



Centre for Public Scrutiny

The role of Overview and Scrutiny

Spelthorne Borough Council

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Centre for Public Scrutiny

- National charity
- Focused on scrutiny, accountability and good governance in public sector
- And amongst those who deliver publicly-funded services
- Policy and practice in governance, scrutiny and accountability

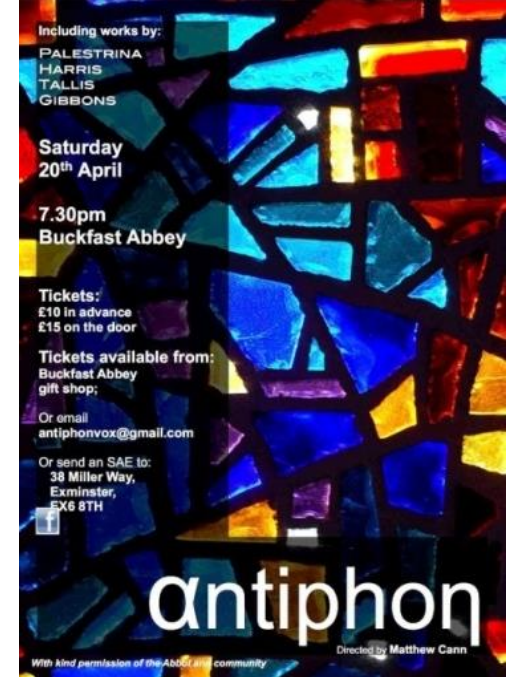
“I want to argue that there is a perfectly respectable alternative career in public life and it is that of holding powerful people to account.”
Jeremy Paxman
at a CfPS conference



Programme

- Introductions
- Outline of O&S origins, principles and powers
- Ways of working and tools for O&S
- Group task on planning and prioritising reviews, facilitated by the Chairman

Discussions, tips, good practice and activities throughout



Session 1

Origins, principles and powers



Outline of O&S in law

- Local Government Act 2000
- Health and Social Care Act 2001
- Police and Justice Act 2006
- Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
- Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011
- Localism Act 2011
- Health and Social Care Act 2012
- Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2015



*“O&S committees
can look at **anything**
relating to
the wellbeing
of its residents”*

Outline of O&S powers

- Can require information ...
- ... attendance
- ... and reasoned response
- Powers over certain partners; more limited over others
- More formal powers with 'social care authorities' eg health statutory consultee
- Often more about **influence, persuasion and goodwill**
- Some items are excluded eg those with separate complaints and appeal processes, planning and licensing applications



