

North Herts Council – Scrutiny Charter

This Charter sets out the purpose and objectives of Scrutiny within North Herts, as well as the expectations of those involved with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S).

1. What is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny is an important part of the council's democratic governance. It is a process whereby councillors who are not part of the council's executive can play an influential role in the shaping of policy and decisions that will have a real benefit on behalf of the community they represent.

2. Objectives of Scrutiny at North Herts

Scrutiny at North Herts aims to fulfil the following objectives:

- To **provide a critical friend** to the Cabinet and senior officers of the council, on the matters of greatest importance to our residents.
- To **enhance accountability and transparency** across the Council area, thereby strengthening the democratic process.
- To **improve decision-making and policy formation**, offering independent perspectives and ensuring that a diverse range of views are considered.

3. Principles of O&S

The work of O&S at North Herts is guided by the following principles ("3i's"):

1. **Independence** – O&S members should be open-minded, and strive to operate independently of political group, the Cabinet and senior council officers.
2. **Initiative** – O&S members should be curious, resourceful, and proactive; seeking always to make positive contributions in the interests of residents.
3. **Integrity** – O&S members should be diligent, collaborative, and respectful of each other; and of those whose work or ideas are being scrutinised.

4. Key functions of O&S

O&S achieves its objectives chiefly by exercising the following functions:

1. Considering proposals from, and making recommendations to, the Cabinet and/or Leadership team.
2. Undertaking proactive exploratory work to inform policy formation, where opportunities to do so effectively are identified.
3. Ensuring council decision makers are held to account, and that where things don't go to plan, appropriate lessons are identified and then implemented.
4. Enhancing the scrutiny function itself, through continuous improvement.

The full list of functions of O&S is detailed in the Council Constitution ([Section 6](#)) and further guidance will be published in the Scrutiny Toolkit.

5. Roles and responsibilities in relation to O&S

Role	Responsibilities
Members of the Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adhere to the objectives and principles outlined above • Understand the role and make of use of any available training • Be prepared for meetings, and attend briefings when offered • Be respectful of officer time, and where possible provide questions in advance to allow for more in-depth answers • Raise questions which are short and to the point, and in the spirit of constructive challenge • Be mindful of any proposed recommendations and focus attention on how they might be improved • Work with the Chair and Vice Chair to improve the overall effectiveness of the scrutiny function, and to ensure that it adds maximum value in line with the objectives
Chair / Vice Chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead by example • Create an environment which facilitates constructive challenge • Chair meetings fairly and encourage healthy debate, whilst maintaining a clear focus on the issues at hand • Ensure that questions are answered in full and encourage members to deep dive for further information if appropriate • Lead the prioritisation of the O&S work programme, taking into account the views of committee members • Present the Committee's recommendations to Cabinet • Communicate frequently with the Scrutiny officer and work to improve the effectiveness of the committee as a whole
Scrutiny Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adhere to the objectives and principles outlined above • Provide support to the Chair and Vice Chair - before, during and after committee meetings • Ensure that Cabinet members and seniors officers know what to expect when attending O&S meetings • Be prepared to challenge senior officers and Cabinet members at times, in pursuit of the committee's objectives • Monitor actions, recommendations and decisions of the committee to ensure its ongoing effectiveness • Schedule committee meetings, briefings, and ensure relevant materials are prepared and circulated in a timely manner • Liaise with outside representatives, where appropriate
Cabinet members / Senior officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise the purpose, objectives and principles of Scrutiny • Assist the Chair, VC and Scrutiny Officer to proactively identify items where scrutiny may be beneficial or necessary • Attend O&S meetings when requested to do so, and provide relevant materials in advance • Be prepared to answer questions and to contribute to the discussion in a constructive manner