

COMMITTEE:	Policy and Performance Review Committee
MEETING DATE:	15 January 2026
BY:	Depute Chief Executive – Resources and Economy
REPORT TITLE:	Policy and Performance Review Committee (PPRC) Development Plan 2025-2027
REPORT STATUS:	Public

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents an updated Policy and Performance Review Committee (PPRC) Development Plan to the Committee for comment and noting.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the updated Policy and Performance Review Committee (PPRC) Development Plan 2025-2027 and agree to close the actions recommended for closure.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Earlier this year, supported by the Improvement Service, the Committee completed a self-assessment questionnaire followed by an action planning workshop, to ensure the committee is operating effectively and adding value to the organisation.
- 3.2 The Committee approved the Development Plan in September 2025 and agreed that actions would be tracked and monitored at every Committee meeting.
- 3.3 Progress and update commentary has been added for Members' consideration.

- 3.4 To support improved scrutiny a Scrutiny Guide has also been attached at Appendix 2 for consideration. Feedback from Members is welcomed.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 No notable policy implications.

5 RESOURCE AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Finance: No additional implications
- 5.2 Human Resources: No additional implications
- 5.3 Other (e.g. Legal/IT): No additional implications
- 5.4 Risk: No additional implications

6 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 **Select the statement that is appropriate to your report by placing an 'X' in the relevant box.**

An Integrated Impact Assessment screening process has been undertaken and the subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on: equality and human rights; tackling socio-economic disadvantages and poverty; climate change, the environment and sustainability; the Council's role as a corporate parent; or the storage/collection of personal data.

or

The subject of this report has been through the Integrated Impact Assessment process and impacts have been identified as follows:

Subject	Impacts identified (Yes, No or N/A)
Equality and human rights	
Socio-economic disadvantage/poverty	
Climate change, the environment and sustainability	

Subject	Impacts identified (Yes, No or N/A)
Corporate parenting and care-experienced young people	
Storage/collection of personal data	
Other	

7 APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix 1 - PPRC Development Plan 2025- 2027

7.2 Appendix 2 – Scrutiny Guide and Summary Document

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 Policy and Performance Review Committee (PPRC) Development Plan 2025-2027, PPRC Report, September 2025

9 AUTHOR AND APPROVAL DETAILS

Report Author(s)

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Date	20 November 2025

Head of Service Approval

Name	Hayley Barnett
Designation	Head of Corporate Support
Confirmation that IIA and other relevant checks (e.g. finance/legal) have been completed	Completed
Approval Date	20 November 2025

Appendix 1 – PPRC Development Plan 2025 - 2027

A committee focused on strategic matters (cross Council) aligned to the Council Plan and supported by a series of deep dives.

PPRC makes greater use of its remit and powers to add (and demonstrate) value to the work of the Council						
No.	Action	Evidence needed to close action	Due Date	Owner - Member	Owner - Officer	Comments
1.	To review the PPRC workplan in line with the committees Terms of Reference.	New workplan in place.	December 2025	Cllr Jardine	Head of Corporate Support	Recommended for closure Workplan on the agenda.
2.	To work with Cabinet to understand their areas of focus to inform the PPRC workplan.	Regular engagement established with Cabinet.	December 2025	Cllr Jardine & Cllr Gilbert	Head of Corporate Support	An initial discussion took place with Cllr Hampshire, Chair of the Cabinet in November 2025. The Head of Corporate Support agreed to draft amendments to the to the

						<p>Council's Standing Orders for presentation to February 2026 Council to create a mechanism for cross-committee actions.</p> <p>To be considered for closure following SOs review.</p>
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Increased and better-quality scrutiny to support improvement.

Members are supported to take a full and active role in committee.

No.	Action	Evidence required to close action	Due Date	Owner - Member	Owner - Officer	Comments
3.	To expand the scrutiny induction offering for new elected members	New scrutiny training session developed and included within the 2027 Induction programme	June 2027	Cllr Jardine and Cllr Menzies	Head of Corporate Support	<p>Recommended for closure</p> <p>The Head of Corporate Support has added to the project plan for Elected Member Induction 2027</p>
4.	To provide further and regular scrutiny training e.g. questioning techniques.	The development of an annual programme of training sessions and the delivery of the sessions with attendance from all PPRC members.	March 2027	Cllr Jardine and Cllr Menzies	Head of Corporate Support	<p>Recommended for closure</p> <p>Questioning Techniques Training completed on 18 September 2025.</p> <p>A scrutiny guide has also been attached at Appendix 2 for member's consideration. This can be a tool member's use to support ongoing development.</p>