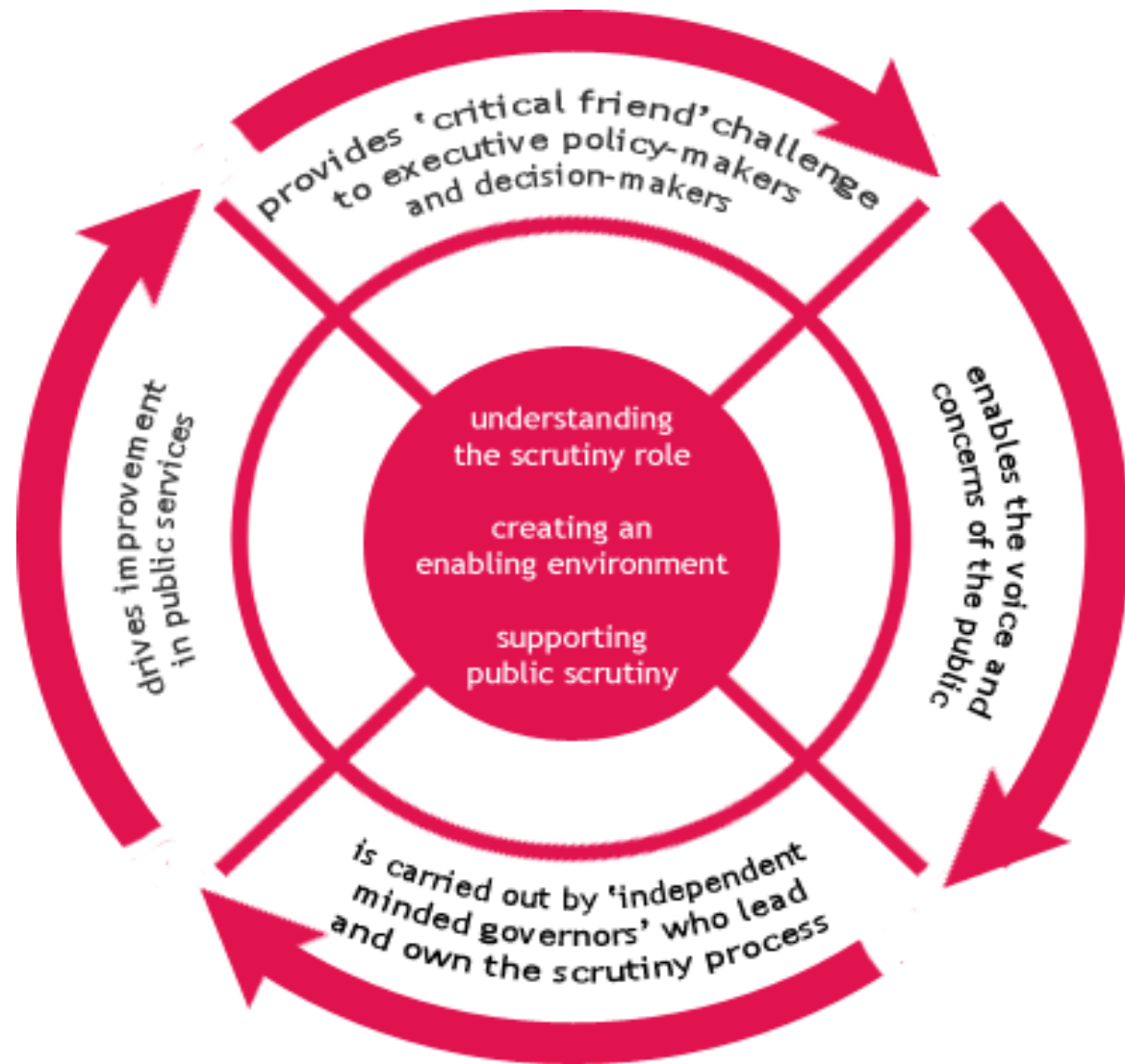
O&S context

- The financial challenge of austerity; declining resources
- Public sector reforms
- The pressure to innovate
- Francis, Jay and Casey reports
- The devolution agenda
- ... opportunities for a new relevance during major change
- Return on investment significant

“Councillors have a vital duty to scrutinise and challenge their council's use of public money. This duty to local council taxpayers is at the heart of their role and mandate as local elected representatives.”



Key principles and conditions for effective O&S



O&S activity – some suggestions

- Member led process, not only committee
- Strategic oversight of plans and policies
- Critical Friend constructive challenge
- Monitoring of performance
- Review of outcomes and impact
- Input to policy development
- Independent view on future challenges
- ... Of Council and partners
- A means to connect with residents



O&S in Spelthorne

See Procedure Rules; Agenda Item 5; pp 9 -16

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- Pre-scrutiny eg with regard to the Cabinet Forward Plan
- Policy development, providing input to shaping decisions and offering options
- Review eg regular corporate project management update and financial monitoring by exception
- Special projects and new initiatives, eg devolution, as required
- Option for infrequent Call-in

“Fundamentally, good scrutiny requires everyone in the council to understand what scrutiny is actually for. It’s more and more necessary for scrutiny to have a clear place in the organisation’s approach to change, service improvement and policy making”
LGA



Reflections on O&S

Have a conversation around:

Your O&S experience:

- What it is for
- How it can help

Session 2

Ways of working and tools for O&S



O&S key tasks

See Procedure Rules; Agenda Item 5; pp 9 -16

- Work programming
- Project scoping
- Evidence gathering
- Questioning and listening
- Report writing
- Presenting recommendations
- Decision tracking and follow up
- Evaluation
- Other?



O&S processes

- Planning O&S activity
- Desk research and briefings offline
- Lead Member, Officer and Partner accountability in person and reports
- Viewing at first hand, and other user and community consultation
- Q&A with expert witnesses
- Monitoring of scrutiny topics and activity
- Other?



