making as a whole in xxxxxxxxx Council, what would you identify as the main strengths and weaknesses of the decision-making process in xxxxxxxxx? (DON'T LIMIT RESPONSES, BUT PROBE TO UNDERSTAND FULLY – CONSIDER BOTH INPUTS AND PROCESSES)

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**The Status/Perception of Scrutiny**

8. How important is scrutiny within decision-making in xxxxxxxx Council? What does it add to the decision-making process?

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9. How highly is scrutiny valued as a part of the decision-making process by elected members and officers? Would you say it is...

Very highly valued / fairly highly valued / not very highly values / not valued at all?

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10. Is there any evidence that scrutiny is perceived within the Council as a 'secondary' role in the decision-making process? (PROBE FOR EVIDENCE) What could be done to address this?

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(Executive Members only)

11. Would you ever choose to move from the Executive to work as a scrutiny committee member? Please explain why (not).

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12. What are the advantages to being an Executive member?

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(Scrutiny Members only)

13. Why do you work on the scrutiny side of decision-making? Would you like at some point to become an Executive member?

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**The 'How' of Scrutiny**

(if councillor has served more than 4 years)

14. In what ways does the new decision-making process feel different from the old council system?

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15. How consensual is the decision-making process in the Council? Would you say ...

Very consensual / fairly consensual / not very consensual / not at all?

How does scrutiny influence this?

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16. Have the new arrangements caused or fuelled any divisions or resentments within the council? IF YES: In what way(s)? Are these divisions along party political lines?

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17. How well supported do you feel in your role in the Executive/Scrutiny Committee? Please explain your answer, including outlining how your needs could be better met.

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(Executive members only)

18. How well informed do you feel about the scrutiny process and scrutiny committee / commission outcomes? Please explain your answer.

Very well informed / fairly well informed / not very well informed / know little or nothing about them

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**The 'What' of Scrutiny**

19. Which topics/issues would you like to see there to be more scrutiny of? Is the balance/ range of issues satisfactory? Please explain why you feel it is / not.

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20. Does scrutiny in xxxxxxxx Council deal effectively with both policy and service delivery issues?  
PROBE FOR DETAIL

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(Scrutiny Members only)

21. How do you choose which issues to scrutinise? (PROBE: IS THIS AN ELECTED MEMBER- OR OFFICER-LED PROCESS?)

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(Scrutiny Members only)

22. Do you take a different approach to scrutiny depending on topic? Or do you feel that you have found a formula that can be applied universally?

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**Conclusions/overview**

23. So overall, how effective do you think the decision-making process is in xxxxxxxx Council? Would you say ... Very effective / fairly effective / not very effective / or not at all effective

Please explain why you have given that answer.

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24. What barriers are there to effective decision-making and scrutiny, if any? How can they be overcome?

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25. What single thing would help you fulfil your role better as an Elected Member of the Executive / Scrutiny Committee?

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(If Councillor has served more than 4 years)

26. Overall, in what ways has the Local Government Act 2000 impacted on the effectiveness of xxxxxxxx Council?

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**Thank you for your time.**

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