



**AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE  
COMMITTEE**

**STATUTORY SCRUTINY  
WITNESS GUIDE**

## **What is Statutory Scrutiny?**

Under the new democratic arrangements in Hartlepool, the Council has a statutory responsibility to consider issues relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services and to establish a Crime and Disorder Committee to scrutinise and review the decisions / actions of the Crime and Disorder Reduction. These scrutiny functions will be undertaken through the Council's Audit and Governance Committee.

The statutory scrutiny function helps Councillors ensure that the Council and partner organisations are making the best decisions for the people of Hartlepool.

The Audit and Governance Committee will review and scrutinise health and crime and disorder issues. The length of a review will be dependent upon the specific issue under consideration and this can vary from a few meetings to a more substantial review conducted over a period of several months.

The Audit and Governance Committee can call council officers; representatives from NHS bodies and relevant health service providers; representatives from the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and other witnesses to answer questions and provide evidence about the issue being reviewed. The Committee will collate as much evidence as possible surrounding the issue within the time available. When recommendations are formulated at the conclusion of a statutory scrutiny inquiry, the Audit and Governance Committee will agree a formal report, which will be considered by the appropriate body.

## **What statutory scrutiny does not do!**

Statutory scrutiny does not deal with queries from an individual, concerns or complaints about council services. Scrutiny is not a confrontational process looking at allocate blame. In reality scrutiny is about looking for improvements and recommending the best options.

## **Who will be at Audit and Governance meetings?**

Audit and Governance meetings are held in public to encourage community participation. Members of the public are welcome to attend Audit and Governance Committee. The press also attend meetings however, it is unusual for more than one journalist to be present during the meetings unless a high profile issue is under consideration.

The majority of persons at Audit and Governance meetings will be the elected councillors. (This may also include co-opted members). Support officers will also be present and a Democratic Services Officer will minute the meeting. Other officers with an interest in the scrutiny topic under discussion may be present as will other witnesses.

## **What happens when I arrive for an Audit and Governance meeting?**

Upon your arrival at the venue for the meeting, you will normally be met by an officer supporting the meeting. The officer will explain the format of the meeting, provide you with an indication of when your evidence is likely to be heard and will answer any queries that you may have. The Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee will also introduce him/herself to you before the start of the meeting.

# PROVIDING EVIDENCE

## Written Evidence

The Audit and Governance Committee encourages the submission of written evidence. This ensures that the investigation is conducted as thoroughly as possible.

Written evidence should be clearly presented. Briefing papers are preferable to reports however, no specific format is prescribed. All written evidence should contain a brief introduction to the individual or organisation submitting it and details of any recommendations for action that the witnesses would like the committee to consider during the course of the investigation.

All submissions will be circulated to members of the Committee and may be appended to the final report. If witnesses wish the whole or part of their evidence to remain confidential to the Committee this should be clearly stated in a covering letter. In summary, written evidence needs to:

- Be concise and factually accurate
- Explain any jargon, acronyms, abbreviations and technical terms used
- Refer to or include relevant policy and other key documents where necessary
- Address the specific issues asked by the committee

## Oral Evidence

Witnesses may be asked to deliver a short presentation to the Forum. If you are asked to give a presentation you may assume that members have read your written evidence beforehand.

Presentations of approximately 10 minutes should be sufficient to provide an overview of the key points. Members may then wish to ask you some questions about your evidence and report. The questions will be phrased to promote a frank, open and relaxed discussion around the topic involving all the Forum members and witnesses. The Committee may ask for further information to be provided in writing after the meeting or schedule a further meeting to discuss the issues in further detail.

If you have any doubts or concerns about the line of questioning or the practicality of providing the information requested then contact the support officer as soon as possible.

Oral evidence sessions are usually conducted in public session and transcripts will be taken which may subsequently be made available publicly.

## The Key Principles

The following principles should underpin all statutory scrutiny enquiries. They should be adhered to by members and officers alike.

- Adherence to processes and protocols
- Interactive and participatory
- Respect for all
- Use of plain English
- Effective listening
- Careful selection of witnesses - make clear what is expected of them
- Open
- Appropriate use of confidentiality
- No party political slant
- Informal in style
- Be clear as to whether evidence is based on policy, information or is anecdotal

### **Witness Expenses**

If as a result of being asked to attend a Hartlepool Borough Council Audit and Governance Committee you have incurred expenses then you may be entitled to claim reasonable 'out of pocket' expenses. You should where possible obtain receipts of any expenditure incurred. For further information please ask the support officer who will provide the relevant forms.

### **For further information**

On our yearly Statutory Scrutiny Work Programme, dates of meetings and recently published reports visit the Council's web site or contact our Support Team.

**Tel: 01429 28 4142**

**Email: [scrutiny@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@hartlepool.gov.uk)**

**[www.hartlepool.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/scrutiny)**

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