
Wales Audit Office –Improvement Study – effectiveness of scrutiny

Reason for the Report

1. To advise committee of a Wales Audit Office Improvement Study into the effectiveness of scrutiny programmed within its 2012-13 Regulatory Programme.

Background

2. Scrutiny has a key role in promoting improvement, efficiencies, and collaboration across public services. This is increasingly the case in responding to the challenge of the global financial situation whilst continuously seeking to improve services, and in developing effective joint scrutiny arrangements for new and emerging collaborations.
3. The Auditor General has stated that he plans to conduct a number of all-Wales improvement studies each year, focusing on those issues that most hinder transformation and give rise to the greatest inefficiencies. His aim is to identify areas of common learning that will support councils' efforts to improve and help resolve some of the tensions between central and local government that often impede progress.
4. In light of the above the Wales Audit Office Regulatory Programme this year includes an Improvement Study on Scrutiny. This will take place at all councils across Wales and the first stage of the work will be starting soon.

5. Attached at **Appendix A** is the project brief. The approach is essentially developmental and will contribute to developing councils' self-evaluation skills as well as their scrutiny functions.
6. Wales Audit Office considers the timing of this study is absolutely right as many new Members participate in Scrutiny for the first time. Councils will be asked to carry out an initial self-assessment according to nationally agreed criteria.
7. In brief, there will be 5 stages to the study as follows:
 - Initial self-evaluation;
 - Regional workshop –councils share their self-evaluations with each other;
 - Peer Learning Exchange – a team (approx 5, including members and officers) from one council will visit two committee meetings at another council and provide feedback;
 - Another Regional Workshop – Peer Learning Exchange teams make presentations based on their findings during their visits to another council. Afterwards, each council will complete another self-evaluation.
 - Wales Audit Office will write a national summary report and disseminate findings.
8. This will take place over an extended period, with the report due in March/April 2013.

Legal Implications

9. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Executive/Council will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b) comply with any

procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers of behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

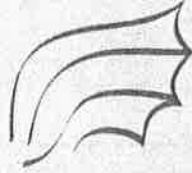
Financial Implications

10. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme. However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Executive/Council will set out any financial implications arising from those recommendations.

Recommendation

The Committee is invited to note the Wales Audit Office Scrutiny study programmed for the 2012-13 Regulatory Programme.

MIKE DAVIES
Head of Scrutiny, Performance & Improvement
26 September 2012



WALES AUDIT OFFICE

SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Good Scrutiny? Good Question!

Wales Audit Office Scrutiny Improvement Study

Developing Effective Scrutiny: Environment, Practice and Impact – Project Brief

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Introduction

The time is right to continue the scrutiny improvement journey

1. Scrutiny has a key role in promoting improvement, efficiencies, and collaboration across public services. This is increasingly the case in responding to the challenge of the global financial situation whilst continuously seeking to improve services, and in developing effective joint scrutiny arrangements for new and emerging collaborations. The changes brought about following the local government elections in May 2012, the introduction of the Local Government Measure 2011, together with improving self-scrutiny and regulation, mean that it is now timely to work with local government to support and develop stronger scrutiny arrangements. This year's study will provide a baseline for new councils to assess and demonstrate their scrutiny improvement journey over the next five years and take stock of their improvement journey to date.

2. The Auditor General in his letter to chief executives on 13 March 2012 stated:

'I plan to conduct a number of all-Wales improvement studies each year, focusing on those issues that most hinder transformation and give rise to the greatest inefficiencies. My aim is to identify areas of common learning that will support councils' efforts to improve and help resolve some of the tensions between central and local government that often impede progress. Where further work is necessary or would be valuable, there will be scope to provide more detailed and tailored local assessments. My improvement study themes for the coming year will focus on issues of transparency and openness to challenge. It is my view that if we can oil the wheels with effective shared learning and real insights, the delivery of the whole range of council services will benefit.

I want to explore the extent to which challenge and scrutiny are operating effectively in local government in Wales and, alongside this, to review the approach to the preparation of annual governance statements. This work will complement my report on the issues arising and lessons learnt from the preparation of local government accounts.'

Wales Audit Office and local authorities working together

3. The Wales Audit Office will work together with the local government sector over the next year in a way that provides a valuable opportunity for all involved to further improve scrutiny in a sustainable manner. Together we will achieve this through facilitating the gaining of insight, sharing knowledge, developing skills, building and strengthening relationships, and identifying new opportunities for working together with other councils and partners. The study will also support councils in responding to the Welsh Government's programme for scrutiny over the next three years, and to shape the proposed Key Characteristics of Effective Overview and Scrutiny that the WLGA and partners have crafted from existing good practice guidance. As a result, by April 2013, Wales will have in place an agreed set of key characteristics of effective overview and scrutiny that can be used consistently by all practitioners, stakeholders, regulators and inspectorates.
4. This programme of activity differs from a traditional audit approach in that it involves real-time shared activity and working together, self-evaluation, and peer learning exchange opportunities. The focus is upon gaining insight and supporting and developing sustainable continuous improvement, not just on providing assurance. The approach is based upon six principles:

The Six Principles:

- **Co-Development and Delivery:** The expertise of local government practitioners will help shape the approach to ensure that delivery plans are meaningful, realistic and achievable. The work will provide opportunities for members across political groups to become involved in peer learning exchange teams, so that each council and each member on the learning exchange teams can gain and share valuable learning and insight and ideas for improvement in their own and in other councils in their region as the study progresses.
- **Self-Evaluation:** Councils will undertake an initial self-evaluation which will be refined through self-reflection and through peer learning exchange team work in order to formulate a final self-evaluation on which to focus improvement over the next five years.
- **Real-Time Feedback:** The work will dovetail with councils' real-time scrutiny arrangements. Local and regional feedback will be made available as soon as possible after every phase of work. This will ensure that the work and its outputs can be applied meaningfully in practice and to inform plans for improvement.
- **Openness and Sharing:** Councils and the Wales Audit Office will share data and information with each other throughout the process, to enable councils and peer learning exchange team members to receive the most value from the work.
- **Learning and Development:** There will be a strong focus on transferring knowledge and skills throughout the study. This will help to sustainably improve scrutiny arrangements and strengthen self-evaluation.
- **Relationship Building:** Strong relationships are at the heart of any successful endeavour. The work will aim to build relationships by improving self-awareness and developing an appreciation of others and practice elsewhere. This will also help to identify potential opportunities for working together and for joint scrutiny in future.

