*c*f*ps* the centre for
public scrutiny

better scrutiny for better government

Self-evaluation framework
for overview and scrutiny in local government

Contents

The framework:

Introduction

In the short time since overview and scrutiny was introduced under the Local Government Act 2000 research has indicated slow but gradual improvement of its execution and outcomes. Evidence also suggests that effective political governance is related directly to effective council performance. This information is, however, based largely on subjective measurement and perception.

There has been an absence to date of *objective* measures that can identify the successful operation of overview and scrutiny, largely due to the disparate nature of its implementation across local government.

This self-evaluation framework provides, for the first time, a mechanism for all local authorities to demonstrate the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny and, further, to identify areas and means for improvement. The questions posed aim to provide objectivity by asking the "evaluator" to identify evidence in support of their answers: rather than stating "yes, we use the forward plan to inform our work programme" they are asked to consider examples of how it has been used in practice, and what might be done to improve its use.

Self-evaluation can be undertaken by any individual or group and does not presuppose an existing level of achievement. Rather, within a given set of principles, it requires the "evaluator" to:

- demonstrate evidence of achievement,
- identify areas for improvement, and
- highlight potential barriers to improvement

Once completed, the framework will provide a clear picture of how overview and scrutiny operates in an authority. This can then be used to:

- communicate the potential of scrutiny to local communities
- encourage involvement in the process of those being scrutinised
- build confidence of those undertaking scrutiny activities
- demonstrate scrutiny's value to auditors and inspectors

Completion of the framework will also produce an explicit set of priorities for improvement planning.

User guide

The framework has been designed for use according the needs of each authority. It does not presuppose any current level of achievement and can be applied to any type of local authority, operating under any of the four options for political management as set out in the Local Government Act 2000.

It is up to individual councils to decide how to use this framework, however authorities might like to consider some of the following suggestions:

- use the framework as a survey sent to key stakeholders and use results to develop an action plan

- hold a workshop with key stakeholders to complete the framework, using the results to develop an action plan

- contract external consultants to undertake the evaluation and produce recommendations

> **Key stakeholders might include:**
> scrutiny Members and officers; executive Members; senior management; departmental officers; members of the public; community groups; area forums (or their equivalents); the local strategic partnership; other partnerships; external bodies subject to scrutiny; etc

The framework is in four sections, reflecting the principles set out CfPS' **Good Scrutiny Guide**. For each principle there is a set of key questions with prompts to help complete an evaluation table.

Once the tables are complete the authority will be have identified a series of areas for improvement which can then be built in to an improvement plan, examples of which will be made available on our website at www.cfps.org.uk/improvement.

If your authority decides to use the framework to review its overview and scrutiny performance, please let us know by contacting info@cfps.org.uk.

The online version

Those who participated in the development of the framework approached us with a variety of motivations and desired outputs. We hope this document addresses most of them but don't want the project to end with a static publication that is out of date within a few months.

The framework's success will rely on its ongoing development and this can be best achieved through collaborative input from professional practitioners. To facilitate this we have created an editable version of the framework on the CfPS website so that if you find something which can be improved, ought to be changed, or should be deleted, you can do so.

Examples of online collaborative development have proved remarkably successful in other fields, such as the online encyclopaedia - Wikipedia - which is written and updated constantly by thousands of people around the world.

There are instructions on the site to help you make amendments and create your own pages to describe your experience of using the framework. Also, the system allows CfPS to keep a track of all new ideas and we will update the this document in response to them on a regular basis.