						Sessions will be built into the 2027 Induction Programme and ongoing elected member Learning and Development Programme. Further sessions to be planned.
5.	To explore of use of recommendations by the PPRC committee	Written advice provided to the Committee by the Monitoring Officer	December 2025	Officer ownership	Head of Corporate Support	<p>This will be included in the proposed changes to Standing Orders noted at item 2.</p> <p>To be considered for closure following SOs review.</p>
6.	To ensure all committee members understand the terms of reference of the committee and the Council standing orders.	Published scrutiny guide for members of PPRC	December 2025	Officer ownership	Head of Corporate Support	<p>Recommended for Closure</p> <p>A draft scrutiny guide has been attached at appendix 2 for member's consideration.</p>

7.	To hold a training session on the Local Government Benchmarking Framework to ensure members have the knowledge to scrutinise	Training session delivered	March 2026 (in advance of the 2024/25 report)	Officer ownership	Transformation and Digital Portfolio Manager	This has been added to the Members Briefing Programme for 10 March 2026. To be considered for closure after the session.
8.	To better understand how officers carry out IIAs	Deep dive discussion session on IIAs	June 2026	Officer ownership (to schedule awareness session).	Head of Corporate Support	These will be scheduled in 2026.
9.	To maintain wider pre-meeting approach	All committee members attending pre-meets.	September 2025	Cllr Jardine	Head of Corporate Support	CLOSED Arrangement implemented for the 2025/26 committee session.
10.	To develop a skills matrix	Up to date committee skills matrix in place	December 2025	All Committee Members to complete the skills matrix.	Head of Corporate Support	Details of skills required to perform scrutiny is included within the Scrutiny Guide at action 6 and skills matrix has been circulated to elected members to complete.

						To be considered for closure at next meeting following receipt of all member input to matrix.
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East Lothian
Council

Comhairle Lodainn An Ear

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Scrutiny Guide

2026



Background

The Standards Commission for Scotland states:

'Local authorities in Scotland are tasked with delivering essential services to communities, including housing, education and waste management. Given the importance of these services and the expenditure of public funds involved in their delivery, it is vital that councils are subject to robust scrutiny in order to ensure that they are accountable, transparent and effective.'

'Councillors, as elected representatives, are responsible for assisting the public in scrutinising the delivery of services. It is vital, though, that in exercising their key scrutiny role, councillors adhere to the provisions in the Councillors' Code of Conduct.'

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/code-conduct-councillors-2/>

The East Lothian Council 2023/24 Annual Audit Report stated:

'The Council has appropriate governance arrangements in place which support effective scrutiny, challenge and decision making'

It went on to say that it was:

'Important that every effort is taken to ensure an appropriate balance between allowing effective scrutiny of agenda items and ensuring that councillors' have sufficient capacity to review the supporting documentation.'

The Committee, with the support of the Improvement Service, have drafted a Development Plan after they recognised a need for continuous improvement in scrutiny. This plan is a live document which can have actions added to support improvement. It is proposed that the Development Plan is added as a standing item to the Committee's agenda and actions are tracked and monitored at every committee meeting.

This guide aims to provide an overview of the main elements of scrutiny and details the tools and skills to support robust scrutiny

What is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny is a form of a checks and balance system. All councils operating executive arrangements (those with a Cabinet or Executive Committee) must have at least one scrutiny committee. The Committee's main responsibilities include holding the executive (Cabinet) to account and reviewing and challenging the management of council services

Overview and scrutiny should be a strategic function of the council. It should be central to the organisation's corporate governance and a crucial cog in the decision-making machine. Scrutiny should be seeking to investigate and inquire into issues of interest and relevance to local people.

Fundamental Principles of Good Scrutiny in Local Government

Independence

- Scrutiny should be conducted independently of the executive (cabinet).
- Scrutiny members must feel free to challenge policies, decisions, and performance without political pressure.
- Chairs of scrutiny committees should be chosen for their impartiality and leadership, not party loyalty.

Transparency

- Scrutiny work should be open and accessible to the public.
- Agendas, reports, and decisions should be clearly published.
- Meetings should be open to the public and press, unless there are valid confidentiality reasons.

Accountability

- Scrutiny must hold decision-makers (e.g. cabinet members, council officers, partner organisations) to account for their actions and decisions.
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Evidence-based

- Effective scrutiny relies on robust, diverse, and reliable evidence.
- Members should seek input from officers, experts, partners, and especially residents.
- Recommendations must be based on facts, not opinion or party politics.

