

# Overview & Scrutiny

## Rapid Scrutiny Exercise Protocol

### Introduction

1. The Rapid Scrutiny Exercise Protocol offers guidance on the operation of Overview and Scrutiny (OS) Rapid Scrutiny Exercises at Wiltshire Council.
2. Where necessary, the Protocol should be read in conjunction with
  - [Part 8](#) of the council's Constitution, which sets out the formal powers of OS
  - The council's OS Task Group Protocol.

### What are rapid scrutiny exercises?

3. Rapid scrutiny exercises are a further way of undertaking OS, in addition to the more traditional forums of **select committees** and **task groups**.
4. Like task groups, rapid scrutiny exercises involve small groups of non-executive members (a minimum of 3) reviewing a single issue. Unlike task groups, rapid scrutiny exercises usually involve only **one** meeting.
5. Rapid scrutiny exercises are used to review specific issues when consideration by select committee or task group is inappropriate because,
  - a) There is a need for more urgent scrutiny;
  - b) The matter does not warrant a full task group review, which is comparatively time- and resource-intensive.
6. Rapid scrutiny exercises are therefore appropriate for,
  - a) Pre-decision scrutiny on a proposal when the matter is urgent. Examples include,
    - when a cabinet member would value scrutiny of an intended delegated decision
    - when cabinet are scheduled to take a decision and the relevant select committee is not scheduled to meet prior to this.

- b) In-depth scrutiny of a single issue to enhance subsequent consideration by select committee. This may include determining if further, longer term scrutiny is appropriate (e.g. by a task group).

## Establishment

7. Where possible, the relevant select committee establishes the rapid scrutiny exercise, agrees its purpose\*, membership and arrangements for reporting back. If, for reasons of urgency, this is not possible then the Chairman and Vice-chairman of the select committee may determine these matters.

\* While time may not allow for the formation of detailed terms of reference (as with task groups), the remit and objective of the exercise should be made as clear as possible.

## Meetings

8. A flexible approach will be needed to scheduling the meeting and providing evidence in advance.
9. Like task groups, rapid scrutiny exercise meetings tend to be less formal than committee meetings. Witnesses usually include the relevant Cabinet Member and service officers. Due to their urgency and brevity, rapid scrutiny exercises do not generally involve witness such as service users or other members of the public. They are also not public meetings.
10. In most cases, rapid scrutiny meetings will be held online in the interests of efficiency, accessibility and minimising travel costs and the council's carbon footprint.
11. When considering a fully or partly (hybrid) face-to-face meeting, rapid scrutiny groups should consider the following factors:
- The availability and preference of all attendees
  - The availability of a suitable meeting room
  - The particular matters to be discussed and needs of witnesses
  - Efficiency of time, carbon footprint and transport costs.
12. Prior to the exercise, witnesses should be advised of the issue to be considered and what will be required of them. The scrutiny officer should ensure that witnesses understand OS's powers and processes and provide them with this Protocol. Witnesses should also be advised whether they will have the opportunity to view or comment on the final report before it is published.
13. In undertaking its role, the rapid scrutiny group may become party to confidential information, provided on trust by another body. Naturally members are expected

to honour this trust and will also need to be mindful of the expectations outlined in the council's Code of Conduct.

14. At the meeting a lead member will be elected from the rapid scrutiny group's membership to
  - a) Chair the meeting
  - b) Lead production of the resultant report (with the Scrutiny officer)
  - c) Attend relevant meetings of the decision-making body
  - d) Report back to the relevant select committee.

## The report

15. Having considered the evidence, the rapid scrutiny group will agree its findings and recommendations. These may include whether further scrutiny is required and how the implementation of recommendations should be monitored.
16. The report should present findings and recommendations **with evidence** in a clear and understandable form. Any resource implications arising from the recommendations should be costed and funded where time allows; where it does not as a minimum any anticipated costs should be identified.
17. Recommendations should be 'SMART' i.e. Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely.
18. Whenever possible, all members of a rapid scrutiny exercise will unanimously agree the content of its final report. However, members are able to submit a minority report stating clearly, with evidence, why they are unable to agree with the majority view.
19. Witnesses should be informed when the rapid scrutiny group's report is published and provided with a link or electronic copy.

## Principles

20. As with task groups, rapid scrutiny exercises should follow the principles set out in the Constitution, which fosters and encourages an approach to OS that is:
  - Inclusive
  - Structured
  - Non-adversarial
  - Reliant on evidence rather than anecdote
  - Cross-party
21. Rapid scrutiny exercise members should aim to:
  - Take a positive and constructive approach

- Make use of the financial, performance, risk and audit data available
- Ensure that outcomes for the customer are the focus
- Consider possible equality and diversity issues in relation to any proposals
- Consider possible service continuity and emergency planning issues.

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If you would like further information on Overview and Scrutiny at Wiltshire Council please contact Democratic Services on 01225 718220 / [committee@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:committee@wiltshire.gov.uk)