The approach is in six phases

5. These are summarised in Figure 1 below and include:

The Six Phases:

Phase 1 – Collaborative scoping, summer 2012

Phase 2 – Initial self-evaluation, September/October 2012

Phase 3 – Regional workshop 1, November 2012

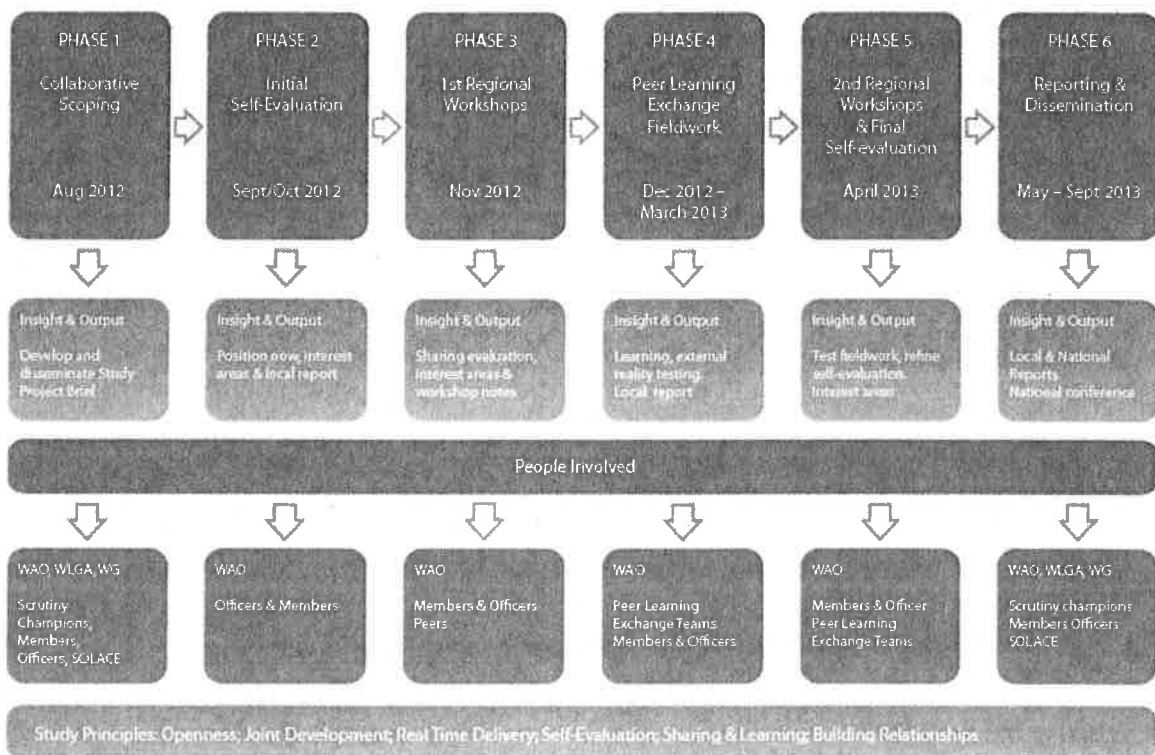
Phase 4 – Fieldwork through peer learning exchange teams, December 2012 to March 2013

Phase 5 – Regional workshop 2 and final self-evaluation refinement, April 2013

Phase 6 – National reporting and on-going dissemination, May to September 2013

6. The overall approach is summarised in Figure 1. The rest of this document describes the detail of each of these phases under the headings below:
- Activity – what is planned
 - Outputs – what can be expected from that phase of activity
 - Supporting tools – what is available to help carry out the phase
 - Resources required – how many people are required
 - Timing – when the activity should happen
 - Action – who is required to do what to make things happen
7. There are a series of appendices also attached which contain project management documents, tools and supporting information.

Figure 1: 'Good scrutiny? Good question!' Improvement Study – Developing Effective Scrutiny, Environment, Practice and Impact



Phase 1: Collaborative Scoping

Activity

8. We will develop the approach and outline delivery plans in discussion with local government and other key partners. Our partners involved in this process include:
 - Local government representatives (including chief executives, leaders, policy and performance officers, and scrutiny officers)
 - Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)
 - Welsh Government
 - Scrutiny Officers' Network

Outputs

9. This project brief covers:
 - The principles underpinning the study
 - Details of the activities planned
 - The tools needed and the outputs to be delivered
 - Resource implications
 - Timing

Resources required

10. The Wales Audit Office study development team
11. The time of representatives of key partners to inform the development of the study, review documents, and to discuss and agree how to move forward

Timing

12. The approach to the study will be agreed by mid-September 2012.

Actions

- Discussions with partners
- Drafting and clearance of the project brief

Phase 2: Initial self-evaluation

Activity

13. The Wales Audit Office will issue each council with an electronic scrutiny self-evaluation tool to use to gather evidence and evaluate their scrutiny arrangements.
14. The self-evaluation uses the proposed 'Key Characteristics of Effective Overview and Scrutiny' developed by the Welsh Government, WLGA, and the Scrutiny Champions' Network in discussion with the Wales Audit Office. The characteristics relate to the scrutiny environment, scrutiny practice and the impact of scrutiny.
15. As part of the self-evaluation, councils will need to make judgments on whether their arrangements support effective scrutiny for each of the proposed characteristics. They will also need to identify areas of good or innovative practice as well as areas for further development. Councils may want to involve their own Learning Exchange Team members in coming to these judgements.
16. The Wales Audit Office will support councils in completing the electronic self-evaluation tool by sharing any evidence that has arisen from previous Wales Audit Office work. Councils should draw on existing assessments and evaluations of scrutiny and relevant work, as well as taking account of any recent changes to their scrutiny arrangements. Councils should make the most of the evidence that is held already, and identify any gaps that may need filling.
17. The Wales Audit Office will not challenge the council's initial self-evaluation or evaluative judgments at this stage.
18. The Wales Audit Office will send the electronic self-evaluation tool to the council's nominated lead for the study in mid-September 2012 for completion and return to the Wales Audit Office by 31 October 2012.
19. It is intended that as part of the study, practitioners will help refine the proposed Key Characteristics for Effective Overview and Scrutiny so that by April 2013, Wales will have an agreed set of key characteristics of effective overview and scrutiny that can be used consistently by all practitioners, stakeholders, regulators and inspectorates.

Outputs

20. This initial self-evaluation will form an **up-to-date baseline** of the council's scrutiny arrangements and can be refined during the course of the study. The evaluation can also be shared with other councils at Phases 3, 4 and 5 of this study to enable learning, development and continuous improvement.
21. The Wales Audit Office will provide to each council a **local report and summary** of their initial self-evaluation which will include the positive aspects and areas for improvement, and a comparative analysis to identify positive practice to share. This will enable councils to prepare presentations to the regional workshop at Phase 3 in November 2012.
22. In future, **the self-evaluation can be revisited** by the council to evaluate improvement and promote further learning.

Supporting tools

Tool 1: Electronic initial self-evaluation. This tool uses the proposed 'key characteristics of effective scrutiny' which are attached in Appendix 2 (see Tool 1). There is an additional section to the electronic self-evaluation which allows councils to add their own questions and views on the proposed key characteristics so that they can be refined and form an agreed set by April 2013.

23. **Tool 2: A judgment guide** for the proposed key characteristics of effective scrutiny is also attached (see Tool 2). This draws on current and existing material that identifies principles of good scrutiny and self-evaluation arrangements across Wales and England.

Resources required

24. **Council:**

- The council will nominate a lead person for the self-evaluation, who will gather the required evidence and will complete, return and present the self-evaluation.

25. **Wales Audit Office:**

- The Wales Audit Office local team will work with the nominated lead to provide evidence from previous work to assist completion of the self-evaluation tool.

Timing

26. The council will nominate a lead person by mid-September 2012.
27. The Wales Audit Office will send an e-mail with a link and unique login details for the electronic initial self-evaluation tool to each council's nominated lead person in mid-September 2012.
28. The council will complete and return the electronic initial self-evaluation tool to the Wales Audit Office by 31 October 2012, and present it to the regional workshop 1 (Phase 3) in November 2012. This will enable councils to refine the self-evaluation during Phases 3, 4, and 5 in order to arrive at a final agreed evaluation at the end of Phase 5 (end of April 2013).

