

## Scrutiny Research

The Scrutiny Team has dedicated research capacity to support Cardiff Council's Scrutiny function. The Scrutiny researcher takes responsibility for systematically collecting and analysing independent information by using various qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The research collated, then forms part of the evidence considered by Scrutiny Committees and helps inform their recommendations.

This research adds significant value to Scrutiny activity by:

- Providing Scrutiny Committees with **access to independent research and information resources** to triangulate, validate and compare with other evidence submitted to the committees.
- **Bringing in a range of citizens' and service users' views and perspectives** to be considered as part of scrutiny inquiries and reviews.
- **Engaging with systematically selected groups** to ensure their independent views contribute to scrutiny challenge.
- Providing **access to and analysis of views and perspectives of those groups often described as "hard to reach"**, who may find the idea of attending a formal scrutiny meeting intimidating.
- "Helping to **avoid what could be resource intensive or repetitive oral evidence collection activities**".
- "Enabling scrutiny **to enhance its lines of inquiry** and focus on exploring in-depth specific issues".
- Further **supporting the development of the Council's relationship and engagement with stakeholders** in its challenge and review of policies and decisions.

The following are examples of the types of research that can be undertaken for Scrutiny Committees:

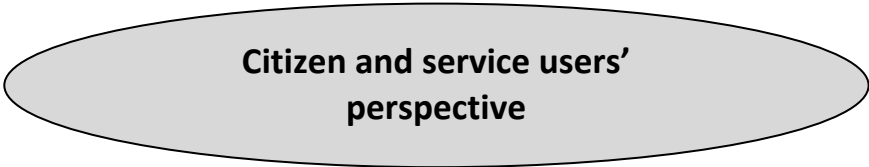


*Document or literature reviews*

*Primary research (stakeholders)*

Previous work examples:

- Review of other **Local Authorities' Alternative Delivery Models (ADM)** implemented on Environmental Services.
- Good practice in dealing with **sickness absence** – selection of public and private sector
- **Feasibility of benchmarking**– literature review on conduct of benchmarking



Engaging with and involving citizens and service users to independently establish their priorities or views and perspectives.

Previous work examples:

- Research into **Access to Information and Advice for Mental Health Service Users**.
- A survey (2300+) of **residents' and visitors' perceptions of nuisance litter in Cardiff**.



Critical review and analysis of selected documents and reports submitted to Committee in line with statutory scrutiny of the PSB responsibilities.

Previous work examples:

- **Critical review** of the **Cardiff's What Matters** refresh document
- **Critical review of Cardiff's Liveable City Report** and formulation of briefings.

## Evaluations of Projects, Policy or Strategies

Involves the assessment of a project / policy / strategy against its goals, objectives or its intended outputs and outcomes.

Previous work examples:

- SDF (Scrutiny Development Fund) **Scrutiny Officers Development Project's Training Needs Assessment and Project Evaluation**

- Impact, benefits and outcomes of the **Integrating Health and Social Care (IHCS) Programme** from service users' perspectives

Scrutiny Researchers can undertake the following types of research to support the work of Scrutiny Committees:

**'Current Practice' and 'Good Practice'** – looking into the interventions and policies that have been adopted by other organisations, and evaluating the solutions or practices that have been implemented. 'Current Practice' research specifically identifies “what works” and “what doesn't work” and may identify expertise in a particular area or field. 'Good Practice' research draws attention to 'what works' as well as highlighting those interventions that can be replicated locally. They are useful in identifying and gaining an understanding of the different variables that affect the success of a particular intervention or change. They also provide useful insight into the different causes and strategies for change as well as problems encountered. Data can come from both primary and secondary sources, with the findings presented in a briefing paper.

**Benchmarking** – comparing a set of performance management indicators with similar data sets from other Local Authorities and organizations. This involves comparing the outputs, results and/or processes. This research provides an insight into how well the Local Authority is performing against targets that are set compared to comparable Authorities or organizations. It also helps in identifying processes that achieve the 'highest or best' level of performance. Information collected over time will also be useful in monitoring the impact of process changes.

**Citizen or service user perspectives** – This research can be undertaken to identify or establish citizen priorities in a particular area, or as part of an assessment of the impact of an intervention on service users. This research may involve the use of quantitative methodologies such as a survey or qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews or focus groups.

**Feasibility study** –A feasibility study looks into the viability of a proposal, intervention or changes that could be implemented. In most cases, this type of research will look into the financial viability of a proposal, its estimated costs, its profitability or value for money. This research is not limited to financial aspects but can also focus on the resource as well as the social or cultural feasibility of a proposal or project. For example, cultural feasibility would look into the impact of the different elements of the project on the local or general culture and how this can affect the success of the project or intervention. Resources feasibility would look at or evaluate the different resources e.g. time and other elements that will have an impact or implication to the success of the project/intervention.

**Impact assessment** – This involves research to understand the consequences or impact of a particular policy or intervention on an affected population. The research specifically identifies both the positive and negative impacts of a proposed intervention or policy. This type of research can also be undertaken 'after' implementation of a project in order to assess its impacts. The impact assessment can look at environmental, economic or social impacts or a combination of all three.

**Case studies** –an in-depth study of a particular individual, a group, a setting, an organisation or events. The research may involve the use of multiple, complementary methodologies such as observation, interviews, reviews of written or published information and data. The findings of this type of research are specific to the context or

setting of the study. It is a narrow method of reporting on a topic or situation and could inform other research on similar topics.

**Evaluation of projects and of policies or strategies** –assessment of a project / policy / strategy or project against its goals, objectives or its intended outputs and outcomes. This type of research could look into how the programme could be improved, whether the programme is worthwhile, whether there are better alternatives, if there are *unintended* outcomes, and whether the programme goals are appropriate and useful. The evaluation can be conducted at different points in the policy or project lifespan.

### **Commissioning Research**

All the Scrutiny Committees can commission research to inform their committee work. Each scrutiny committee will receive an allocation of research time; if one committee does not fully utilise their allocation, the Scrutiny Chairs decide how the available resource is used. Research requests are usually identified as part of the work programming process; however, sometimes the need for research can arise during the municipal year. The Principal Scrutiny Officer (PSO) and Principal Research Officer (PRO) work with Members to scope the research topic. The process for commissioning research is shown in the diagramme over page.

A key stage is to define the “Research Problem”; this helps in scoping and defining the limitations of the research to be undertaken. It is also useful in determining the appropriate methodology to deliver the research outputs within the timescales required by the Scrutiny Committee. The research commissioning process helps with this process, via a scoping document that guides Members through each stage. The following tips can help to determine the “research problem” and focus the research topic:

- Agree a clear stand-alone statement that makes explicit what you are aiming to discover, establish or investigate.
- Identify what should be studied.
- Describe the issue that needs to be addressed.

- Identify overarching questions, key factors, variables and issues.
- Identify key concepts and terms to be looked at in the study.
- Address the “so what” question to convey the benefits of research.