Constructive Challenge

- The goal is not to obstruct but to improve decision-making.
- Scrutiny should focus on solutions, learning, and service improvement rather than blame.
- Good scrutiny offers a critical friend approach – supportive but questioning.

Public Involvement and Engagement

- Scrutiny should reflect the views and priorities of the local community.
- Public input (e.g., via consultations, surveys, or public speaking at meetings) adds legitimacy and relevance.
- Community concerns should help shape scrutiny work programmes.

Strategic Focus

- Scrutiny must prioritise the most significant issues: those with high public impact, complexity, or risk.

- A clear, focused work programme helps scrutiny remain manageable and effective.
- It should avoid spreading itself too thin across many minor issues.

Collaboration and Partnership

- Scrutiny should engage with other local service providers (e.g. NHS, police, housing associations).
- Understanding the wider system and holding partners to account where appropriate is vital under models like *place-based* scrutiny.

Impact-Oriented

- The purpose of scrutiny is to make a difference—through actionable recommendations, influencing policy, or preventing poor decisions.
- Success should be measured by outcomes, not just outputs (like the number of meetings or reports).

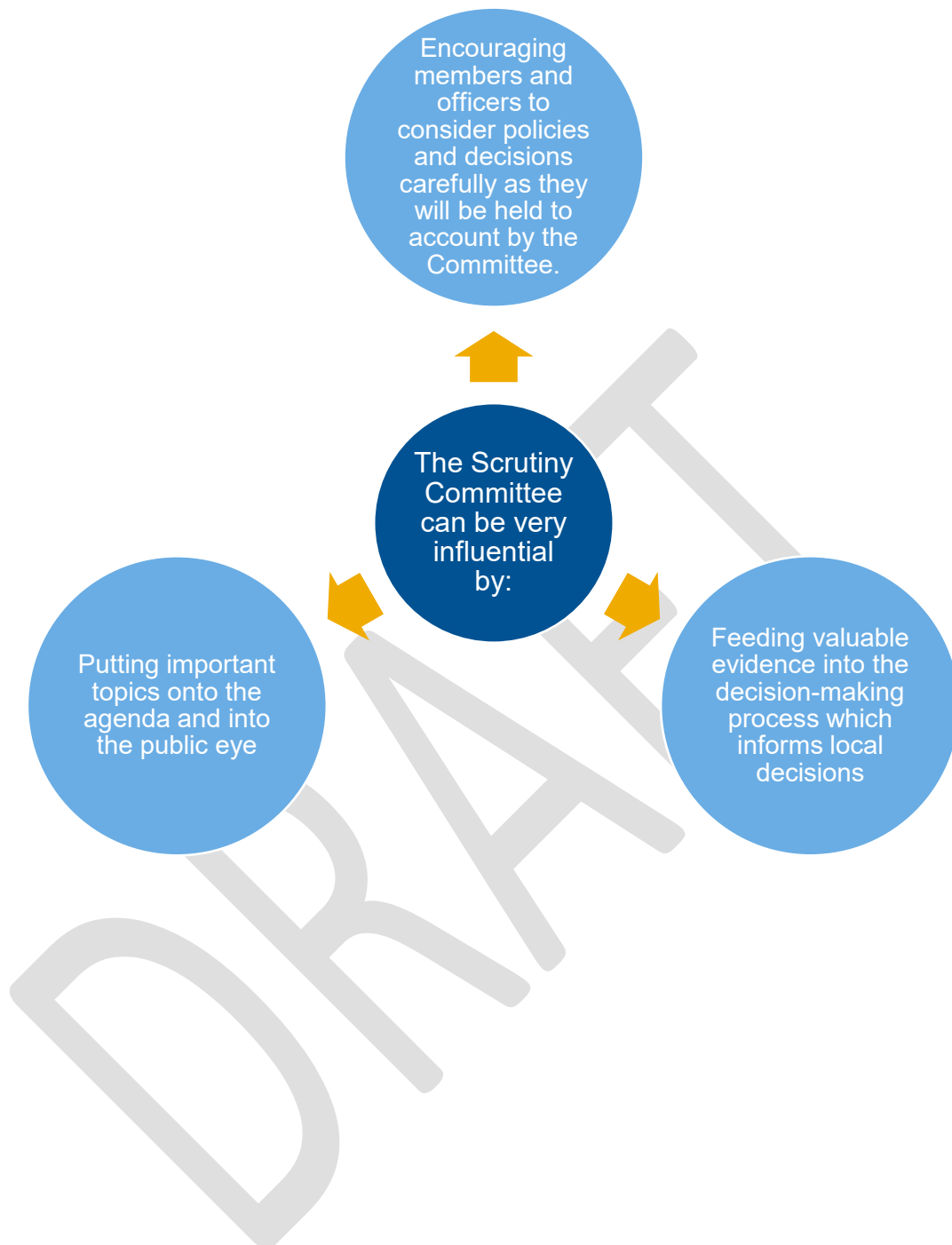
Continuous Improvement

- Scrutiny should reflect on its own performance, seeking ways to improve.
- Training and development for scrutiny members is essential.
- Feedback from those scrutinised and the public helps refine future work.