Actions required

29. **Wales Audit Office:**

The Wales Audit Office will send out the electronic initial self-evaluation tool and liaise with the council's nominated lead to facilitate the completion of this Phase by 31 October 2012.

30. **Council:**

- The council will complete the electronic self-evaluation tool by 31 October 2012.
- The council's nominated lead will present their initial self-evaluation to the regional workshop during Phase 3.
- In preparation for Phase 3, each council should nominate up to five members to form a scrutiny learning exchange team for their council. The learning exchange team will attend the regional workshop and will work with a partner council in the region over the coming months, sharing, learning and reflecting on the partner council's initial self-evaluation during Phase 3, 4 and 5. In deciding on representatives for the learning exchange team,

the council should ensure a cross-section of appropriate members, executive and non-executive, from a mix of political groups, as well as officers if they wish. Consistent attendance by the learning exchange team members will be important to enable the team and partner council to gain as much value from the process as possible. This means a maximum commitment of four days between November 2012 and April 2013 (one half-day focus group in December 2012/January 2013, two half-day observations in January/February/March 2013, and one other half-day regional workshop April 2013).

- The council's nominated lead should inform the Wales Audit Office study leads of the names and details of their learning exchange team, along with dates and details for Phase 4 by 31 October 2012. Please complete and return the schedule in Appendix 1 to the Wales Audit Office study leads for the region.

Phase 3: Regional workshop 1 – sharing and learning with other councils

Activity

31. A regional workshop will be held in each of the four Wales Audit Office regions (North Wales, Mid and West Wales, Gwent and South Wales), led by the Wales Audit Office manager for the region supported by a Wales Audit Office lead co-ordinator for this study as follows:

Region	Councils	Wales Audit Office study leads for the region
Gwent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newport • Torfaen • Monmouthshire • Blaenau Gwent • Caerphilly 	<p>Non Jenkins Wales Audit Office Performance Manager Non.Jenkins@wao.gov.uk</p> <p>Louise Fleet Wales Audit Office regional Lead Co-ordinator for this study Louise.Fleet@wao.gov.uk</p>
Mid and West Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RCT • Powys • Merthyr • Ceredigion • Carmarthenshire • Pembrokeshire 	<p>Colin Davies Wales Audit Office Performance Manager Colin.Davies@wao.gov.uk</p> <p>Chris Bolton Wales Audit Office regional Lead Co-ordinator for this study Chris.Bolton@wao.gov.uk</p>
South Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vale • Cardiff • Bridgend • NPT • Swansea 	<p>Steve Barry Wales Audit Office Performance Manager Steve.Barry@wao.gov.uk</p> <p>Helen Keatley Wales Audit Office regional Lead Co-ordinator for this study Helen.Keatley@wao.gov.uk</p>
North Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anglesey • Gwynedd • Conwy • Denbighshire • Flintshire • Wrexham 	<p>Huw Lloyd Jones Wales Audit Office Performance Manager Huw.LloydJones@wao.gov.uk</p> <p>Ena Lloyd Wales Audit Office regional Lead Co-ordinator for this study Ena.Lloyd@wao.gov.uk</p>

Outputs

32. Each council will **present their initial self-evaluations to peer learning exchange teams from other councils** in the region and learn from each other's initial self-evaluations.
33. Councils will have an opportunity to **establish relationships and better understanding** of each other's arrangements to identify ideas for further improvement and opportunities for working together and joint scrutiny in the future.
34. In order to achieve a rounded and mature self-evaluation, and promote a culture of sharing, learning and openness and constructive challenge, each council will pass on **their initial self-evaluation and comparative analysis summary to a peer learning exchange team from another council** in the region in readiness for Phases 4 and 5. Each council will undertake a learning exchange evaluation of one other council, facilitated by the Wales Audit Office study leads for the region. This will help to enhance each council's self-evaluation and facilitate learning from both a self-evaluator and peer perspective. They will be able to build relationships with other councils and develop a better understanding, awareness and appreciation of self and others, as well as identifying opportunities for joint working and joint scrutiny in the future.
35. The Wales Audit Office study leads will provide the each council with a copy of **the notes of their regional workshop** to share learning.

Supporting tools

36. **Tool 3:** The Wales Audit Office will circulate an agenda for the regional workshops.
37. **Tool 4:** Each council will receive the initial self-evaluation of another council to carry out Phases 4 and 5.

Resources required

38. **Council:**
 - Each council's nominated lead and their learning exchange team will attend the regional workshop to share and present their self-evaluation and to receive another council's initial self-evaluation. An appropriate off-site venue for each regional workshop (ie, not in committee rooms or chambers) will need to be agreed, that has facilities to accommodate a workshop for up to 50 delegates.
39. **Wales Audit Office:**
 - The Wales Audit Office study leads for the region will prepare, co-ordinate, facilitate and write up the regional workshop.

Timing

40. The regional workshop will be a half-day workshop as set out in the schedule in Appendix 1.

Actions

41. **Wales Audit Office** to agree dates and venues for regional workshops.
42. **Council:** The nominated lead and the learning exchange team members of each council will attend the regional workshop, and commit to participating as peer learning exchange teams to another council in the region for Phases 4 and 5.

Phase 4: Peer Learning Exchange Fieldwork

Activity

43. This phase consists of three key fieldwork activities for each peer learning exchange team to work with their partner council to share learning and support it to reflect on its initial self-evaluation. They are:
1. Peer Learning Exchange Team to hold a **focus group** with the chairs of scrutiny of the partner council, facilitated by the Wales Audit Office study team leads.
 2. Peer Learning Exchange Team to **observe two scrutiny committees** of the partner council and share their views with the committee members at the end of each meeting. This process will be facilitated by the Wales Audit Office study team leads. This exercise is tried and tested, and some councils will already be familiar with this methodology where the Wales Audit Office has facilitated such peer observations between committees/councils in the past.
 3. **Peer Learning Exchange Team meeting to:**
 - Reflect on their experience and findings.
 - Complete a peer learning exchange team evaluation tool that will be sent out by the Wales Audit Office.
 - Prepare a short summary of their views and key messages for presentation at the regional workshop in Phase 5. This summary should include:
 - The peer learning exchange team's views of the council's initial self-evaluation in light of their observations and focus group.
 - The learning exchange team's thoughts on:
 - a) The strengths, good practice and areas for improvement of the scrutiny arrangements of the council.
 - b) How this fits with the council's initial self-evaluation and how the initial self-evaluation could be refined.
 - c) What they have learned from being a peer learning exchange team member and what they will take back to their own council.
 - d) How they could refine their own self-evaluation based on their experience as a peer learning exchange team.
 - e) What opportunities there are to work together with other councils, and for joint scrutiny in future.
44. During these three activities the Wales Audit Office study leads and their local teams will facilitate the activities and provide challenge to the self-evaluation and the peer learning exchange teams.
45. The peer learning exchange team may also wish to undertake further work, such as reviewing key documents to further inform their work.

Outputs

46. The Wales Audit Office study leads will **circulate the notes of the focus group** to the peer learning exchange team.
47. The Peer Learning Exchange Team will **provide real-time observations and feedback** to the committee meeting facilitated by the Wales Audit Office study leads and local teams.
48. The Wales Audit Office study leads will **circulate the feedback of the observations** to the peer learning exchange team.
49. The Peer Learning Exchange Team will **complete the electronic peer learning exchange team evaluation tool** (Tool 7).
50. The Wales Audit Office will **prepare a summary report** and circulate to the Peer Learning Exchange Team.
51. The Peer Learning Exchange Team will **prepare a presentation to be shared** at the regional workshop 2.

Supporting tools

52. **Tool 5: In a pre-meeting** just before the focus group, the Peer Learning Exchange Team, facilitated by the Wales Audit Office study leads for the region **will prepare questions to ask the focus group**, drawing on the partner council's initial self-evaluation.
53. **Tool 6:** The Peer Learning Exchange Team members will be given an **Observation Aide Memoire** for when they observe the two scrutiny committees of their partner council. The Aide Memoire has been tried and tested successfully during past peer observation exercises.
54. **Tool 7: The Wales Audit Office** will send an electronic **peer learning exchange evaluation tool** for the team to provide their comments on the partner council's initial self-evaluation drawing on their fieldwork. The team will return the tool to the Wales Audit Office by 31 March 2013.

Resources required

55. The Peer Learning Exchange Team will attend one half-day focus group, two half-day observations, an internal peer learning exchange team meeting, and a second half-day regional workshop to feed back their views and findings. This equates to a maximum of four days per peer learning exchange team member between November 2012 and April 2013.

Timing

56. The focus group will be held in December 2012/January 2013. Dates will be set out in the completed schedule.
57. Observations will be held during January-March 2013. Dates will be set out in the completed schedule.
58. Peer Learning Exchange Team meetings will be held during March 2013 and return the evaluation tool by 31 March 2013.
59. Regional workshop 2 will be held during April 2013.

Actions

60. Council:

- The council's nominated lead for the study will co-ordinate the learning exchange team from their council so that they can attend and participate in the three fieldwork activities and the regional workshops at Phases 3 and 5.

61. Wales Audit Office:

- The Wales Audit Office study leads will facilitate and co-ordinate the three fieldwork sessions.
- The Wales Audit Office study leads will develop and circulate outputs and tools as required.

Phase 5: Regional workshop 2 – Peer learning exchange team feedback reflection and final self-evaluation refinement; lessons learnt

Activity

62. A second regional workshop will be held in the regions following the completion of Phase 4, to feedback findings, views, and share learning. Councils will work together to reflect on and refine their own self-evaluations to develop a final self-evaluation. It will also be an opportunity for each council to share experiences, practice, ideas and lessons learned to further improve their own scrutiny arrangements and to discuss how they might work together similarly in future. This will be facilitated by the Wales Audit Office study leads for each region.

Outputs

63. Each Peer Learning Exchange Team will **share their overall views** with the regional workshop and circulate the **completed peer learning exchange evaluation tool** to the relevant partner council.
64. After the regional workshop, the Wales Audit Office will **send the final self-evaluation tool** to each relevant council.
65. Each council will then have an opportunity to **reflect and refine their self-evaluations**, before:
- completing the final electronic self-evaluation tool by 30 April 2013;
 - receiving a final local report from the Wales Audit Office of the final self-evaluation and summary; and
 - presenting their final self-evaluations to their own councils.
66. Councils will **share experiences and ideas for improvement** and will reflect on the process of peer learning and evaluation and self-evaluation. The Wales Audit Office study leads will circulate notes from the regional workshops.

Supporting tools

67. **Tool 8:** An agenda for the workshop will be issued.
68. **Tool 9:** The Wales Audit Office will send an **electronic final self-evaluation tool** to each council's nominated lead to refine their initial self-evaluation and return to the Wales Audit Office by 30 April 2013.

Resources required

69. Council:

- Peer Learning Exchange Teams from each council will attend the workshop to present their views and take part in the discussions.
- An appropriate off-site venue with facilities for up to 50 delegates will be required for the workshop.
- The Council's nominated lead with their own Council's Learning Exchange Team will arrange the refinement and return of their final self-evaluation tool (Tool 9) to the Wales Audit Office by 30 April 2013.

70. Wales Audit Office:

- The Wales Audit Office study leads will prepare, co-ordinate, facilitate and write up the regional workshop.
- The Wales Audit Office will send the final self-evaluation tool (Tool 9) to each council.
- The Wales Audit Office will circulate final local reports and summaries to each council in April 2013.

Timing

71. The regional workshops will be held during April 2013 Councils will return their final self-evaluations to the Wales Audit Office by 30 April 2013.
72. The Wales Audit Office will circulate local reports and summaries of the final self-evaluations during April 2013.

Actions

73. Wales Audit Office:

- The Wales Audit Office will send out the final self-evaluation tool (Tool 9), to include its initial self-evaluation and Peer Learning Exchange team evaluation.
- The Wales Audit Office study leads for each region will prepare, co-ordinate, facilitate and write up the regional workshop.
- The Wales Audit Office study leads will circulate final local reports and summaries.

74. Council:

- Learning Exchange Teams will attend the regional workshop 2 and provide feedback.
- Councils will return the final self-evaluation to Wales Audit Office by 30 April 2013.

Phase 6: Reporting and ongoing dissemination

Activity

- The Wales Audit Office will prepare a national summary report.
- The Wales Audit Office will provide local feedback to individual councils and regional groups.
- The Wales Audit Office will provide Good Practice Exchange case studies.

There may also be additional activities:

- National scrutiny conference
- Regional shared learning seminars
- Presentations and conferences, seminars and meetings (inside and outside of Wales)
- Submissions of worthy elements for award and recognition schemes
- Social media knowledge sharing campaign

Outputs

75. Wales Audit Office national summary report plus any outputs related to the above additional activities.

Supporting tools

76. To be confirmed.

Resources required

77. To be confirmed in discussion with partners.

Timing

78. Wales Audit Office national summary report – June/July 2013
79. Local feedback to individual councils and regional groups – May/June 2013
80. Wales Audit Office Good Practice Exchange products – April to December 2013
81. National scrutiny conference – September/Autumn 2013

Actions

82. To be confirmed in discussion with partners.

Next steps

83. The outputs from Phases 2 to 5 above will be pulled together by the Wales Audit Office to inform a national summary report and possibly a national good practice conference by September 2013. Councils and other partners may be invited to contribute to the production and presentation.

Wales Audit Office study timings

Phase	2012												2013				
	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sep	
1																	
2																	
3																	
4							FG	FG OBS		OBS	OBS Team Meeting						
5																	
National														Publish national summary			National conference

Action

Appendix 1

Study Schedule

Good scrutiny? Good question! Schedule	Phase 2: self-evaluation		Phase 3: regional workshop 1		Phase 4: fieldwork				Phase 5: regional workshop 2		
	Council nominated lead for self-evaluation (name, position and contact details)	Council attendees/ learning exchange team (up to five in addition to council nominated lead) (names and position)	Date and time (mid-end Oct)	Venue	Scrutiny chairs focus group in each council (Nov/Dec) (date, time and venue)	Scrutiny committee observation 1 (Jan) (name of scrutiny committee, date, time and venue)	Scrutiny committee observation 2 (Jan/Feb) (name of scrutiny committee, date, time and venue)	Learning exchange team meeting (Feb) (date, time and venue)	Council attendees/ learning exchange team (names and position)	Date and time (mid-end Oct)	Venue
Gwent region			Nov	TBC						April	TBC
Torfaen											
Monmouth											
Caerphilly											
Blaenau Gwent											
Newport											
NW region			Nov	TBC						April	TBC
Anglesey											
Gwynedd											
Conwy											
Denbighshire											
Wrexham											

Good scrutiny? Good question! Schedule	Phase 2: self-evaluation			Phase 3: regional workshop 1			Phase 4: fieldwork				Phase 5: regional workshop 2		
	Council nominated lead for self-evaluation (name, position and contact details)	Council attendees/ learning exchange team (up to five in addition to council nominated lead) (names and position)	Date and time (mid-end Oct)	Venue	Scrutiny chairs focus group in each council (Nov/Dec) (date, time and venue)	Scrutiny committee observation 1 (Jan) (name of scrutiny committee, date, time and venue)	Scrutiny committee observation 2 (Jan/Feb) (name of scrutiny committee, date, time and venue)	Learning exchange team meeting (Feb) (date, time and venue)	Council attendees/ learning exchange team (names and position)	Date and time (mid-end Oct)	Venue		
Flintshire													
MWW region			Nov	TBC					April	TBC			
RCT													
Merthyr													
Powys													
Ceredigion													
Carmarthenshire													
Pembrokeshire													
SW region			Nov	TBC					April	TBC			
Vale													
Cardiff													
Bridgend													
NPT													
Swansea													

Appendix 2

Study Tools

Phase 2 tools

Tool 1: Proposed Key characteristics of effective overview and scrutiny – self-evaluation questions

Tool 2: Judgment guide

Phase 3 tools

Tool 3: Workshop 1 agenda (the Wales Audit Office central study team to follow)

Tool 4: Another council's completed initial self-evaluation report (the Wales Audit Office central study team to follow)

Phase 4 tools

Tool 5: Focus group key questions (the Wales Audit Office local study team to follow)

Tool 6: Observation aide memoire

Tool 7: Peer Learning Exchange Team evaluation tool (the Wales Audit Office central study team to follow)

Phase 5 tools

Tool 8: Workshop 2 agenda (the Wales Audit Office central study team to follow)

Tool 9: Final self-evaluation tool (the Wales Audit Office central study team to follow)

Tool 1 – Study evaluation questions based on the proposed ‘Key Characteristics of Effective Overview and Scrutiny’

The characteristics below have been developed following initial discussions at a meeting of the Wales Overview & Scrutiny Officers Network where it was felt that the possibility of developing some form of benchmark/criteria for use as part of a self-assessment/peer assessment process should be examined further.

The proposed characteristics have drawn upon a number of existing documents/references including the Centre for Public Scrutiny’s principles of effective scrutiny, the Welsh Government/Wales Audit Office’s ‘Factors of Successful Scrutiny’ and the properties of ‘Credible Scrutiny’ that were developed through the Cardiff Council-led project that examined the interface between external regulation and overview and scrutiny.

The characteristics have been further developed through discussions with officials from WLGA, Welsh Government and Wales Audit Office. It is intended that as part of this study, practitioners will help refine the proposed Key Characteristics for Effective Overview and Scrutiny so that by April 2013, Wales will have an agreed set of key characteristics of effective overview and scrutiny that can be consistently used by all practitioners, stakeholders, regulators and inspectorates.

Does the environment that Overview and Scrutiny operate in support improvement?

1. Is there a clear and shared understanding and application of the role and purpose of Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) amongst executive and non-executive members, senior officers, scrutiny officers and key local partners?
2. Does O&S enjoy a high status and is it held in high esteem, trusted and respected both within and outside the Authority?
3. Is there a well-defined and constructive relationship between O&S, the executive and senior officers?
4. Does O&S have a clearly defined and valued role in the council’s self-evaluation, performance management and improvement arrangements?
5. Is there regular and effective two-way communication between O&S and external/internal auditors, regulators and inspectors?
6. Does O&S have clear governance arrangements that are understood and applied effectively?
7. Are O&S chairs and executive members actively promoting the role and value of the scrutiny function to a variety of internal and external stakeholders?
8. Do O&S members have access to development and training opportunities focused on need, as part of the council’s wider commitment to member support and development?

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9. Does O&S have a sufficient level of dedicated support from officers who are able to research independently and are able to provide O&S members with high-quality, objective analysis and support?
 10. Is the role of officers directly supporting scrutiny activity well-understood and valued within the organisation?
 11. Does the O&S process receive effective support from the council's wider officer corps and when required?
 12. Is information provided to O&S relevant, robust, balanced, meaningful, responsive to requests, of high quality and provided in a timely and consistent manner?

Is Overview and Scrutiny practice effective?

13. Does O&S provide evidence-based, constructive challenge; operate objectively, apolitically and with independence from executive decision-makers?
14. Do O&S members identify appropriate topics for challenge or policy review/development and develop outcome-focused forward work programmes?
15. Do O&S members constructively yet robustly challenge policy and decision-makers and implementers (including partners etc) through effective questioning, listening and analysis, and develop a good understanding and knowledge of the subject under scrutiny?
16. Are O&S inquiries/reviews in-depth, rigorous and draw upon independent and objective perspectives from a wide range of sources (including making use of benchmarking information) within and outside the council?
17. Does O&S regularly engage with members, officers, the public and other external stakeholders in planning and conducting its work?
18. Does O&S have a balanced and focused work programme that is developed by O&S members, following consultation with the public and partners and discussions with executive members and senior officers?
19. Do O&S members plan their work considering the appropriateness of a range of scrutiny methods/methodologies, use of clear terms of reference and realistic project plans?
20. Are scrutiny forward work programmes routinely shared with auditors, inspectors and regulators to influence planning of improvement activity?
21. Does O&S play a key role in the council's self-evaluation and assessment arrangements and regularly evaluate itself to ensure that it continues to learn and improve how it adds value and impact?

Does Overview and Scrutiny activity have impact?

22. Does O&S regularly contribute to the improvement of proposed/existing policies for the benefit of the area and its local communities?
23. Does O&S identify instances where agreed policies are not being implemented effectively and recommend appropriate remedial action to whomever is responsible within or outside the council?

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24. Does O&S challenge poor performance and its causes and alert senior officers, the executive, full council or partners to instigate remedial action as appropriate whilst continuing to monitor progress to remedy this?
 25. When conducting in-depth inquiries/reviews into areas of poor performance, does O&S help shape responses to improve performance and the performance of other public sector providers?
 26. Does O&S ensure that the 'voice' of local people and communities across the area is heard as part of local decision and policy-making processes?
 27. Does O&S enhance democratic accountability through regular, robust, constructive and public challenge of local decision-makers/deliverers of services in the local area (including other public service providers/providers of 'shared services')?

Tool 2 – Study judgment guide

This judgement guide is based on each of the proposed key characteristics of effective overview and scrutiny as set out in Tool 1. It is intended that, as part of the study, practitioners will help refine this judgement guide for each of the proposed key characteristics so that by April 2013, Wales will have an agreed set of judgements for all the key characteristics which can be consistently used by all practitioners, stakeholders, regulators and inspectorates.

