



GETTING INVOLVED IN SCRUTINY

A GUIDE FOR WITNESSES

1. Introduction

This brief guide provides an introduction to the Scrutiny process at East Suffolk Council for individuals who have been asked to provide evidence to the Scrutiny Committee.

2. What is Scrutiny?

Delivered through a Member-led work programme, Scrutiny holds the Council's Cabinet and other public service providers to account for delivering priorities and for the decisions they make. It is a key mechanism for driving forward service improvements.

It is important to note, however, that Scrutiny Committees are influencing bodies not decision-making bodies. The role of Scrutiny is therefore that of a 'critical friend' – checking and challenging decisions in a robust and constructive way.

3. How is Scrutiny carried out?

The Council has one Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee meets regularly throughout the year and hears evidence about issues it is reviewing or scrutinising.

4. Who attends Scrutiny Committee meetings?

- Members of the public and media are welcome to attend.
- Membership of the Scrutiny Committee is made up of elected Councillors.
- A Democratic Services Business Manager (Officer) will be present to support the Committee and take formal minutes.
- Other Council Officers, as necessary
- Other Councillors with an interest in the topic under review.

5. What happens if I am invited to be a witness?

If you are invited to attend a Scrutiny meeting, you will be contacted initially by the Democratic Services Business Manager who will outline how the Committee thinks you may be able to help with its study and the main issues that it is interested in examining.

The date, time and venue of the meeting will be discussed with you as well as any special requirements you may have in order to attend the meeting. If you cannot attend on a particular date, the Democratic Services Business Manager may discuss other possibilities with you depending on the topic under review .

6. Providing evidence

The Democratic Services Business Manager will discuss with you in advance of the meeting, the form that your oral evidence should take. For example, you may:

- Be asked to give a verbal summary of an issue, which will be followed by questions from members of the Scrutiny Committee.
- Be requested to provide a presentation to the Committee to outline some key issues followed by questions.
- Be requested to talk about a written report you have produced followed by questions.

If you are planning to provide a presentation you will be asked to email a copy in advance of the meeting.

After you have presented your evidence, the Committee may wish to ask you some questions. Questioning will be as informal as possible and aims to encourage open debate about the issue being reviewed. You may also be asked to provide some additional information either in person or in writing after the meeting.

Minutes will be produced following the meeting and these will be made available publicly.

If you have any queries or concerns about providing evidence to the Committee, you should contact the Democratic Services Business Manager.

7. Useful Tips

- Assume the Members have read your report prior to the meeting. Don't simply read through a written report verbatim at the meeting – please try to summarise the key messages.
- Avoid abbreviations in any reports. Make sure information is clear and concise.
- Be open and honest in your responses to questions asked. Scrutiny is not there to criticise you or your colleagues or to apportion blame; it is about thorough investigations and reviews.
- Don't be afraid to say that you can't answer a question. Members don't expect you to know everything.
- If you have any concerns about anything said in the meeting and don't want to raise it in front of the Committee, speak to the Democratic Services Business Manager afterwards.

8. Where can I find out more?

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