O&S challenges

- Have manageable work programmes
- Have realistic agendas
- Manage large volumes of information
- Ensure appropriate timescales
- Make judgments regarding:
 - complexity of issue
 - available resources
 - potential outcomes
 - value to the Council
 - return on investment



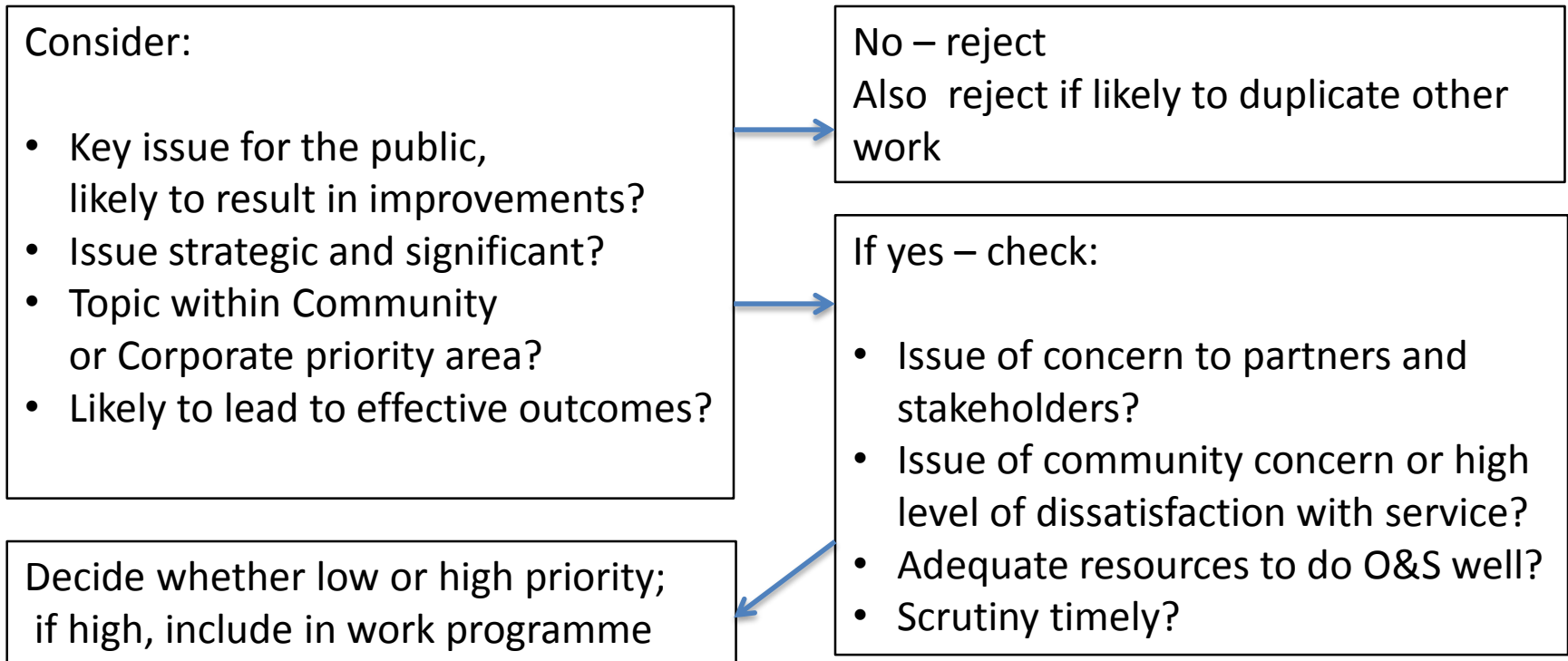
Work programming

- Has a corporate fit
- Is developed with stakeholders
- Uses clear rationale and criteria
- Follows a realistic timetable
- Is timely
- Appreciates available capacity
- Understands that 'less is more'
- Targets limited resources well



Work Programme Development

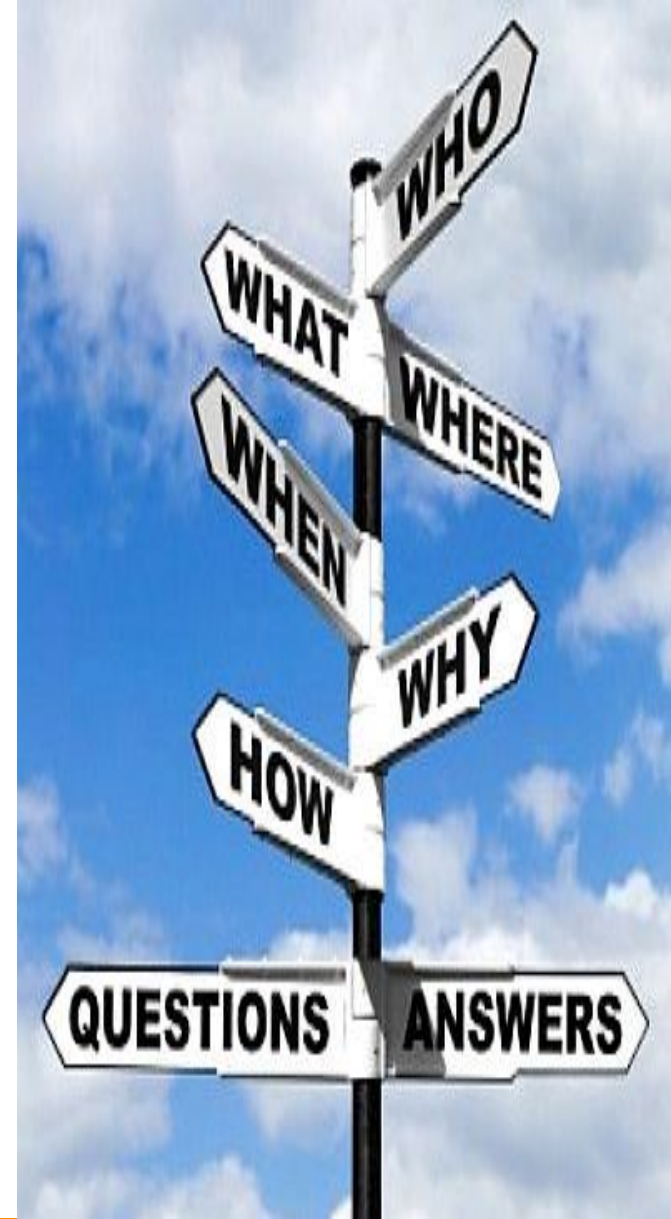
Overview and Scrutiny Topic Selection Flowchart; adapted from South East Employers



Project scoping

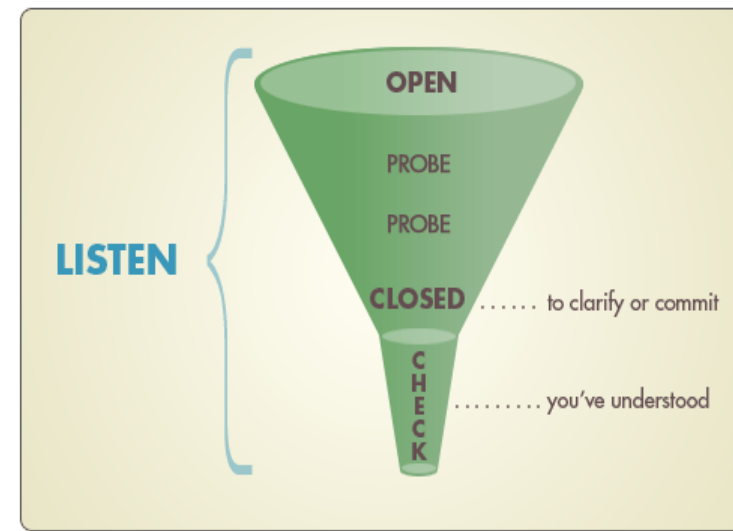
To ensure a structured review, scope:

- Objective(s)
- Terms of reference
- Intended outcomes
- Methodology
- Inputs for evidence gathering
- Timescales
- Intended recipient of timely, clear and robust outcomes



Evidence and reports

- Where from? What and how?
Written, site visits, commissioned research, comparative data, verbal
- Plan a questioning strategy
- Use Key Lines of Enquiry
- Evaluate evidence
- Draw evidence-based conclusions
- Draft SMART recommendations
- Submit it to decision makers



Decision tracking and follow up

- Submit reports and recommendations to appropriate body
- Seek response to or decision within timescale
- Evaluate response
- Consider if evaluation suggests further O&S action
- Monitor progress with recommendations and actions
- Evaluate each review:
 - Resources used
 - Impact made
 - Outcomes delivered against Council priorities





Session 3
Group task - selecting potential O&S topics

Group task



Planning the O&S work programme

Focus on community impact
and support for Corporate Priorities



Evaluation

Please complete the evaluation form

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