

Press release: Embrace the benefits of public scrutiny, councils told

Councils are encouraged to embrace scrutiny of their spending decisions to achieve value for money, improve services and address the public's concerns in [new guidance](#) published today (7 May 2019).

New statutory guidance for local and combined authorities in England stresses the role of their scrutiny committees – made up of councillors – in holding them to account over local decision-making.

Developed by the government in consultation with the public sector, the guidance outlines what effective scrutiny looks like and the positives it can bring to local authorities.

Key points include:

- councils should adopt a position of sharing any information asked for by their scrutiny committee, and if information can't be shared in public they should consider sharing it in a closed session
- scrutiny committees should be constructive 'critical friends' with a vital role of amplifying the voices and concerns of the public when councils take important decisions
- local authorities should also consider whether contracts with companies delivering services should include a requirement to supply information to scrutiny committees

Minister for Local Government, Rishi Sunak MP, said:

Scrutiny committees form an integral part of the work of councils in delivering services by acting on behalf of residents to hold councillors and staff to account for the important decisions they make.

That is why I have set out new guidance to ensure authorities and residents can reap the benefits of effective scrutiny, by instilling a culture that welcomes challenge.

Jacqui McKinlay, Chief Executive of the Centre for Public Scrutiny, said:

We welcome government's timely revision of its statutory guidance on scrutiny, and particularly its focus on leadership buy-in, culture and behaviours that are so central to ensuring that effective overview and scrutiny can operate, and make an impact, at local level.

We look forward to working closely with our colleagues at the Local

Government Association and individual councils to use the new guidance as an excellent opportunity to reflect and review their current approach to scrutiny”.

The [guidance](#), which applies to local and combined authorities in England, has been published on Gov.uk.

The guidance was developed by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) with the assistance of the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

The government consulted widely with the sector to shape the new guidance.

MHCLG held a roundtable event in September 2018 attended by the Local Government Association, the Institute for Local Government, Association of Democratic Support Officers, the Committee for Standards in Public Life, Centre for Public Scrutiny, councillors and council scrutiny officers.

Submissions were received from more than 30 authorities, organisations and individuals with involvement in conducting, researching and supporting scrutiny, and MHCLG attended a County and Unitary Scrutiny Officers Network meeting to gain insight. Work was also informed by the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee’s report and submissions to it.