



# **South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

## **Scrutiny and Assurance Protocol**

Developed in consultation with



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(Revised November 2023)

## **Introduction**

1. The establishment of a Scrutiny and assurance function supports the Fire and Rescue Authority in achieving its strategic objectives and ensure that its policy and demands in meeting its statutory obligations. Scrutiny has a very important role in researching and providing innovative and practical solutions to particular issues.
2. In summary the main purposes of Scrutiny and Assurance are to:-
  - i) Develop policy.
  - ii) Hold Executive Officers of the Authority and the Service to account, and provide support where needed.
  - iii) Carry out investigations into specific issues.
  - iv) Conduct pre and post-implementation reviews where appropriate and timely.

## **Valuing Scrutiny and Assurance**

3. A fundamental principle of scrutiny and assurance is that it should be a Member led process. If it is conducted efficiently, effectively and in an enquiring manner, rather than in an adversarial and inquisitorial manner, scrutiny and assurance activity can yield a number of benefits including:-
  - Developing better informed Members who are able to investigate below the surface of policies, strategies and processes and, consequently, develop a range of skills and attributes.
  - Complementing the strategic and policy formulation and development work of the Authority and Service.
  - Providing a useful oversight and an element of 'challenge' to performance improvement processes and continuous improvement.
  - Adding value to Service delivery and improving outcomes and outputs for people affected by those decisions.
  - Encouraging public involvement in the policy process.
  - Supporting the development of an environment that stimulates a more reflective, evaluative and evidence-based culture within the Authority and Service.

## **Principles for Scrutiny and Assurance**

4. If scrutiny and assurance is to be effective it is acknowledged that both Members and officers (SYFR and the SY Joint Authorities Governance Unit) should be committed to the process, and that an element of constructive challenge must exist. However, a balance must be maintained to ensure that the process of scrutiny does not create an environment or atmosphere which in itself becomes prohibitive to the full co-operation and participation of all involved.
5. Members undertaking scrutiny and assurance will carry out their work in an open and fair manner and will avoid situations which amount to personal vilification of

anyone who takes part in the scrutiny process. Everyone who takes part in the scrutiny process will be expected to treat all others with respect and to listen to things which others wish to say.

6. In return, Members expect to be treated in the same manner by those invited to take part in the scrutiny and assurance process.

### **Assistance with the Process**

7. Outside of scheduled Performance and Scrutiny Board meetings Members may request help and advice from officers of both the Authority and Service. This will ensure the effective co-ordination of the process and allow the Authority's officers to brief others as required in their deliberations with Members. As part of any scrutiny review process the named officer will:
  - Provide information on specific issues or particular Authority policies and services.
  - Produce written background briefs for Members as appropriate.
  - Arrange meetings with officers at their request.
  - Arrange any site visits / inspections necessary to complete the scrutiny review.
8. Members of the Performance and Scrutiny Board may also be involved in the review process, as appropriate, in being a rapporteur, e.g. gathering evidence or conducting research and reporting back to the Board.

### **Approach to Scrutiny and Assurance**

9. Due to the resource implications involved in undertaking reviews, the Performance and Scrutiny Board will prioritise their work and take appropriate steps to ensure that there is no detrimental impact upon service delivery. The Authority will adopt a themed approach in determining appropriate areas for scrutiny and assurance, looking holistically at an area of service or function, the strategies and the end-to-end processes. It will also consider the following as a source of reference:
  - Performance information.
  - Programme and Projects reports.
  - Inspectorate reports / Self-assessment reports.
  - Internal processes and procedures.
  - Staff Group / Forum feedback.
  - Environmental scanning / Changes in legislation.
- 10.1. Members of the Authority may however identify issues they feel worthy of scrutiny which will be referred to the Performance and Scrutiny Board for evaluation and possible incorporation into the work programme.

