



**AGENDA ITEM 10**

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD**

**3<sup>RD</sup> APRIL 2007**

**CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY – SELF  
EVALUATION EXERCISE**

**PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. To inform Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board of an exercise which has been undertaken to examine and evaluate the operation of Middlesbrough’s overview and scrutiny processes using the Centre for Public Scrutiny’s Self Evaluation Framework.

**BACKGROUND**

2. The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CFPS) is a national organisation which was established to promote the value of scrutiny in modern and effective government. The centre aims to do this through a number of measures, including the production of guidance, advice on best practice and promoting information sharing.
3. CFPS has devised a “self-evaluation framework”, which is a mechanism for all local authorities to examine the effectiveness of their overview and scrutiny arrangements and to identify areas for improvement. The framework is based on the CFPS four principles of good scrutiny, which are as follows:
  - Providing critical friend challenge
  - Reflecting the public voice
  - Leading and owning the process
  - Making an impact
4. The framework is a series of questions, based on the above principles, which requires the evaluator to demonstrate evidence of achievement, identify areas for improvement and also highlight potential barriers to improvement. Once completed, the framework can provide a clear picture of how overview and scrutiny operates in an authority and can then be used to identify priorities for improvement planning.

5. A questionnaire based on the framework was sent to all Members of the Council. **Appendix 1** attached summarise the results of the questionnaire, which have been fed into the process and have been used in completing the self evaluation exercise.
6. Following the self evaluation, an action plan has been produced which identifies areas where changed or revised processes are proposed. These areas have been categorised as strengthening and improving systems and improving awareness. The action plan is attached at **Appendix 2**.
7. The findings of this exercise will also be used to inform elements of the Scrutiny Team's Service Plan for 2007/08.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

8. It is recommended as follows:
  - a) That the Overview and Scrutiny Board notes the results of the member questionnaire and self evaluation exercise and comments on the findings, as appropriate.
  - b) That, subject to any comments made at the meeting, the action plan at Appendix 3 of the submitted report is approved.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

9. The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:  
  
Completed CFPS self evaluation framework document.  
Completed member questionnaires.

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**CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY**

**SELF EVALUATION FRAMEWORK**

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF MEMBER QUESTIONNAIRE**

**18/49 returned (37%)**

**9 from scrutiny members  
5 from Executive members  
4 from neither or failed to say**

	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
<b>Providing an effective challenge to the Executive:</b> 1. Scrutiny provides an effective mechanism for the Executive to demonstrate public accountability.	7	9	2
<u>Comments:</u> (i) As call in meetings are in public, some decisions are open to public view and challenge. (ii) The Executive considers whether it will or will not accept panel views - that is not effective challenge. (iii) Scrutiny seems to be effective in influencing policy but may lack teeth in effectively challenging the system.			
2. Challenge is constructive, robust and purposeful.	13	4	1
<u>Comments:</u> (i) This is very rare in Middlesbrough. (ii) Scrutiny has no teeth since it can be overridden and totally disregarded by the system.			
3. Scrutiny operates independently of the Executive.	13	5	0
<u>Comments:</u> (i) Concern when Executive members express opinions that are more than providing information.			

	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
<p><b>Challenging the authority's corporate strategy and budget:</b></p> <p>4. Monitoring and questioning performance has provided effective challenge.</p>	3	8	5
<u>Comments:</u> None			
5. Financial priorities have been questioned as well as how these meet corporate objectives.	6	7	4
<u>Comments:</u> (i) Not enough.			
<p><b>Reflecting the voice and concerns of the public and its communities:</b></p> <p>6. There is dialogue with all sections of the public about scrutiny topics.</p>	5	8	5
<u>Comments:</u> (i) Not sure that public understand call in on specific subjects.			
7. The scrutiny programme has been influenced by both the public and partner/external organisations.	8	6	4
<u>Comments:</u> (i) Yes, sometimes topics are chosen following public interest/external organisations' concerns.			
<p><b>Taking the lead and owning the scrutiny process:</b></p> <p>8. Members have an opportunity to communicate their views on the development and operation of the scrutiny process.</p>	13	4	1
<u>Comments:</u> (i) By the officers yes, by the Executive no.			