Elements of Effective Scrutiny

- **Effective work programming** - Planning ahead, selecting appropriate topics, allocating time and resources, scoping, and planning activities
- **Positive and constructive relationships** - Relationships fostered through effective communication with the Council's Executive, Officers, partners, and other scrutineers.
- **Involvement** - Ensuring that residents and local businesses can participate in the wider process of scrutiny to ensure that Council decisions are informed by local needs.
- **Effective research and analysis** - Examining evidence and prepared reports, using appropriate questioning techniques, and selecting appropriate witnesses.
- **Effective meetings** - Preparing the meeting and the invitees, communicating in advance and afterwards, staying on topic, summarising, and confirming decisions.
- **SMART recommendations** - Stating what needs to change, associated time scales, who needs to be involved, how it should be implemented and how accountability will be ensured.
- **Good monitoring and evaluation** - Ensuring that recommendations are being implemented and measuring success in terms of outcomes.

The Impact of Scrutiny



Financial Scrutiny

Good financial scrutiny is especially prudent given the financial position of many public bodies and local authorities. Scrutiny committees can add value by:

- Reviewing how resources are allocated, monitoring how they are used, and examining their impact. This is about following through from budget development and planning to the delivery of a budget, and oversight over that budget in-year.
- Reviewing the integration between financial planning and service outputs: what are the discrepancies between finances and service delivery?
- Testing out and making explicit whether the Council is directing its resources effectively to meet its priorities and demonstrating whether it is achieving value for money, equity and social value.
- Providing, through scrutiny in a public forum, challenge to the Executive's management of the Council's finances, and a different perspective on challenges. This is about scrutiny having a clearly defined role, and bringing something unique to the table in how it goes about its work.

In order to provide effective scrutiny, Committees must consider the Council's management of finances in the:

Short term

In-year issues include monitoring performance against the budget, identifying overspends and underspends and understanding the impact of budget decisions on ongoing service performance.

For example:

- How is our immediate financial health affecting the performance of this service?
- Can we anticipate any changes in Council finances which may impact the way this service manages its resources in the next year?

Medium term

The medium-term financial strategy looks at a financial horizon of two to three years in the future.

For example:

- How is the Council keeping the medium-term financial strategy under review by reflecting on current performance?
- To what extent do the Council's medium-term plans reflect its overall priorities as an organisation?

Long term

Long-term issues include a reserves policy, and other approaches to long term financial planning.

For example:

- How much does the Council hold in reserves and how does this compare to councils with similar circumstances?
- What are we holding reserves for? What are the risks or future spending plans for which the Council is holding reserves?

Essential Skills for Good Scrutiny

1

Listening skills. Listen thoroughly and hear what you are being told.

2

An understanding of and an interest in the topics of the committee.

3

An understanding of the scrutiny role function.

4

An awareness and understanding of different questioning techniques.

5

An ability to / or experience of engaging with the public.

6

An ability to digest both written and verbal information and summarise the key points.

7

An ability to interpret both qualitative and quantitative data. Appraise the information given and ask for what is missing.

8

Critical thinking ability to evaluate and triangulate evidence from a range of sources. Think about how, why, when, where and what.

9

Confidence to seek clarity when required.

10

An ability and willingness to undertake research and gather evidence to contribute.

Meeting Organisation

Planning and priority setting

One of the most important activities for those involved in scrutiny is designing a work programme. A well-designed scrutiny work programme is the cornerstone of effective scrutiny.

The work programme should ensure that scrutiny is focused on subject areas and issues that matter the most and makes the best use of scarce time and resources. It should support members to identify key areas for review and when it is done right, the process of designing a work programme can promote transparency, and public participation as well as being a positive demonstration of good governance.

Generally, good practice for a work programme follows the 'less is more' rule, it is more beneficial to have a narrow, yet deep work programme as opposed to one that is broad and shallow.

Scrutiny cannot and should not look at everything and time should be taken to prioritise to have the most impact.

