



Scrutiny and Audit Committee

Handbook

Page	
2.	CONTENTS
3.	INTRODUCTION
4.	WHAT IS THE SCRUTINY AND AUDIT COMMITTEE?
5.	What does it do?
5.	What does it not do?
6.	INVESTIGATIONS
7.	How does it operate?
8.	Requirements of Councillors
8.	Officer support
8.	Choice of topic for investigation
9.	Scoring process
10.	Defining the remit
10.	Utilising external experts
11.	Background papers
11.	Setting in context
11	Hearing potential witnesses
13.	Preparing relevant questions
13.	What happens at the meeting?
14.	What happens after the meeting?
15.	What happens next?
17.	AUDIT
17.	Internal Audit
18.	External Audit
18.	Performance assessed
18.	TREASURY MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY
19.	SERVICE SAVING MONITORING
19.	RISK MANAGEMENT
20.	APPENDICES
20.	Appendix 1 – Service Briefing Information
25.	Appendix 2 – Terms of Reference Proforma
26.	Appendix 3 – Terms of Reference for External Experts
27.	Appendix 4 – Letter of Invitation to Witnesses
31.	Appendix 5 – Witness Questions Cover Letter
32.	Appendix 6 – Feedback Proforma
40.	Appendix 7 – Sample Action Plan Response to Investigation Recommendations

INTRODUCTION

Since its establishment in 2002, Aberdeenshire Council's Scrutiny and Audit Committee has been in a continual process of self review and evolution. Its greatest strengths have been determined to lie in the Councillors who devote time and commitment to the work of scrutiny and audit. The processes previously implemented have arisen directly from their personal approach, but became a cohesive, cross-party and corporate strength. Many of the cultural aspects of its successful operation have been rooted in the approach established by the previous Committee and this document attempts to encapsulate a flavour of that culture. It also seeks to share what has been successful in the past and highlight lessons learnt from previous experiences.

As the individuals who serve on the Committee change, bringing their own skills and abilities to the process, the operational practise will continue to evolve, but the key principles will remain constant. In carrying out its work, the Committee will seek to be Deliberative, Outward looking, Investigative, Inclusive, Open, Influencing, Evidence based, Proactive, Transparent, Flexible, Accountable, Non-partisan and Responsive.

This document seeks to pull together, in a single volume, the various leaflets and information relating to Aberdeenshire Council's Scrutiny and Audit Committee which have been published. It also provides a narrative of the processes which the Committee follows in order to undertake its work, and, in particular, focuses on how the formal investigations are undertaken.

It is hoped that this collective overview of the Committee, setting its operation in context, describing locally adopted procedures and processes, will be helpful to Councillors serving on the Committee; to those throughout Aberdeenshire Council who may wish to become more aware of the Committee and its working processes; and also to the general public who are interested in how Aberdeenshire Council has chosen to go beyond the statutory requirements for audit and self scrutiny.

This handbook will be kept under review and will be updated on a regular basis to reflect any amendments to practice or procedure. This is the first formal update of the original 2007 handbook and takes on board the additional treasury scrutiny role agreed at Committee on 14 April, 2010 and the overview of service savings agreed on 30 March, 2011.

Aberdeenshire Council is proud of the work undertaken by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee to date and believes that the strengths of the past will be the foundations of yet more development and growth.

Cllr Peter Bellarby
Chair,
Scrutiny and Audit
Committee.
September, 2011

Cllr Amanda Allan,
Vice-Chair,
Scrutiny and Audit
Committee.

Colin D Mackenzie,
Chief Executive,
Aberdeenshire Council.

WHAT IS THE SCRUTINY AND AUDIT COMMITTEE?

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee is a central Committee of Aberdeenshire Council. It is made up of 12 councillors, reflecting the political spread across the authority and, unlike the Council's other policy committees, does not allow for substitutes to attend. The Committee was established in 2002 and has been given powers:

- (a) to review the effectiveness of Council policy implementation and Council service delivery, and to identify potential improvements;
- (b) to undertake an annual programme of reviews;
- (c) to make recommendations regarding improvements to the performance of services;
- (d) to call upon any officer of the Council or Chair/Vice-Chair of the Council's committees to give evidence or provide written reports, as appropriate;
- (e) to call upon expert witnesses or members of the public to give evidence, where necessary;
- (f) to review, in conjunction with Council managers, the adequacy of: (i) internal control systems, (ii) policies and practices employed to ensure compliance with relevant statutes, directions, guidance and policies, (iii) financial information presented to the Council, and (iv) risk assessment arrangements and procedures;
- (g) to review, in conjunction with Council managers, management letters or reports, and compliance with relevant codes of practice;
- (h) to ensure that the Council's Internal Audit function is properly resourced and has appropriate standing within the Council;
- (i) to review the activities of the Internal Audit function, including its annual work programme and review all audit reports and management delivery of agreed recommendations; and
- (j) to manage all aspects of the Council's relationship with its external auditors, including the review of annual work programmes and strategic risk analysis.