	Arrangements are hindering improvement	Arrangements are partly supporting improvement	Arrangements are positively supporting improvement	Arrangements are playing a significant role in supporting improvement
Scrutiny environment				
1	Understanding and application of the role and purpose of O&S is poor and inconsistent amongst executive and non-executive members, senior officers, scrutiny officers and key local partners.	Understanding and application of the role and purpose of O&S is variable within the council. O&S tends to be more inward looking although there may be some examples of effective engagement but overall engagement with others external to the council is low level.	O&S is valued by the executive which recognises the added value scrutiny can bring to decision making. Key local partners are willing to engage in the scrutiny process.	There is a clear and shared understanding and application of the role and purpose of O&S amongst executive and non-executive members, senior officers, scrutiny officers and key local partners.
2	O&S has low status and is not trusted or respected within or outside the Authority.			O&S is held in high esteem, enjoys a high status and is trusted and respected both within and outside the Authority.
3	There is little or no relationship between O&S, the executive and senior officers.	Relationships are developing in the right direction, but some changes in behaviour and attitude may be necessary to remove misconceptions about the value of purpose of scrutiny.	Relationships are maturing and key actors are contributing well to ensure relationships are constructive.	There is a well-defined and constructive relationship between O&S, the executive and senior officers.
4	O&S is not defined or valued in the council's self-evaluation, performance management and improvement arrangements.	O&S receives performance information but understanding of the issues lacks depth overall. Its role in self-evaluation is relatively superficial.	The council is taking appropriate action to ensure O&S can participate effectively in self-evaluation, performance management and improvement arrangements.	O&S has a clearly defined and valued role in the council's self-evaluation, performance management and improvement arrangements.

Arrangements are hindering improvement	Arrangements are partly supporting improvement	Arrangements are positively supporting improvement	Arrangements are playing a significant role in supporting improvement
5 Communication between O&S and external/internal auditors, regulators and inspectors is irregular and ineffective.	The level of engagement between regulators and O&S is variable. Regulators would welcome more opportunities to engage with O&S.	O&S becomes more outward focused inviting regulators to attend O&S for specific issues.	There is regular and effective two-way communication between O&S and external/internal auditors, regulators and inspectors.
6 O&S has weak governance arrangements which are not applied effectively.	Governance arrangements are in place O&S is not yet mature enough to use the arrangements effectively.	The governance framework supports scrutiny. Scrutiny operates effectively due to a range of contributing factors and is supported and encouraged by the governance arrangements and not constrained by them.	O&S has clear governance arrangements that are understood and applied effectively.
7 O&S chairs fail to promote the role and value of the scrutiny function to internal and external stakeholders.	Chairs and vice chairs of O&S are beginning to demonstrate leadership and are playing an active and proactive role in promoting the scrutiny function.	O&S chairs and vice chairs are pivotal and influential in driving up scrutiny standards and developing effective working relationships with others.	O&S chairs and executive members actively promote the role and value of the scrutiny function to a variety of internal and external stakeholders.
8 The council does not provide O&S members with development and training opportunities focused on need.	Training and development is in place but focus and structure could be improved.	The council's approach to needs-based training is maturing and may include a focus on competencies and role-specific training. Members are proactive in identifying their own training needs.	O&S members have access to development and training opportunities focused on need, as part of the council's wider commitment to member support and development.
9 O&S has little or no dedicated support from officers who can research independently and so analysis and support provided is biased and poor quality.	Some support is provided, but the level limits the depth and range of work that scrutiny can cover.	Support is helping to develop members' proficiency in scrutiny techniques and knowledge of service areas.	O&S has a sufficient level of dedicated support from officers who are able to research independently, and are able to provide O&S members with high-quality, objective analysis and support.
10 The role of officers directly supporting scrutiny activity is poorly understood and not valued within the organisation.	The level of officers' understanding varies across services producing an imbalance in the effectiveness of scrutiny.	Officers supporting scrutiny work constructively with members to improve the scrutiny function.	The role of officers directly supporting scrutiny activity is well-understood and valued within the organisation.

Arrangements are hindering improvement	Arrangements are partly supporting improvement	Arrangements are positively supporting improvement	Arrangements are playing a significant role in supporting improvement
<p>11 The O&S process is not supported by the wider officer corps.</p>	<p>Support from the wider officer corps is variable.</p>	<p>Support from the wider officer corps is consistent across services. Officers respond fairly promptly and appropriately to members' requests.</p>	<p>The O&S process receives effective support from the council's wider officer corps as and when required.</p>
<p>12 Information provided to O&S is weak, slow, inconsistent and of poor quality.</p>	<p>Generally information meets members' requirements; it may not meet members' needs entirely. Officers may not be proactive in seeking what improvements could be made to increase its effectiveness.</p>	<p>Information allows members to engage in constructive debate about performance issues, to elicit the right level of information from officers and aids their understanding of corporate and service issues.</p>	<p>Information provided to O&S is relevant, robust, balanced, meaningful, responsive to requests, is of high quality, and is provided in a timely and consistent manner.</p>
<p>Scrutiny practice</p>			
<p>13 O&S is passive, acts on minimal evidence or is influenced by politics and executive decision-makers.</p>	<p>Better use is being made of appropriate evidence. Most members work consensually and the influence of party politics is waning. Some influence from executive members remains.</p>	<p>Good use is being made of evidence from a wide range of sources. O&S is more assertive, establishing its independence more clearly.</p>	<p>O&S provides evidence-based, constructive challenge, operating objectively, apolitically and with independence from executive decision-makers.</p>
<p>14 O&S members fail to identify appropriate topics for challenge or policy review/ development and have difficulty developing outcome-focused forward work programmes.</p>	<p>Work programming is becoming more balanced, reflecting the range of scrutiny functions, but a better focus on priorities would help to improve impact. Members are becoming more proactive and involved in planning the work programme.</p>	<p>The work programme is selective and informed by a number of sources. Impact from the work is increasing and there is clearly added value as a result. Members have complete ownership of the work programme to advise and guidance.</p>	<p>O&S members identify appropriate topics for challenge or policy review/development and develop outcome-focused forward work programmes.</p>
<p>15 O&S members are ineffective at challenging decision-makers and implementers (including partners etc). and lack understanding and knowledge of the subject under scrutiny.</p>	<p>O&S members, through training and experience, are gaining confidence. The level of challenge is improving. Members are beginning to acquire knowledge and understanding and are proactive in this.</p>	<p>O&S members' skills and knowledge are increasing and are being used to good effect, together with maturing questioning and listening skills. The influence of O&S on decision making is becoming more apparent.</p>	<p>O&S members constructively yet robustly challenge policy and decision-makers and implementers (including partners etc) through effective questioning, listening and analysis, and have developed a good understanding and knowledge of the subject under scrutiny.</p>