You can find the online version at:
www.cfps.org.uk/improvement

An example of a page being edited:
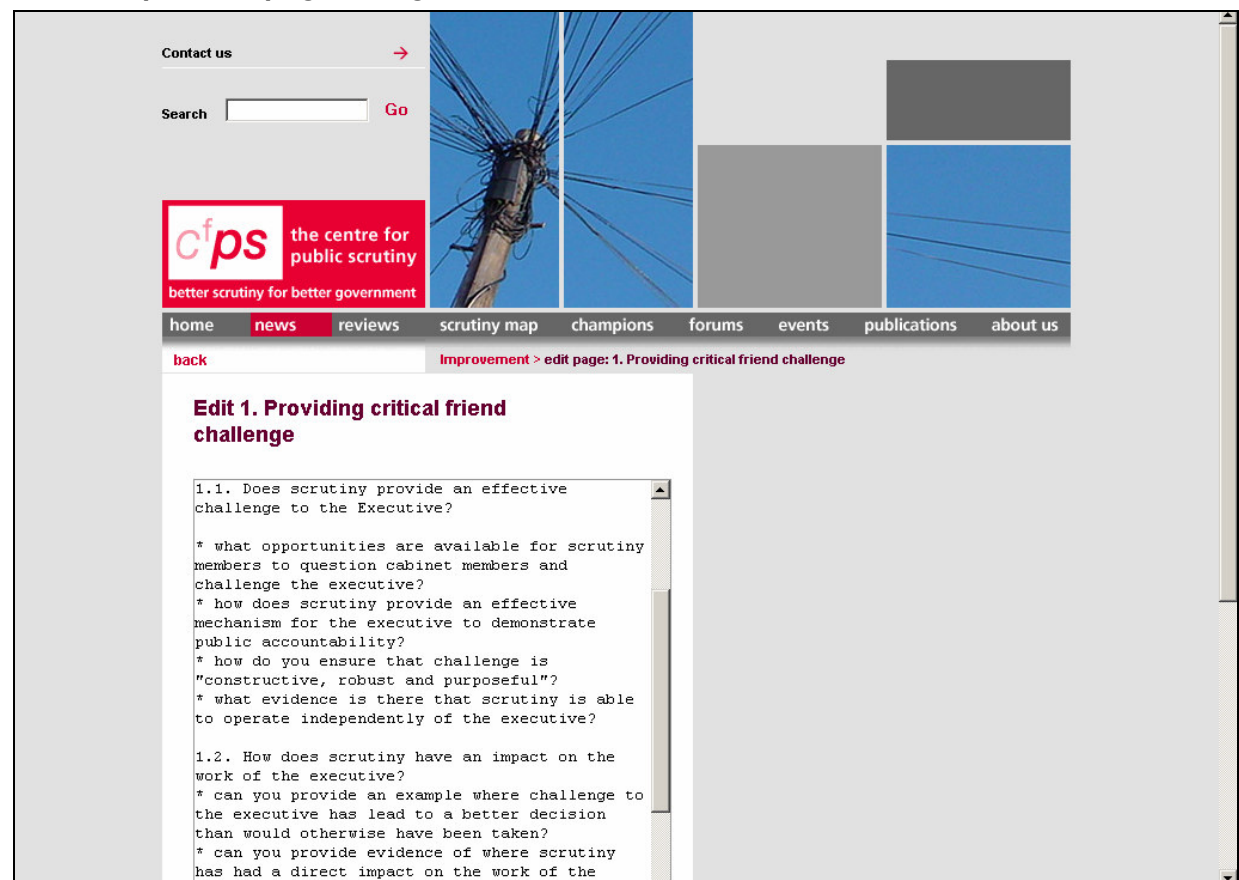
1. Provide 'critical friend' challenge

1.1. Does scrutiny provide an effective challenge to the Executive?

- o what opportunities are available for scrutiny members to question cabinet members and challenge the executive?

- o how does scrutiny provide an effective mechanism for the executive to demonstrate public accountability?

- o how do you ensure that challenge is "constructive, robust and purposeful"?

- o what evidence is there that scrutiny is able to operate independently of the executive?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?

What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?

1.2. How does scrutiny have an impact on the work of the executive?

- o can you provide an example where challenge to the executive has lead to a better decision than would otherwise have been taken
- o can you provide evidence of where scrutiny has had a direct impact on the work of the executive?
- o has a cabinet member had a change of mind on a decision due to scrutiny?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?

What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?

1.3. How does scrutiny routinely challenge the authority's corporate strategy and budget?

- o is there evidence of questioning financial priorities and how they meet corporate objectives?
- o how can you demonstrate that monitoring and questioning performance has provided effective challenge?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

1.4. Are external partners involved in scrutiny and how are they included?

- o are external partners used to provide challenge?

- o can you provide examples where partnerships and partner organisations have been the subject of scrutiny?

- o is there a process for external involvement in scrutiny? Have you developed a scheme as outline in Local Government Act 2003?

- o are arrangements in place to support and encourage external challenge?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

1.5. Does scrutiny work effectively with the executive and senior management?

- o do you have an agreed way of working with executive and senior management?
- o could you describe those relationships confidently and provide an example if them working in practice?
- o are there examples to demonstrate improved outcomes as a result of these relationships in use?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?

What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?

2. Reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities

2.1. How is the work of scrutiny informed by the public?

- o is there evidence of an ongoing dialogue with the public and its diverse communities?

- o what evidence is there to show how diverse/different public expectations have been managed?

- o Is there evidence to show where the scrutiny work programme has been influenced by suggestions from both public and partner organisations?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

2.2. How does scrutiny make itself accessible to the public?

- o what mechanisms are in place to enable/encourage the public to become involved in the work of scrutiny?

- o how can you demonstrate that they have been effective?

- o how are the outcomes of scrutiny communicated?

- o what evidence is there to show how the public has been engaged in the meetings and work of scrutiny?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

2.3. How does scrutiny communicate?

- o are mechanisms in place to ensure that all members and officers are aware of and understand scrutiny?

- o how do you ensure that opportunities for communicating scrutiny are identified and used, including corporate arrangements for media and public relations?

- o do you have any specific arrangements for communicating with partnerships and partner organisations?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

3. Take the lead and own the scrutiny process

3.1. Does scrutiny operate with political impartiality?

- o are you able to demonstrate that the whip is not used?
- o is it possible to demonstrate political consensus?
- o how have executive members been involved in championing the value and potential of scrutiny?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?

What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?