A key question members should ask themselves when setting the work programme is "can scrutiny add value?"

The Pre-Meeting

The purpose of the pre-meeting is to allow members to prepare for the Committee and ensure a coordinated, organised approach to scrutiny is taken. It is important for all members of the Committee to attend the pre-meeting, so everyone knows who will be asking questions and what the order of questions will be. A guide to structuring the pre-meeting can be found below:

- Map out the questioning approach – what is the 'big' question the Committee wants to ask? What key areas will be covered?
- Who will ask the questions?
- How will questions be organised?
- Will the Chair call people to ask questions in a free format, or will questions be assigned to specific members in a specific order?
- How will supplementary questions be dealt with?
- How will the Committee work as a team?
- Which types of questions will be used for different officers?
- How will the Committee respond to an officer who has not answered a question in the desired way?

At The Meeting

Top tips for an effective meeting:

Focus on the 'Big' Question - A questioning session for an item should have a clear purpose, usually this should be able to be expressed as a single question, such as 'how can service delivery be improved?' or 'what is the cause of poor performance?' The questioning approach should be structured with a view to building a picture of the Big Question.

Listen and learn - The purpose of questioning is to learn. Always think explicitly about who the best person is to provide the evidence that the Committee wants and make sure enough time has been allocated to get that evidence.

Work as a team - Questioning is a team sport. To get the most out of questioning and the limited time available with Officers, it is important to have an approach to questioning that involves everyone. If members do not get involved in the development of a questioning strategy and attend the meeting and ask questions 'at a tangent', this might undermine what the Committee as a whole wants to achieve.

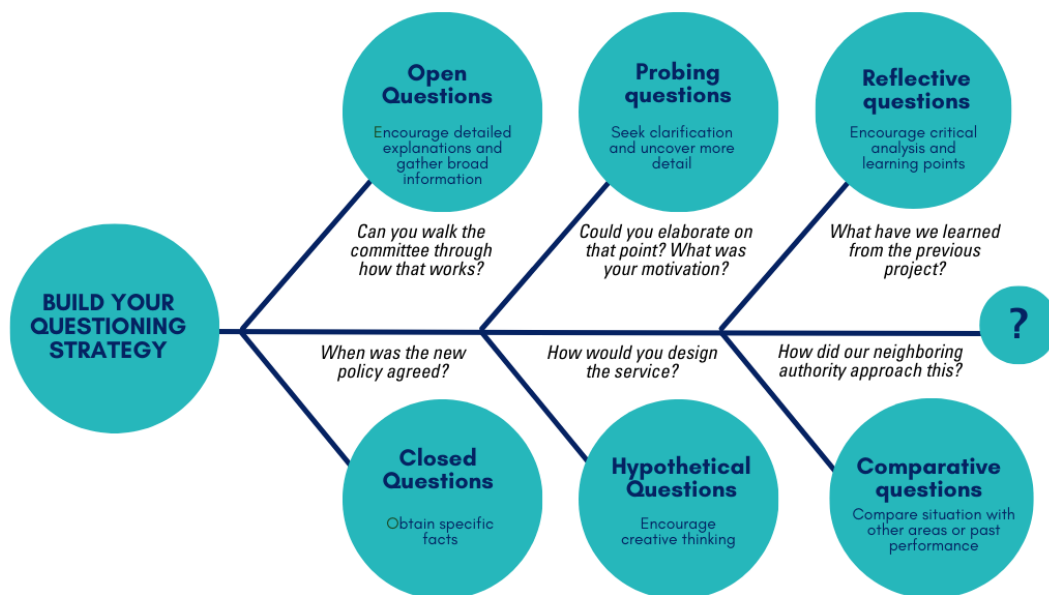
Reflect - Finally, it is important to evaluate and review the effectiveness of questioning. This can be done in post meetings, as part of annual reviews or through one off exercises.

Effective Scrutiny Questioning

Questioning is the most important part of the scrutiny process. Without effective questioning there cannot be effective scrutiny.

Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

Good questioning requires rigour, consistency and clear purpose. The best results will always come when questions are carefully designed to fit the situation. Members should have a good working knowledge of the different types of question they might use (Appendix 1) and when best to use them.



The diagram above illustrates a range of question types that can be used to develop a questioning strategy in scrutiny work. Each type of question serves a different function and can help elicit different kinds of information, insight, or reflection. Think about layering your questions to explore multiple angles.