Arrangements are hindering improvement	Arrangements are partly supporting improvement	Arrangements are positively supporting improvement	Arrangements are playing a significant role in supporting improvement
<p>16 O&S inquiries are superficial, vague and heavily influenced by internal or biased perspectives from a limited range of sources.</p>	<p>Scoping and planning of inquiries is improving with outcomes more clearly identified. O&S is beginning to broaden its source of information.</p>	<p>O&S is focusing on doing a few things very well, improving the impact and value of its work.</p>	<p>O&S inquiries/reviews are in-depth, rigorous and draw upon independent and objective perspectives from a wide range of sources (including making use of benchmarking information) within and outside the council.</p>
<p>17 O&S operates in isolation to members, officers, the public and other external stakeholders in planning and conducting its work. It fails to reflect the views, needs and aspirations of the county and its people and community. Forward work programmes are not accessible or are made available to a restricted group of stakeholders.</p>	<p>A published guide or protocol that describes how stakeholders can engage with O&S is available. O&S is making some attempt to seek the views of others. A forward work programme is available but scope remains to share it more widely and to get input into its content.</p>	<p>O&S is demonstrating a more 'citizen-centred approach' to its work with engagement/ participation factored into the planning and scoping of its work. O&S is beginning to use imaginative or innovative ways to engage with others. Good use is being made of co-optees for specific reviews.</p>	<p>O&S regularly engages with members, officers, the public and other external stakeholders in planning and conducting its work. It seeks to reflect the views, needs and aspirations of the county and its people and community in helping to improve the priorities of the council. Forward work programmes are available and accessible to stakeholders and are used to manage the work of scrutiny committees.</p>
<p>18 O&S has an unbalanced and overambitious work programme that has been created with little or no consultation from the public and partners, executive members and senior officers. Work programmes fail to take into account local priorities, improvement objectives and key risks and make poor use of the resources available to it.</p>	<p>O&S work programming is becoming more realistic. Recognition of the importance of aligning work to key priorities of the council and the community is increasing.</p>	<p>O&S has strong ownership of its programme whilst being receptive to suggestions from others. It is becoming more discerning in selecting areas that will make a difference.</p>	<p>O&S has a balanced and focused work programme that is developed by O&S members, following consultation with the public and partners and discussions with executive members and senior officers. Work programmes take into account local priorities, improvement objectives and key risks and make best use of the resources available to it.</p>

Arrangements are hindering improvement	Arrangements are partly supporting improvement	Arrangements are positively supporting improvement	Arrangements are playing a significant role in supporting improvement
<p>19 O&S members fail to plan work considering the appropriateness of a range of scrutiny methods/methodologies. Terms of reference are vague and project plans are unrealistic. Work programmes are rigid and incapable of responding to changing priorities. Where aspirations exist, they are not proportionate to resource available.</p>	<p>Members realise that poor project planning and unclear terms of reference are reducing the impact of their work and recognise the need for change.</p>	<p>O&S learns from previous work and continues to refine its project planning. Increased knowledge, understanding and skills level is enabling members to respond more flexibly to changing priorities.</p>	<p>O&S members plan their work considering the appropriateness of a range of scrutiny methods/methodologies, use of clear terms of reference and realistic project plans. Work programmes are flexible enough to respond to changing priorities whilst ensuring that aspirations are proportionate to the resource available to it.</p>
<p>20 Scrutiny forward work programmes are not shared with auditors, inspectors and regulators.</p>	<p>O&S begins to share its work programmes.</p>	<p>O&S proactively seeks the views of regulators on its work programme as part of its consultation arrangements.</p>	<p>Scrutiny forward work programmes are routinely shared with auditors, inspectors and regulators to influence the planning of improvement activity.</p>
<p>21 O&S has little or no role in the council's self-evaluation and assessment arrangements. O&S does not evaluate itself to identify how it can improve.</p>	<p>O&S receives self-evaluation reports, but its knowledge and understanding is not yet sufficient to provide rigorous and effective challenge. The review of its own work is not yet fully comprehensive.</p>	<p>The knowledge, understanding and skills of O&S has matured well and this enables it to play a more active role in the self-evaluation process. O&S is seen as an important part of the process. O&S has gained sufficient confidence to undertake a more rigorous self-evaluation of its work and seeks the views of other stakeholders as part of the process.</p>	<p>O&S plays a key role in the council's self-evaluation and assessment arrangements and regularly evaluates itself to ensure that it continues to learn and improve how it adds value and impact.</p>

Arrangements are hindering improvement	Arrangements are partly supporting improvement	Arrangements are positively supporting improvement	Arrangements are playing a significant role in supporting improvement
<p>Impact of scrutiny</p> <p>22 O&S rarely contributes to the improvement of proposed/existing policies for the benefit of the area and its local communities.</p> <p>23 O&S is unaware of instances where agreed policies are not being implemented effectively, or is unable to recommend appropriate remedial action.</p>	<p>O&S is beginning to make good use of its community knowledge to identify areas for improvement to new or existing policies.</p> <p>O&S is beginning to better understand the impact of policies and is identifying opportunities to undertake policy reviews.</p>	<p>O&S is becoming more adept at focusing on the policy areas to review that will have maximum benefit to the community.</p> <p>Because of raised knowledge and awareness O&S has a better understanding of poor or ineffective policy implementation and as a consequence its work has become more sharply focused with clear recommendations for improvement.</p>	<p>O&S regularly contributes to the improvement of proposed/existing policies for the benefit of the area and its local communities.</p> <p>O&S identifies instances where agreed policies are not being implemented effectively and recommends appropriate remedial action to whomever is responsible within or outside the council.</p>
<p>24 O&S is unreactive towards poor performance and its causes, and neglects to alert senior officers, the executive, full council or partners as appropriate.</p>	<p>O&S is starting to drill down on issues and members are beginning to identify issues and trends.</p>	<p>O&S is engaging in constructive debate about performance issues, is identifying the right level of information it needs and is becoming increasingly able to interpret data and information.</p>	<p>O&S challenges poor performance and its causes and alerts senior officers, the executive, full council or partners to instigate remedial action as appropriate whilst continuing to monitor progress to remedy this.</p>
<p>25 When O&S conducts in-depth inquiries into areas of poor performance it is unable to help shape responses and so fails to improve performance or the performance of other public sector providers.</p>	<p>O&S is willing to address poor performance but may be hindered by too much or irrelevant information. However, it is making steady progress and is beginning to recognise performance-related issues and the need for remedial action.</p>	<p>Members' ability to effectively link performance information to priorities, improvement objectives, and the priorities of other public sector providers is developing well, and can point to tangible improvements in performance.</p>	<p>When O&S conducts in-depth inquiries/reviews into areas of poor performance it helps shape responses to improve performance and the performance of other public sector providers.</p>

Arrangements are hindering improvement	Arrangements are partly supporting improvement	Arrangements are positively supporting improvement	Arrangements are playing a significant role in supporting improvement
<p>26 O&S does not ensure that the 'voice' of local people and communities is heard as part of local decision-making processes.</p> <p>O&S weakens democratic accountability through its inactivity and inconsistency, failing to challenge local decision-makers/deliverers of services in the local area (including other public service providers/providers of 'shared services').</p>	<p>As part of its reviews, O&S is making some attempt to seek the views of others. Some use is made of ensuring that views of the public and stakeholders are obtained during its reviews.</p> <p>O&S is becoming more challenging and is beginning to hold others to account, although this may be more apparent within the council than with other external providers.</p>	<p>O&S has arrangements in place to ensure that the views of local people are gathered routinely during the course of its work.</p> <p>O&S is developing a professional, respectful, open and non-confrontational relationship with others and is promoting a strong culture of accountability.</p>	<p>O&S ensures that the 'voice' of local people and communities across the area is heard as part of local decision and policy-making processes.</p> <p>O&S enhances democratic accountability through regular, robust, constructive and public challenge of local decision-makers/deliverers of services in the local area (including other public service providers/providers of 'shared services').</p>

