

Scrutiny Business Planning Guide and Checklist

1. Principles

- (a) Scrutiny should improve outcomes for West Sussex by providing:
 - Robust challenge to the executive and service performance; and
 - Timely opportunities to influence budget and policy planning
- (b) Scrutiny holds the executive to account and should be objective, evidence-based, transparent and constructive
- (c) It acts as a critical friend to the decision maker to enable the most effective delivery of the Council's priorities.
- (d) It takes a strategic perspective, focussing on the wider community needs and outcomes for all residents and service users
- (e) It should aim for consensus and avoid party politics.

2. Business Planning

Each Committee's Business Planning Group (BPG) plans the Committee's business and considers what to scrutinise. Business emerges from sources including:

- The Forward Plan or items referred by a Cabinet Member
- Member requests for an item to be considered.
- Performance issues identified from the Total Performance Monitor or other sources
- A proposed decision being 'called in'.
- The annual process of developing budget and corporate priorities.

BPG members should have a good understanding of the budget and performance issues for their portfolio. A BPG should prioritise business to ensure time for detailed scrutiny of the most important issues within the resources available, using the checklist at paragraph 5.

Select Committees should have a **clear focus on the objectives and desired outcomes** for their work. This should inform work prioritisation, planning agendas and the approach to managing meetings. The BPG should do so by use of the checklist set out below which should focus on key lines of enquiry.

All Select Committee members should have the opportunity to contribute to and influence the work programme. To help this, the agenda for and notes from BPG meetings should be shared at the earliest opportunity with all members of the committee.

Performance and Finance Select Committee (PFSC) should ensure all scrutiny arrangements are effective and are dealing with the most important issues for the Council. It may do so by receiving and considering select committee work programmes from time to time. An annual report for PFSC allows it to monitor the scrutiny work programme and developments and to highlight best practice and training needs. As set out in Standing Orders, paragraph 8.12), the scrutiny work programme should be reviewed by the end of May each year by PFSC and then by County Council County Council.

3. **Agenda Planning**

A pre-agenda meeting (PrAM) is held two weeks before the formal meeting attended by the chairman and vice-chairman, Democratic Services officers, and the officers preparing reports. It is a brief session of no more than one hour to:

- Ensure the agenda and approach meet the needs of the committee
- Agree scrutiny aims or outcomes from each item
- Plan the management of the meeting (timing, presentations, witnesses)
- Decide whether a pre-meeting would be helpful
- Discuss what information members may need for effective scrutiny

The pre-agenda meeting should identify the key lines of enquiry for scrutiny of the subject and ensure that the report covers what is required for the scrutiny focus. Its role is not to review draft reports.

Agendas should be short to allow time and focus to produce meaningful outcomes. Items for information only must not be taken. Information gathering and questions of detail should be dealt with outside formal meetings.

4. **BPG Tasks**

Task	Objective
Programme setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agree outline committee work programme
Programme planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prioritisation of business• Prepare a balanced work programme to ensure priority items have sufficient time• Consider the best and most timely approach
Performance and Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the Performance Monitor quarterly to identify issues for the committee.
Agenda planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Defining the scrutiny aims of agenda items• Identification of witnesses and evidence
Project Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set up Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups (TFGs)• Identify other ways to carry out work
Publicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify how best to promote the work of the committee and how to engage the public

5. **Business Planning Checklist**

Priorities - Is the topic

- a corporate or service priority? In what way?
- an area where performance, outcomes or budget is a concern? How?
- one that matters most to residents? Why?

What is being scrutinised and Why?

- What should the scrutiny focus be?
- Where can the committee add value?
- What is the desired outcome from scrutiny?

When and how to scrutinise?

- When can the committee have most influence?
- What is the best approach - committee, TFG, one-off small group?
- What research, visits or other activities are needed?
- Would scrutiny benefit from external witnesses or evidence?

Is the work programme focused and achievable?

- Have priorities changed – should any work be stopped or put back?
- Can there be fewer items for more in-depth consideration?
- Has sufficient capacity been retained for future work?