



# Joining the dots: Understanding corporate governance

## Standards committees, overview & scrutiny committees, audit committees: Case studies

### Newport

A few years ago a review of scrutiny arrangements in Newport led to the scrutiny function being relocated to its current home within the 'Law & Standards' division. This brought together the key modernisation agenda elements of scrutiny and the development of a new ethical framework.

The chief scrutiny officer reports direct to the council's monitoring officer and all reports to and from scrutiny always include comments from the monitoring officer and the section 151 officer.

Scrutiny also has close links to the audit team and one of their overview and scrutiny forums acts as their audit committee – regularly receiving reports on audit opinions, progress against the internal audit plan etc. The chief scrutiny officer attend all their meetings.

Where items arise at scrutiny which may be of interest to the standards committee they are referred on - eg scrutiny takes a report each year on the Ombudsman's Annual Report. In fact the chief scrutiny officer also co-ordinates the council's responses to the Ombudsman's inquires and liaises with the monitoring officer over any issues which may arise in relation to individual complaints. This also helps them in their scrutiny role as, whilst the scrutiny "day job" gives the strategic overview, the involvement in individual complaints provides a degree of operational understanding which can then inform future scrutiny work.

#### More information:

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Chief Scrutiny Officer/Prif Swyddog Archwilio

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

## Tameside

An example of practical working between a standards committee and the scrutiny function is in Tameside where last year the standards committee asked a scrutiny panel to review the provision of support, learning and development for elected members in Tameside.

This was instigated following the standards committee's consideration of the report of the All Party Parliamentary Local Government Group that was formed to bring forward proposals to strengthen the role of ward councillors.

The outcome of the report was a much improved induction programme for new members, enhanced IT provision and training, and better facilities for members.

**More information:**

Howard Boots

Head of Scrutiny

Tameside Council, Greater Manchester

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

## Cambridgeshire

Cambridgeshire County Council's scrutiny function is situated within the 'Internal Audit, Information Governance and Scrutiny' department.

Scrutiny officers share findings with internal auditors, e.g. work on the council's shared services programme. Officers regularly look at the audit plan to see if there are areas that scrutiny should be looking at and view audit reports to help develop lines of enquiry for scrutiny reviews.

One of the council's scrutiny committees has also just completed a review of member training and development, as in the Tameside example above.

**More information:**

Scrutiny Development Team

Cambridgeshire County Council

[www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/democracy/scrutiny](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/democracy/scrutiny)

## Some key principles for successful working together by standards committees, overview & scrutiny and audit committees:

- **Co-location of staff** in a joined-up governance team can be valuable and mean more effective use of staff resources.
- **Sharing work plans** to see if there are common areas of interest where work can be shared, for example on council governance, member support and development, and financial control issues.
- **Clarity of different roles and responsibilities** is important to ensure no confusion or treading on toes.
- **Consider joint involvement in partnerships** governance reviews – eg codes of conduct, decision-making processes, financial controls.

## References

- 1 CIPFA and SOLACE: Delivering good governance in Local Government – guidance notes for English authorities (2007)
- 2 CIPFA: Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities (2005)
- 3 OPM and CIPFA: The Good Governance Standard for Public services (2004)
- 4 Corporate Governance improvement and trust in local public services (2003)

For more information, including web links for these publications, please call **Cara Afzal**, Deputy Research and Monitoring Manager, the Standards Board for England on **0161 817 5414** or email [cara.afzal@standardsboard.gov.uk](mailto:cara.afzal@standardsboard.gov.uk).

## Useful websites

Standards Board for England: [www.standardsboard.gov.uk](http://www.standardsboard.gov.uk)

Centre for Public Scrutiny: [www.cfps.org.uk](http://www.cfps.org.uk)

Audit Commission: [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

National Audit Office: [www.nao.org.uk](http://www.nao.org.uk)

The Improvement Network: [www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk](http://www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk)