

Effective Scrutiny

Horsham District Council

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Workshop programme

- Scrutiny roles and challenges
 - Scrutiny methods and questioning skills
 - Developing a scrutiny work programme
 - Finance scrutiny
 - Partnership scrutiny
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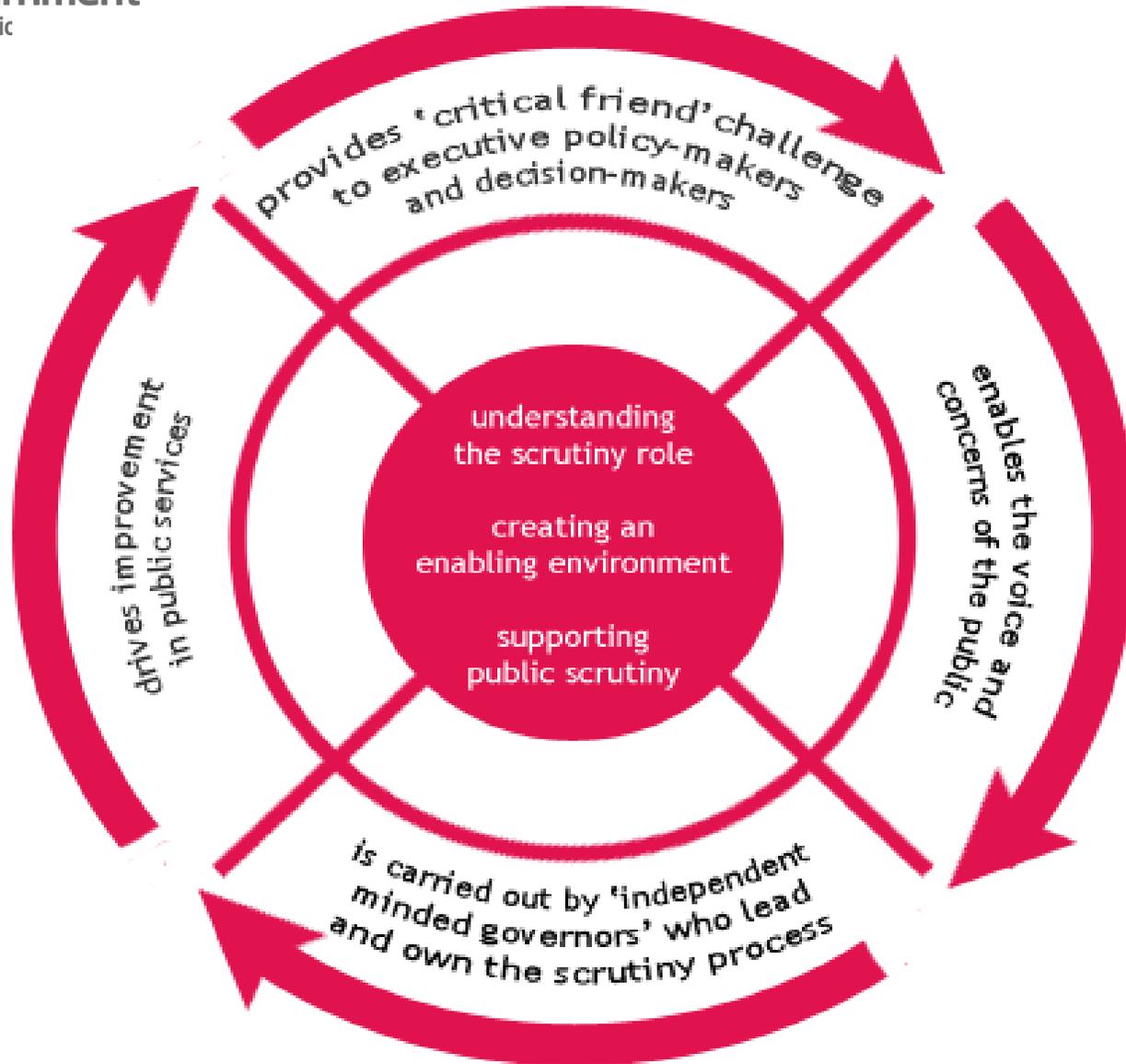
Discussion

- **What is overview & scrutiny?**
- **What works well for us?**



- Local Government Act 2000
 - Establishment of Executives / Cabinets
 - Statutory Power and Duties
 - Each Authority has developed its own structures and ways of doing things
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Four principles of effective scrutiny



Scrutiny roles exercise

Examine the potential scrutiny roles and tasks listed on the handout

Which are legitimate roles for overview & scrutiny and which are not?