### **Performance and Scrutiny Board Meetings**

#### **Procedure**

11. Before undertaking a review or investigation the Performance and Scrutiny Board and officers from the SYFR and Joint Authorities Governance Unit will agree:-

- i) An appropriate working title.
- ii) Clear objectives.
- iii) Specific scope of enquiry (terms of reference).
- iv) Timetable.
- v) Method of scrutiny process – (how the review or investigation will be conducted). This will cover:-
  - a) whether it will be an in-depth or minor review;
  - b) whether evidence will be submitted either orally/in written form/written submissions only/ presentations or a combination of one or more of these forms.
  - c) whether an independent Member needs to be appointed.
  - d) identification of target groups and/or individuals that the Board wishes to invite to submit evidence. Participants should be informed of how they can help with the review / investigation and what they would be invited to contribute in terms of evidence etc.
  - e) an Evidence Submission Plan – if participants are invited to meet with the Board it needs to be made clear to them what the purpose of the review / investigation is and what questions the Board wishes to ask on particular areas/issues. This will allow participants to come prepared with the necessary information and will hopefully encourage people to respond to the invitation to give evidence.
  - f) an expected timetable - some reviews / investigations will take longer than others, but it is important to have an idea of the timeframe in order to keep the Board focused upon its task. The timetable can always be amended if particular elements of the review / investigation take longer than expected.
  - g) whether an informal meeting/presentation is required in order to allow the Board to be briefed upon/understand issues prior to the scope of the review / investigation being finalised.
  - h) the number of intended meetings to hear evidence and whether these will be conducted in public.

### **Format**

12. The format for meetings of the Performance and Scrutiny Board will be as follows:-
- i) The agenda will be simple and clear.
  - ii) The Chair of the meeting will identify whether time constraints will be placed on individual elements of the meeting.
  - iii) Full participation by all in attendance will be encouraged.
  - iv) Officers / 'Witnesses' should not speak at the meeting except where invited to do so by the Chair.

- v) The conduct of the Board is also subject to any other appropriate policies, procedures or protocols approved by the Authority in consultation with the Chief Fire Officer and Clerk to the Authority.

### **Consideration of Evidence (Internal)**

- 13. After the Board has gathered all the evidence it wishes on an issue, there will be an opportunity for the Board to deliberate the issue to make recommendations.
- 14. This may be at the same meeting after evidence has been gathered or at a separate meeting. A report providing the findings of the review will be prepared – along with recommendations – and will be discussed by the Board before being submitted to the Authority. The Chair of the Board will be called upon at a meeting of the full Authority to present the report and help inform the debate.

### **Consideration of Evidence (External)**

- 15. The input of key stakeholders / partners / representative bodies is recognised as being essential to the success of scrutiny but needs to be proportionate to the area under scrutiny.
- 16. The gathering of evidence and information from other parties will respect the requirements and provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. The provision of information to scrutiny will be governed by relevant legislation and established protocols for the sharing of data.
- 17. Where requests for external information are made by the Performance and Scrutiny Board they will be made in writing. The request will clearly identify why the information is needed and what it is to be used for to enable the recipient(s) to identify the appropriate information to be provided.
- 18. Where personal or exempt information is requested to allow Scrutiny to effectively undertake its function, and there is likely to be a breach, the information may be de-personalised so that the individual cannot be identified and no breach takes place.

### **Witnesses**

- 19. The Authority may on occasions wish to call on the services of witnesses either from within or outside the organisation. The decision will be a matter for the Performance and Scrutiny Board and take account of the likely cost of procuring such services.

### **Reports and Recommendations**

- 20. Reports will be submitted to the Performance and Scrutiny Board in line with the timescales agreed as part of the scoping exercise, taking account of any legitimate slippage.
- 21. If the report contains recommendations that has implications for external partners / organisations the report shall include an explanation of the issue scrutinised, a summary of the evidence considered and a list of the participants involved in the scrutiny review.

### **Implementation Review / Evaluation**

- 22. It is important that the Scrutiny Review is not just seen as a finite task, but the start of a process of service improvement. Recommendations from Scrutiny Reviews

should be incorporated within the Corporate / Service Planning process, and will be monitored by Performance and Scrutiny Board to completion.

23. The Performance and Scrutiny Board will consider building into the future work programme post-implementation reviews to monitor the outcomes from Service Reviews, Scrutiny Reviews etc.

#### **Review of Scrutiny Protocol**

24. This protocol will be reviewed on an annual basis or more frequently if experience and circumstances highlight that amendments may need to be made.