3.2. Does scrutiny have ownership of its own work programme?

- o how have members been involved in developing the work programme?
- o do members regularly monitor and evaluate the progress of work programmes?
- o can you provide evidence to show how conflicting views in regard to the work programme have been resolved by scrutiny members?
- o do scrutiny members goals for what they want to achieve?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

3.3. Do scrutiny members consider that they have a worthwhile and fulfilling role?

- o do Members have an opportunity to communicate their views on the development and operation of overview and scrutiny?

- o are the views of Members canvassed/collected and evaluated?

- o is scrutiny seen as an attractive political career?

- o is the scrutiny role seen as one that makes an important contribution to the good management of the authority and quality of life in the community?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

3.4. Is there a constructive working partnership with officers including support arrangements for scrutiny?

- o can you provide evidence to show that there are arrangements to enable discussion and consensus between scrutiny, the executive and officers?

- o how have officers been involved in championing the value and potential of scrutiny?

- o what training and development has been provided with a view to improving scrutiny?

- o how are the arrangements for scrutiny support evaluated for effectiveness and appropriateness?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

4. Make an impact on service delivery

4.1. How does scrutiny workload co-ordinated and integrated in to corporate processes?

- o are you able to use the forward plan to programme the work of scrutiny?
- o Is the forward plan fit for purpose?
- o what evidence is there that scrutiny contributes to the delivery of corporate priorities?
- o can scrutiny demonstrate an involvement and impact in setting performance objectives?
- o what evidence is there to show that scrutiny involvement has identified the need to realign resource allocation or objectives?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

4.2. What evidence is there to show that scrutiny has contributed to improvement?

o what evidence is there to show that changes have been brought about as a result of scrutiny activity? (including community well-being and strategic quality assurance)

o what arrangements are in place to ensure that recommendations and actions arising from scrutiny are acted upon?

o how does scrutiny monitor routinely the implementation of its recommendations?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

4.3. How well is information required by scrutiny managed?

- o how effective are the arrangements for planning and scoping reviews?
- o what arrangements have been made to ensure that scrutiny members receive accurate, timely and appropriate information?
- o how does scrutiny record, monitor and evaluate its own proceedings?

Evidence of what do we do well?	How can we improve?
What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?	

Other assessment tools and methodologies

Full details on other performance management models and improvement tools are available from the IDeA Knowledge website (free registration / log-in required)

Performance management model	Summary description
Balanced Scorecard	A multi-dimensional framework for managing strategy by linking objectives, initiatives, targets and performance measures across key corporate perspectives
EFQM Excellence Model®	Organisational improvement framework for assessing strengths and areas for improvement across the spectrum of an organisation's activities
Dolphin EFQM Excellence Model™	Improvement framework for conducting self assessments using the EFQM Excellence Model®
PQASSO	Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations, or projects within larger organisations
Public Service Excellence Model	Organisational improvement framework and diagnostic tool for identifying strengths and weaknesses within an organisation or programmes of work
The Big Picture	Organisational development framework and toolbox designed to make an organisation think about every aspect of their work and take action to improve it.
Performance improvement tool	Summary description
Charter Mark	The Government's national standard and quality improvement scheme for customer service.
Investors in People	National standard for improving organisational performance by training and developing people to achieve organisational goals
ISO9001 Quality System	Global standard and approach for quality management systems. The standard focuses on the management of processes and documentation in order to meet customer needs and expectations
Kaizen Blitz	Short term performance improvement approach to improving business processes, which can achieve rapid results
Local Government Improvement Programme	Performance Improvement approach based on a peer review against a benchmark of an 'ideal' local authority
Six Sigma	A disciplined methodology for process improvement that deploys a wide set of tools
Value management	Organisational improvement framework incorporating a toolbox of proven methods that aim to optimise customer outcomes within the resources available

Examples of performance indicators for scrutiny

Critical friend challenge:

- percentage of items on work programmes taken from the forward plan
- percentage of items on the cabinet agenda amended as a result of scrutiny intervention

Reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities

- the percentage of items on the work programme suggested by the public or in response to issues raised through surveys, comments or complaints
- number of visits to the authority's scrutiny web pages
- number of requests for scrutiny newsletter

Take the lead and own the scrutiny process

- the percentage of meetings attended by Members at which they were required
- percentage of Members who are enthusiastic about their role in scrutiny
- percentage of Members that have a fairly good awareness of the role of scrutiny and of their role as a panel member

Making an impact on service delivery

- the percentage of scrutiny recommendations approved by the executive
- the percentage of scrutiny recommendations implemented by the executive
- improvements identified by public/stakeholders as a result of scrutiny reviews

Useful websites

CfPS

- Library of scrutiny reviews
- Discussions forum
- Scrutiny map
- Scrutiny Champions' Network

National

- Improvement and Development Agency
- Improvement Network
- Local Government Association
- Audit Commission
- Parliamentary Select Committees

Regional

- South East Employers
- Association of London Government
- North East Regional Employers Organisation
- East of England Regional Assembly
- West Midlands Local Government Association
- East Midlands Regional Local Government Association
- South West Regional Assembly
- North West Regional Assembly
- Yorkshire and Humber Association of Local Authorities

Others

- Evaluating Local Governance New Constitutions and Ethics
- Local Government Information Unit
- Democratic Health Network
- New Local Government Network
- Office for Public Management