In April, 2010, additional powers were given to the Committee to (a) review the treasury management policy and procedures and make recommendations to the responsible body and (b) review and challenge treasury management activities within the context of the risk management policy.

In March, 2011, the Committee was given an additional role to monitor service savings across the Council's various functions.

Unlike its similarly titled counterparts in England, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee is not a statutory group, but has been adopted by Aberdeenshire Council as a means of reviewing the Council's performance and managing internal and external audit issues.

In Scotland, the Directors of Finance section of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) issued a guidance note covering 'Audit Committee principles in Local Authorities in Scotland'. This set out three fundamental principles to define the expression 'Audit Committee

principles', suggesting that there should be effective mechanisms in place to provide:

- (a) independent assessment of the adequacy of the risk management framework and the associated control environment within the authority;
- (b) independent scrutiny of the authority's financial and non-financial performance to the extent that it affects the authority's exposure to risk and weakness in the control environment; and
- (c) assurance that any issues arising from the process of drawing up, auditing and certifying the authority's annual accounts are properly addressed.

The guidance note makes no assumption that there will be a single audit committee but is clear that the creation of an audit committee (or equivalent), to give effect to good audit committee principles, is good practice.

Aberdeenshire Council is amongst the significant majority of Scottish local authorities which have an audit committee. Not all have wider scrutiny functions. Aberdeenshire is one of few authorities which carry out a programme of investigations or reviews of particular aspects of services.

The Committee has adopted the following principles of operation:

Open	Transparent	Investigative
Deliberative	Evidence-based	Accountable
Responsive	Inclusive	Influencing
Flexible	Proactive	Non-partisan
	Outward Looking	

What does it do?

The Committee has Aberdeenshire-wide responsibilities and two main tasks. Firstly, it reviews the performance of the Council, looking at the effectiveness of Council policy implementation and service delivery through a self-determined programme of investigations. Potential improvements identified in this process are recommended to Council for consideration in the investigation reports. These reports are public documents and are available, in full, on Aberdeenshire Council's website (<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/about/scrutiny.asp>).

Secondly, both the Council's internal and external auditors report their findings to the Committee.

What does it not do?

The Committee does not make policy and does not take decisions about the operation of Council services. It may make recommendations to Council on policy or delivery matters. To date, all the recommendations made by the Committee have been unanimous and cross party.

INVESTIGATIONS

Since its establishment in 2002, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee has investigated a wide range of topics, recommending changes resulting in real improvements to Council Services. These investigations have included:

- **Levering external funding** (2003 and 2005) (Investigations No.s 1 and 7) – the Council committed to lead partnership investigation of potential additional funding. In 2005, this was reviewed;
- **Roads maintenance** (2003) (Investigation No. 2) – the Council accepted the need for a computerised Roads Maintenance Management System, a review of service delivery options, increased workforce, improved public contact and the lobbying, directly and through other organisations, of the Scottish Executive for additional funding;
- **School meals** (2004) (Investigation No. 3) – the Council accepted the Scrutiny and Audit Committee’s recommendations on healthy eating and improved financial management;
- **Public consultation and engagement** (2004) (Investigation No. 4) – as a result of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee’s report, the Council adopted new consultation procedures and strengthened its communications team;
- **Maintenance and repair of Aberdeenshire schools** (2005) (Investigation No. 5) – a revision of the Devolved Educational Management scheme, improved awareness of the allocation of maintenance and repairs responsibility and improvements in internal communications were proposed and accepted;
- **Processing of planning applications** (2005) (Investigation No. 6) – a range of efficiency and other improvements identified by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee were agreed and implemented by the Planning Service of the Council;
- **The recruitment process of Aberdeenshire Council** (2005) (Investigation No. 8) – actions were recommended by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee to tackle recruitment difficulties, leading to changed procedures, better advertising and cost savings;
- **Governance and accountability in partnership working** (2006) (Investigation No. 9) – concerns expressed by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee about risk management and transparency of decision making led to the Council adopting a formal policy on partnership working;
- **Decentralisation of decision-making** (2006 and 2010) (Investigation No.s 10 and 20) – the Scrutiny and Audit Committee identified opportunities for strengthening the role of the Council’s Area Committees;
- **Developer contributions in Aberdeenshire** (2006) (Investigation No.11) – increased public consultation on developer contributions was recommended by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee;
- **Community learning and development** (2007) (Investigation No.12) – the Committee sought a higher profile and more support for the Community Learning Development service, with its vision

communicated more effectively and its further integration in partnership work both within and outwith the Council;