Tool 6 – Scrutiny Committee Observation Aide Memoire

Organisation and environment of the meeting

Areas to observe	Your comments
<p>Agendas</p> <p>What do you think of the agenda? Is there too much/not enough/just enough business? Are the agenda items approached in the best way to get the best information out of it eg, brainstorm sessions, presentations, different venues, site visits, etc?</p>	
<p>Information provided</p> <p>Are report formats suitable? Within 30 seconds of reading the report can you understand why the report has been prepared for Scrutiny, what the report is about, what the key issues are, what the next steps should be? Do the reports help or hinder the committee's work? Why? What is the range of items considered eg, performance monitoring, task group reviews, work programming, call-in, wider scrutiny including scrutiny of partnerships etc? Is the balance right?</p>	
<p>Public and witness participation</p> <p>Does the Committee make any members the public present feel welcome? Are they given appropriate information and guidance? Are any other external witnesses present eg, voluntary groups, tenant groups, police, partners, etc? Are they made to feel welcome and at ease? Are there appropriate approaches being taken to engage external witnesses eg, themed debates, presentations by partners, evidence from partners, scrutiny of partnerships and collaboration etc? Does there appear to be a genuine effort being made to engage external witnesses?</p>	
<p>Officer support</p> <p>How effectively is the committee being supported by officers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Departmental officers? - Scrutiny/committee officers? 	
<p>Other observations</p>	

Practice and conduct of the meeting

Areas to observe	Your comments
<p>Operation</p> <p>Do members appear to have read/understood the papers and prepared for the meeting?</p> <p>How well are committee members engaged in discussion and debate?</p> <p>Is their involvement balanced or dominated by a few people?</p> <p>How effectively is the meeting chaired eg:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traditional or facilitative/team building? - Ensuring all voices are heard? - Bringing debates together and formulating actions/recommendations? - Focusing and leading the committee? - Is the committee operating in a constructive non-party political way? Any evidence of party 'lines' dominating? 	
<p>Involving the people who attend</p> <p>Do scrutiny members stay for the whole meeting?</p> <p>Do departmental officers stay for the whole meeting?</p> <p>Do executive members stay for the whole meeting?</p> <p>Does the committee give feedback to attendees? Eg officers, executive members and witnesses that have participated in the meeting.</p> <p>Do those attending appear threatened or worried by appearing? Alternatively, is it a 'soft touch'? Are they hitting the right balance?</p>	
<p>Public and witness participation</p> <p>Does the committee make any members of the public present feel welcome? Are they given appropriate information and guidance?</p> <p>Are there appropriate approaches being taken to engage external witness eg, themed debates involving external stakeholders, targets to hit for the number of members of the public who attend the meetings?</p> <p>Does there appear to be a genuine effort being made to engage external witnesses?</p>	

Areas to observe

Your comments

Questioning

How many people get involved in asking questions? All, most, some, none?
 Who normally asks the questions? Chair? Scrutiny members – all or some? Others?
 Are the questions being directed at the right person/people? Are the right people being held to account?
 Does the appropriate person answer? Does anyone answer? If so, who answers – is it the executive member, appropriate officer or a more senior officer, or a member of the committee?
 Are the questions relevant and meaningful? Are people actively listening? Are questions built on previous questions and answers or are they asked ad hoc? Do the questions demonstrate appropriate knowledge? Do they get to the bottom of things?
 Is the manner of questioning appropriate? Is it constructive or destructive challenge? Is it about scoring points or about getting to the right point?
 Is the questioning co-ordinated and managed well, or ad hoc? Has the committee agreed which key questions they need to ask and to whom, before the officers/witnesses appear? Or is it a free for all?
 Is an appropriate balance being struck between challenge and consensus?

Presentations

Are presentations presented by the appropriate member/officer/external witness?
 Are they always clearly understandable and readable?
 Do the presentations summarise the key issues clearly and concisely?
 Do the presentations take up too much time/not enough time/just the right amount of time?

Officer support (consider both scrutiny support officers and department staff)

Do officers and members work well together?
 How appropriate is the balance of officers' contribution to committee meetings?
 Should officers contribute to debates more or less?
 Should officers be making more or fewer presentations?

Other observations

Outcomes and Impact of the meeting

Areas to observe	Your comments
<p>Following up outcomes and recommendations How does the committee make sure that it follows up on the comments and recommendations they make? How does the committee make sure things happen as a result of their discussion today?</p>	
<p>Examples of things working Are there any examples today of where the committee has worked well in dealing with an agenda item? What worked well, and how do they ensure they do similar work in the future?</p>	
<p>Planning for future success Does the committee discuss its work plan and future agenda items effectively? Are all committee members engaged in the agenda setting process?</p>	
<p>Keeping focused on outcomes How well did the committee make sure that it kept its focus on helping improve the council/service? Did it get the right things out of the meeting? Did it get as much as it should have out of the meeting? What would assist them in doing this?</p>	
<p>Policy development Is the committee helping to influence policy development effectively? How are officers, other members and stakeholders being engaged by the committee in developing policy?</p>	
<p>Other observations</p>	

Opportunities for learning, development and working together

Skills to observe	Your comments	How would you rate the overall skills of this committee?
<p>Effective questioning, listening and responding skills</p> <p>Are all the right questions being asked by all committee members?</p> <p>Do the committee members listen to each other and to the responses they are given, or do they do their own thing?</p> <p>Are the questions being directed at the right people?</p> <p>Are the responses meaningful?</p>		<p>5= excellent 4= good 3= adequate 2 = ineffective 1 = poor/non-existent</p>
<p>Effective project and work programme management skills</p> <p>Is the scrutiny agenda and work programme concentrating on issues which are of highest priority, risk, and impact on the council?</p> <p>Is the agenda focused mostly on council services (inwardly focused) or on wider scrutiny issues affecting the area (outward and outcome focused)? Is the balance right?</p> <p>Are agenda items given the right amount of discussion time?</p> <p>Does the committee set out detailed timeframes by when it wants things completed, reported and brought back for monitoring? Does it stick to these?</p>		
<p>Effective performance management and monitoring scrutiny skills</p> <p>Does the scrutiny committee monitor the performance, improvement, progress, budget, and efficiency of the council effectively?</p> <p>Does the committee tackle underperformance appropriately?</p> <p>Does the committee compare the council's performance/services against others in Wales and England?</p> <p>Does it seek to learn from others?</p>		
<p>Effective facilitation skills: getting the best out of everybody and every meeting</p> <p>Are people allowed to express differing views?</p> <p>Does the committee environment help all members and officers feel confident in sharing and expressing different views?</p> <p>Do all people appear to be engaged and involved equally?</p>		

Skills to observe	Your comments	How would you rate the overall skills of this committee?
<p>Are all people encouraged to become engaged and involved?</p> <p>Effective negotiation skills Does the committee deal with differing views effectively and constructively? Does it achieve an agreed way forward that everybody is happy with? Does it feel like a win-win situation? Is conflict managed effectively and fairly?</p>		
<p>Effective presentation skills Does the presentation help getting the important messages across quickly? Was it clear and concise and easily understandable? Was it delivered by the appropriate member/officer at the right level? Could you summarise the main points from the presentation?</p>		
<p>Effective report reading and writing skills Are report formats suitable? Within 30 seconds of reading the report can you understand it? Do the reports help or hinder the committee's work? Why? Do members appear to have read/understood the papers and prepared for the meeting?</p>		
<p>Opportunities for in-depth scrutiny reviews Were there opportunities during the meeting that presented themselves to further in-depth scrutiny reviews that would be useful for the council to undertake?</p>		
<p>Opportunities for working with other councils and for joint scrutiny Were/are there opportunities where the council could work with other councils to undertake scrutiny jointly such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint scrutiny support or research? - Joint scrutiny review/task and finish? - Joint scrutiny standing committee? <p>Other learning, development, and joint working opportunities</p>		



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