Effective scrutiny is rarely the result of one person's questioning alone. A strong questioning strategy is most effective when it's developed and delivered by a high-performing team. High-performing teams are clear on their shared objectives, communicate openly, and make the most of each member's strengths. By agreeing roles, for example who will open up lines of enquiry, who will follow up with probing or comparative questions, teams can avoid duplication and ensure coverage of key issues.

Even with the best preparation, effective questioning also requires flexibility. Officers may respond in unexpected ways, offer new insights, or challenge assumptions. Skilled scrutineers remain alert to these shifts and are willing to adapt their questions in the moment. This means resisting the urge to stick rigidly to a pre-written script. Prepared questions are essential, but they should act as a framework only. The best questioning happens when members can move fluidly between prepared lines and spontaneous follow-up, using curiosity and insight to deepen the discussion.

What to avoid in Questioning

Questions are a powerful tool for gaining insight but if you ask the wrong question, you'll probably get the wrong answer or at least not the answer you were hoping for. The quality of the questions can mean all the difference. Skilful questioning however needs to be accompanied by careful listening so that you understand what people really mean with their answers.

Remember It is important you give the person you're questioning enough time to respond, and this may include thinking time, so never assume a pause means 'no comment', leave space.

Details of what to avoid are contained in appendix 2.

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Useful Resources

The Centre for Public Scrutiny's guide to good scrutiny: [CfPS-Good-Scrutiny-Guide-v4-WEB-SINGLE-PAGES.pdf](#)

A checklist for effective scrutiny questions: [02 - Effective Questioning for Scrutiny.pdf](#)

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman – suggested questions for the scrutiny of several local government services: [Scrutiny questions - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

Examples of good scrutiny questions: [Scrutiny questions - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Standard Scrutiny Questions.pdf](#)

A guide to the effective scrutiny of Children's Services: [SP-Childrens-Services-final.pdf](#)

Advice on considering equalities as part of the scrutiny process: [How to consider equality in policy making: A 10-step guide for public bodies in England | EHRC](#)

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny contains several useful publications about scrutiny more generally: [Home - CFGS](#)

Appendix 1

Types of Question

Open:

Open questions are a crucial component of effective scrutiny. They allow respondents to share detailed information and set the scene for the scrutiny process. Here are some examples of open questions that can be used in scrutiny:

- **"What are your thoughts regarding the provision of X service?":** This question invites the respondent to share their perspective on the service provided and how it impacts the community.
- **"Tell us about... or Please give us an example of...":** These questions encourage the respondent to elaborate on a specific issue or topic, providing a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Using open questions not only elicits more comprehensive responses but also helps to build trust and encourages the sharing of information. It is important to note that while open questions are beneficial, they should be used in conjunction with other questioning techniques to ensure a thorough and effective scrutiny process.

Closed:

Closed questions are inquiries that can be answered with a simple yes or no, or with a specific piece of information, making them useful for gathering straightforward data.

- **"Have you fully consulted on the project?"** These questions require the respondent to provide a yes or no answer.
- **"When was the last meeting/consultation?"** These questions require the respondent to provide a specific piece of information.

Hypothetical:

When conducting scrutiny, it is important to use hypothetical questions

- **"What if the decision had not been made? What would have been the consequences?"**
- **"What if you had considered all the options before making the decision?"**

These questions can help to uncover the reasoning behind decisions and to identify any biases or assumptions that may have influenced the decision-making process. They also encourage a more open and transparent scrutiny process.

Probing:

Probing questions are essential in scrutiny to gather detailed information and insights.

- **"If we were to try... what might happen?"** - This question allows the officer to explore potential outcomes and the reasoning behind their actions.
- **"Give me an example of the options that you considered."** - This question helps to understand the officer's thought process and the reasoning behind their decisions.

Reflective:

Reflective questions for scrutiny are essential for ensuring that the scrutiny process is thorough and effective. They help to challenge assumptions, understand complex systems, hold decision-makers to account, and uncover the stories and meaning behind data. Here are some examples of reflective questions that can be used during scrutiny:

- **“How can we improve the effectiveness of this service?”**
- **“What are the potential risks associated with this decision?”**

These questions can be used to guide the scrutiny process, ensuring that all aspects of a decision are considered, and that the community is engaged in the process. By asking reflective questions, scrutiny committees can contribute to the development of more effective and accountable decision-making processes.