- **Climate change** (2007) (Investigation No. 13) – the Council accepted the Scrutiny and Audit Committee’s recommendations and proposals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions;
- **Management of public toilets** (2007) (Investigation No.14) – agreed by Council that strategy for provision be reviewed along a clear hierarchy of provision, with exploration of extended partnership provision;
- **Duplication of funding and effort in Council-funded organisations** (2008) (Investigation No.15) – established revised policies and procedures for better coordination of funding to external bodies, with better and more effective web and paper information available;
- **Equity of sports and leisure provision in Aberdeenshire** (2009) – (Investigation No.16) – encouraged consideration of the establishment of a trust, or trusts for arms length provision of sports and recreational facilities, the adoption of a smartcard membership payment scheme and promoting the concept of sports provision standards relating to local academy networks; and
- **Policy Led Budgeting** (2009) (Investigation No.17) – supported the work of the finance section in linking resource allocations to the delivery of priorities of the Single Outcome Agreement, Council Vision, Strategic and Service priorities.
- **Measuring the effectiveness of Scrutiny and Audit investigations** (2010) (Investigation No. 19) – Action plan approved by Council on 30 June, 2011.

How does it operate?

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee has a heavy workload. Formal meetings of the Committee are held every 6 weeks or so, as part of the standard schedule of council committees. However as part of the Committee’s work involves carrying out an annual programme of reviews or investigations into aspects of the Council’s policy implementation and service delivery, there are a great number of additional informal meetings. Some are evidence gathering sessions; others are occasions when the Committee draws its conclusions from the evidence provided and constructs its investigation report. The Committee meets most weeks and operates as a cross party team, co-opting external experts to assist in individual investigations.

In order to carry out its investigative work successfully, the Committee needs to seek information from Councillors, Council employees, external witnesses and service users. This may be through evidence gathering sessions or by other means such as site visits. It has the power, should it see fit, to require named officers to attend its meetings to give evidence although, to date, this has not been needed as the work of the Committee has been supported at all levels.

Requirements of Councillors

For Councillors sitting on the Scrutiny and Audit Committee, including the Chair and Vice-Chair, the workload, and the nature of the work, can be particularly onerous – both in terms of time commitment and also in the skills which are necessary to undertake the particular areas of work. To be able to undertake the investigation process, a greater provision for induction and training is necessary for those Councillors who sit on the Committee. In 2007, following the local government election, a two day induction session was held prior to the new Committee beginning their first investigation. This intended to allow members to develop the skills required for effective scrutiny, including subjects such as good and bad practice, the assessment of evidence in its various forms and useful questioning techniques. The Committee has traditionally used Away Days, in non-election years held on an annual basis, in order to focus on more specific training requirements on particular issues relating to the Committee's operation. In the initial months of the post election 2007 Committee, there were several such sessions. It is expected that this will be repeated after the 2012 local government election.

Officer Support

The Committee is also supported in its work by a team of officers, located in several services. Its lead officer, based in Customer Communication and Improvement, Corporate Services, has the prime focus of the investigative work of the Committee. The Committee's formal processes are undertaken by a committee officer, based in Legal and Governance, Corporate Services. Both the committee officer and the lead officer have a role in ensuring that all possible steps are taken to make the Committee's operation effective. This includes, during the investigations, making sure that witnesses, including members of staff, are given good advance notice of any invitation to meet Committee members, are properly briefed about the arrangements for the meeting and receive adequate notice of the questions to be discussed at the meeting. Officer support is also provided for taking notes of evidence gathering sessions and ensuring that these are agreed with witnesses before they become matters of public record.

The Chief Internal Auditor and the Director of Corporate Services also work closely with the Committee on the formal reporting of audit and scrutiny matters. The operation of the Committee also depends on the work of the officers through out the Council who may be called to report to the Committee on a variety of matters.