	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
9. Members' views are canvassed/collected and evaluated.	8	4	3
<u>Comments:</u> (i) This survey is one of the few examples I've experienced.			
10. Scrutiny is seen as an attractive political career.	2	6	7
<u>Comments:</u> (i) It provides an opportunity to influence policy decisions. (ii) A strange question that is difficult if not impossible to answer.			
11. The scrutiny role is seen as making an important contribution to the good management of the authority.	9	5	1
<u>Comments:</u> (i) I wish it did - politics gets in the way. (ii) Recommendations are usually supported by CMT/Executive.			
12. The scrutiny role is seen as making an important contribution to the quality of life in the community.	4	6	3
<u>Comments:</u> None			
<b>Working arrangements with officers:</b> 13. Officer evidence/submissions is clear and comprehensive.	16	2	0
<u>Comments:</u> (i) Scrutiny officers work hard to make the process open and accessible. Some other officers hedge the issues and clearly resent being cross examined.			

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
15. Officers have been involved in championing the value and potential of scrutiny.	9	4	5
<u>Comments:</u> None			
16. Training and development has been provided with a view to improving scrutiny.	11	3	3
<u>Comments:</u> None			
17. Scrutiny support is effective and appropriate.	14	2	2
<u>Comments:</u> Most of the scrutiny reports rely heavily on the effective authorship of the scrutiny officers.			

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SELF EVALUATION EXERCISE - ACTION PLAN

<b><u>STRENGTHENING AND IMPROVING SYSTEMS</u></b>	
<b>ACTION</b>	<b>HOW THIS WILL BE ACHIEVED</b>
1. Revise call in system to require reasons for call in.	1. Amended call in form - via discussions with Head of Legal Services and Members Office Manager.
2. Improve liaison between scrutiny panels and Executive.	2. (a) Schedule attendance of Mayor/Deputy Mayor/Executive members at panel meetings for progress reports and/or question and answer sessions. (b) Arrange scheduled meetings between Executive Members and panel chairs – to include items raised by both scrutiny and Executive members.
3. Ensure that non-policy framework documents or non-key decisions are submitted to scrutiny where these impact on communities or are of political interest (eg revised legislation, consultation documents etc).	3. Through improved officer awareness of scrutiny (see 9. below).

ACTION	HOW THIS WILL BE ACHIEVED
4. Ensure that items are submitted to scrutiny process in sufficient time to allow a valid input.	4. Through improved officer awareness of scrutiny (see 9. below).
5. Align training and development to member needs.	5. By gauging members views on what is required - eg by repeating recent questionnaire exercise.
6. Monitoring how scrutiny recommendations have been delivered and assessing their impact.	6. Revised monitoring and reporting system - both to OSB and to scrutiny panels.
7. Improve quality of information submitted to scrutiny panels and ensure that information is appropriate to panel needs.	7. (a) Revise procedure guide and information/guidance provided to officers (see also 9. below). (b) Invite services to provide regular updates to panels.
<b><u>IMPROVING AWARENESS</u></b>	
8. Ensure awareness among Members of: a. full understanding of processes. b. full understanding of potential and value of overview and scrutiny.	8. Via structured Member training and development programme - ensure that included in approved programme.



<b>ACTION</b>	<b>HOW THIS WILL BE ACHIEVED</b>
<p>9. Improve awareness at departmental level of :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. potential and value of the scrutiny process.</li> <li>b. legal obligations.</li> </ul>	<p>9. (a) Liaison with Executive Office to ensure that items are placed on forward plan with adequate notice.  (c) Suggest that this is revisited by CMT.  (d) Structured officer training programme with appropriate facilitators.  (e) Departmental management team awareness sessions.</p>
<p>10. Increased public awareness and involvement.</p>	<p>10. (a) Articles in Middlesbrough News.  (b) Improved/up to date website.  (c) Use of publicity materials to encourage public to identify scrutiny topics.</p>