Comparative:

Comparative questions can help in comparing situations, approaches, or benchmarks during scrutiny or scrutiny:

- **“What has it been like since...?”**
- **“What approaches have been used in...?”**

A guide to SMART questioning structures:

Question Stems

Review	<p>Can you summarise...?</p> <p>Can you provide an update on ...?</p> <p>The report states X. Can you provide more detail on...?</p>
Reflect	<p>What did / did not work as planned?</p> <p>What were the barriers to success?</p> <p>What has been learned?</p>
Future Planning	<p>What are the timescales for completion of X?</p> <p>What challenges can be anticipated?</p> <p>Can you report back on X?</p>
Positive	<p>X stood out in the report as an excellent achievement. Can you tell us more about this?</p> <p>It is great to see X, what work led to this?</p> <p>X has been a popular development how was this achieved?</p>
Probe / Link	<p>Tell us more about....?</p> <p>You spoke about X, can this approach be taken in Y?</p>

	You spoke about challenges related to X, what implications does this have for Y?
Open-ended	What...? How...? What were the reasons for....? What do you think about...?
Compare	What has it been like since...? What difference has X made on service delivery? What benefits does X have over Y?

In addition to structuring questions in a clear and productive way, members must ensure that lines of enquiry focus on areas that will add value:

Key Question Topics

Financial Sustainability	What are the financial implications of X? What impact will budgetary pressures have on service delivery/performance? How will financial sustainability be delivered going forward?
Risk	What are the risks associated with X? What are the risks if X is undertaken? What are the risks if X is NOT undertaken?
Implications	What is the impact on X if Y does/doesn't happen? What are the main factors impacting X right now? What are the wider implications of X for the Council?
Reputation	What risks are associated with X for the Council's reputation? In relation to X, what engagement/consultation has been carried out with the public?
Wider objectives: East Lothian Council Plan Enablers/Priorities/Values	How does X align with Council Priority Y? How will X help the Council achieve Y?
Resources	What resources will be required to deliver X? What will the impact of X be on resources?

	What resource implications will arise from planned projects?
Equalities	<p>How will X impact vulnerable communities?</p> <p>What considerations were given to X when developing Y?</p> <p>Does X have the potential to impact service access for disadvantaged groups?</p>
Benchmarking	<p>How does performance in X compare to other local authorities? Nationally?</p>
Workforce	<p>How are staff recruited / retained/ supported to develop?</p> <p>What are staff absence levels like? How is this being managed?</p>
Service-users	<p>How has service-user experience informed service delivery planning?</p> <p>How can service-users give feedback?</p>
Accountability	<p>In relation to X, how will accountability be demonstrated?</p> <p>How does X align with the Council's values and goals?</p> <p>What strategies are in place to manage underperformance?</p>

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Appendix 2

There are some common pitfalls in questioning to avoid, such as:

1. Asking Leading Questions

Leading questions suggest a particular answer and can bias the response. For example, "Don't you think this approach is the best?" Instead, ask open-ended questions like, "What do you think about this approach?"

2. Being Too Vague

Vague questions can lead to confusion and unclear answers. For instance, "Can you explain this?" is less effective than "Can you explain the steps you took to achieve this result?"

3. Interrupting

Interrupting someone while they are answering can disrupt their thought process and make them feel undervalued. Allow them to finish their response before asking follow-up questions.

4. Overloading Questions

Asking too many questions at once or questions that cover several issues can overwhelm the respondent and lead to incomplete answers. Focus on one question at a time to ensure clarity and depth.

5. Using Jargon

Using technical jargon or complex language, ensure your questions are clear and easily understood by everyone.

6. Assuming Knowledge

Assuming the respondent has certain knowledge about issues can lead to misunderstandings. Instead, ask questions relevant to the respondent's role.

7. Being Confrontational or Too Direct

Aggressive or confrontational questions can put the respondent on the defensive. Aim for a respectful and open tone, softening your approach with phrases like "I'm curious about..." or "Could you share more about...?"

8. Ignoring Non-Verbal Cues

Non-verbal cues like body language and facial expressions can provide valuable insights. Pay attention to these cues and adjust your questioning accordingly.

9. Failing to Listen

Not actively listening to the respondent's answers can lead to missed information and ineffective questioning. Show that you are engaged and interested in their responses.

10. Not Following Up

Failing to ask follow-up questions can result in incomplete understanding. Use probing questions to delve deeper into the topic, such as "Can you elaborate on that point?"

11. Neglecting Context

Ignoring the context of the situation can lead to irrelevant questions. Ensure your questions are relevant to the current discussion or issue.

12. Making Statements or Political Speeches

If scrutiny is to be at its most effective it is important that it stays separate from party politics. Scrutiny is, and always should, be regarded as a party politically impartial forum.

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Scrutiny Guide

Scrutiny ensures that councils deliver essential services—like housing, education, and waste management—effectively and transparently. Councillors play a vital role in helping the public scrutinise these services, and must follow the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

Read the Code of Conduct:
www.gov.scot/publications/code-conduct-councillors-2



The 2023/24 Annual Audit Report confirms that East Lothian Council has strong governance and scrutiny arrangements. Continuous improvement is supported by a Development Plan, which is reviewed at every committee meeting. This guide explains the main elements of scrutiny and provides practical tools and skills for robust scrutiny.

What is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny is a system of checks and balances. Every council with a Cabinet or Executive Committee must have at least one scrutiny committee. Main responsibilities:

Hold the executive (Cabinet) to account

Review and challenge council service management

Scrutiny should be strategic, central to governance, and focused on issues that matter to local people.



Principles of Good Scrutiny

Independence: Scrutiny is separate from the executive. Members should challenge decisions freely and chairs should be impartial.

Transparency: Work should be open to the public. Publish agendas, reports, and decisions.

Accountability: Hold decision-makers to account using evidence, not opinion.

Constructive Challenge: Focus on solutions and improvement, not blame.

Public Involvement: Engage residents and businesses to shape scrutiny work.

Strategic Focus: Prioritise issues with high impact or risk.

Collaboration: Work with partners like NHS, police, and housing associations.

Impact-Oriented: Measure success by outcomes, not just activity.

Continuous Improvement: Reflect and seek feedback to improve scrutiny.



Impact of Scrutiny

 **Highlighting important topics**

 **Providing evidence for decisions**

 **Encouraging careful consideration of policies**



Financial Scrutiny

Effective financial scrutiny is crucial. Committees should:

- **Review resource allocation and impact**
- **Monitor budget performance and service delivery**
- **Ensure value for money and equity**

and consider finances in:

Short term:

Monitor budget and service impact

Medium term:

Review strategy and priorities

Long term:

Assess reserves and future risks

Elements of Effective Scrutiny

Work Programming: Plan ahead, choose topics wisely, and allocate resources.

Relationships: Communicate effectively with the Executive, Officers, partners, and other scrutineers.

Involvement: Enable public participation to inform decisions.

Research & Analysis: Use evidence and appropriate questioning.

Meetings: Prepare, stay on topic, summarise, and confirm decisions.

SMART Recommendations: Clearly state changes, timelines, responsibilities, and accountability.

Monitoring & Evaluation: Track implementation and measure outcomes.

Good Scrutiny Essential Skills

Listening carefully

Understanding committee topics

Knowing the scrutiny role

Using different questioning techniques

Engaging with the public

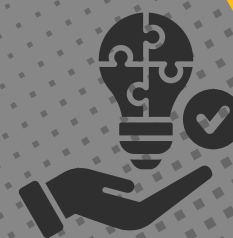
Summarising key points

Interpreting data

Critical thinking

Seeking clarity

Researching and gathering evidence



Organising Meetings

Planning & Priority Setting

Design a focused work programme - less is more.
Prioritise areas where scrutiny can add value.

Pre-Meeting

Prepare by:

- Mapping out questions
- Assigning roles
- Organising question order
- Planning team approach decisions



At The Meeting

- Focus on the 'Big' Question
- Listen and learn
- Work as a team
- Reflect and review effectiveness

Effective Scrutiny Questioning

Use a mix of:

Open questions: Invite detailed responses

Closed questions: Get specific facts

Hypothetical questions: Explore possible outcomes

Probing questions: Dig deeper

Reflective questions: Encourage analysis

Comparative questions: Benchmark against others



Avoid:

- Leading or vague questions
- Interrupting
- Overloading with multiple questions
- Using jargon
- Making assumptions
- Being confrontational
- Ignoring non-verbal cues
- Failing to listen or follow up
- Neglecting context
- Making political statements

Useful Resources

Centre for Public Scrutiny's Guide:

<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/>

Effective Questioning for Scrutiny:

edemocracy.coventry.gov.uk/documents/s32927/02%20%20Effective%20Questioning%20for%20Scrutiny.pdf

Scrutiny Questions – Local Government Ombudsman:

www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/scrutiny-questions

Standard Scrutiny Questions:

cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/documents/s226795/Standard%20Scrutiny%20Questions.pdf

Guide to Scrutiny of Children's Services:

www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/SP-Childrens-Services-final.pdf

Equality in Policy Making:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/guidance/how-consider-equality-policy-making-10-step-guide-public-bodies-england

Centre for Governance and Scrutiny:

www.cfgs.org.uk/

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