Many types of scrutiny

- Pre-decision scrutiny
 - Budget / finance scrutiny
 - Call in
 - Policy review (e.g of outcomes)
 - ‘Deep dives’
 - External / partnership scrutiny
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Scrutiny methods and questioning skills



Different types of question

Closed questions

Requiring short, factual answers (e.g. “yes” or “no”)

Open questions

Deliberately seeks longer answers

Probing questions

Seeks further information in an investigative way

Clarifying questions

Seeks to clarify a fact or opinion

Opinion finding

Asks for an opinion

Example questions – good or bad

1.	Did you achieve what you set out to do?
2.	Why are you not doing what you said you would in your plan?
3.	It's obvious that there's only one option here, don't you agree? Why couldn't did you include the other options? What did the public have to say?
4.	What will happen if you don't make the savings you're forecasting?
5.	What difference has the new legislation made to your day to day role?
6.	It's a right mess, isn't it?
7.	I'm really in favour of Option B, it seems to be the only sensible solution. What are your thoughts?
8.	You said that fire and rescue services have a role in improving public health. Can you tell us more about that?
9.	When will we be able to tell if the policy change has been a success?
10.	Why is this now feasible, when it was considered overambitious in the past?

Probing questions – to gather info

Who?

When?

What?

Where?

Why?

How?

Effective questioning techniques

- Repeat key words to encourage a further response
 - Allow the respondent thinking time
 - Use plain language and avoid jargon
 - Try to use open-ended questions as much as possible
 - Consider assigning questions before meeting
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Work Programme

- Key management tool for scrutiny
 - Limited member and officer time
 - Method of prioritisation
 - Try to coincide with, or feed into, key activities of the council
 - Key vehicle for ensuring scrutiny is member-led
 - Organised well it will ensure balance across scrutiny roles
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Discussion exercise

- How do you identify potential issues for scrutiny?
 - How do you prioritise what you focus on?
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Some possible criteria for prioritisation

- Is the topic already part of a separate review process?
 - Does scrutiny have sufficient resources and time to tackle the topic?
 - Is the topic of significant public concern?
 - Will the topic support the achievement of corporate priorities?
 - Can scrutiny 'make a difference' by addressing this topic?
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Tasks and Finish Groups

Consider the following:

- What evidence would you seek to gather?
 - What witnesses would you want to speak to?
 - How would you ensure the perspective of citizens and users was taken into account?
 - How much time and resource is realistically required to undertake this piece of work?
 - Are there any other investigations / reviews taking place that may overlap?
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Many methods for conducting scrutiny

Reports

**Focus
groups**

Deep dive

Interviews

Site visit

Surveys

**Private
meetings**

Peer review

**Task
Groups**

Evidence based recommendations

Is the recommendation SMART?

- Specific
 - Measurable
 - Achievable
 - Relevant
 - Timely
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Finance Scrutiny

- Finance scrutiny is about money (obviously)
 - But it's also about strategy, risk, governance, innovation
 - While government funding is reducing, the council still has a lot of discretion and powers (and some duties)
 - Examples include tax raising powers (to a point), power to borrow (prudently), power to invest (sensibly)
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Finance Scrutiny

- A council has assets and liabilities – not just on a balance sheet but having a real impact on the financing of existing services
 - Scrutiny should see a council budget in its context
 - Pre-budget scrutiny, including particular significant saving proposals, is important but be proactive and strategic as well
 - Make the most of financial monitoring reports
 - Audit Committee has its own role to play
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Expenditure& income

Revenue (day to day expenses)	
Providing services Paying benefits Repaying debt and interest	Government grants Business rates Council tax Charges for services Investment income
Capital (things that last)	
Buildings Land Infrastructure Vehicles Plant & machinery	Grants Capital receipts Borrowing Developer contributions / planning gain Revenue (see above)

Partnership Scrutiny

- Partnership dimension to most issues
 - Public, private and voluntary sectors
 - Partners often unfamiliar with scrutiny processes and may be resistant
 - Identify where can scrutiny add value
 - Early engagement and clarity of focus is important
 - Transparency of process and avoiding overreach
 - Need to develop ‘acquired’ and ‘earned’ influence due to limited formal powers
 - Requesting evidence
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Partnership Scrutiny

- Be mindful of:
 - Partners' resources
 - Council-speak
 - Commercial confidentiality considerations
 - Partners are often not required to respond
 - Make it easy to engage
 - Relationships are particularly important
 - Frame recommendations for impact
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Any questions?

Further Information

Resources on the LGA website: www.local.gov.uk

- Councillor workbooks on scrutiny and finance scrutiny
- E-Learning Modules

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