Choice of topic for investigation

On an annual basis, usually in January or February of each year, all Councillors and the Council Management Team are contacted to ask if there are any matters which they would wish to have considered for investigation by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee. In thinking about possible topics to suggest, they are encouraged to consider:

- Residents and Employee Surveys;
- Internal and external audit reports;
- Issues raised by residents, local community groups and external organisations;
- Government policies and priorities;
- Complaints;
- Previous Scrutiny and Audit investigations;
- Repeated budget over and underspend; and
- Performance Management information.

In suggesting a potential topic, the proposer is asked to explain why they are putting the topic forward and identify some key questions which they would like the investigation to consider.

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee then meets, in March or April, to consider all the suggestions put forward. It seeks background information from officers about the proposed topics and, in particular, will ask if there are any other reviews, current or planned, relevant to the proposed topics. This, it is hoped, would avoid unnecessary duplication of investigation. The proposed topics are then ranked against a set of criteria, (as detailed under scoring process below) and, on the basis of this ranking, the Committee will agree on three or four topics for investigation in the coming year. The Committee may also request reports on some potential topics not selected for full investigation.

Scoring process

The criteria for assessing proposed investigation topics include the following:

- Issue identified by members as a key issue for the public (via members' surgeries and contact with constituents);
- Issue raised by staff as key matter for investigation;
- Poor performing service (evidence from performance indicators/ bench marking);
- Service ranked as important by Council's community (e.g. through market surveys/citizens' panels);
- High level of user/general public dissatisfaction with the service (market surveys/ citizens' panel/complaints);
- Public interest issue covered in local media;
- High level of budgetary commitment to the service/policy area (as percentage of total Council expenditure);
- Pattern of budgetary overspends/underspends;
- Council corporate priority area;
- Central government priority area;
- Issues raised by External Audit management letters/ Internal Audit reports;
- New government guidance or legislation; and
- Key reports or new evidence provided by external organisations on key issues.

Topics proposed for investigation should be rejected if:

- The issue is already being examined by an officer group, with changes imminent;
- The issue is being examined by another internal body;
- The issue will be addressed as part of a Best Value Review within the next year or so; or
- New legislation or guidance is expected within the next year.

Topics which score highly on the first list of criteria are then further examined on a graded assessment to evaluate their (a) efficiency potential, (b) effectiveness potential and (c) evidence, or perception, of current problems. The topics which come top on this second assessment are those chosen for further investigation. In this process, there is an element of judgement applied by the members of the Committee.

For some of the proposed topics, a written report may be requested initially from the relevant service, as opposed to a full investigation. On some occasions, topics dealt with in this way have subsequently been considered for full investigation.

Defining the remit

As originally proposed, a topic may be quite loosely defined. If chosen for investigation, the definition of the issue is clarified to allow a precise focus. Comments from the various services are considered in this process and guide the committee as to the validity of the proposed topic.

Additional information will be sought which will further define the remit of any subsequent investigation. This work is carried out by the lead officer in consultation with the proposer of the issue, with advice provided by the appropriate service. When the lead service is contacted initially, the service is provided with briefing information (as in Appendix 1). This does not replace continuous dialogue between the lead officer and the chief officers of the service, but is intended to give services an awareness of the processes and procedures which will be followed.

A terms of reference schedule is completed, and submitted for formal committee approval. This will define the specific target of the investigation, identify potential experts and witnesses who it is thought may advance the investigation and indicate potential costs which may be incurred in completing the investigation (see Appendix 2 for sample). The terms of reference statement defines the intent, as it is perceived at the start of the process, of how the investigation will proceed, but may need to be amended to allow the Committee to pursue additional evidence sources or lines of questioning which arise during the investigation timetable.

Utilising external experts

In the process of agreeing the remit of the investigation, the Committee has powers to engage an external expert to facilitate the review. If it is decided that such assistance would benefit the investigation, a survey will be made of

appropriate experts who may be able to guide the Committee. These experts are generally external to the Council, accredited professionals, or academics, with a background in the topic under discussion. They have the role of being able to provide a framework of general understanding of the issue, acting as a touchstone for assessing and responding to the information gathered during the investigation process and also sharing their experience of the issue in its context wider than Aberdeenshire.

The external expert may also contribute to the choice of questions put to witnesses to maximise the information available to the committee.

The general terms of reference for the appointment of an external expert were approved by the Committee in December, 2008 (as detailed in Appendix 3).

In some investigations, it may be that there is no need for an external expert, as the matter under discussion is easily accessible without professional guidance. However, the benefit of an outside oversight is helpful to other investigations.

Background papers

When an investigation remit has been agreed, the lead officer, in discussion with the appropriate service(s) and external expert, if applicable, will identify information on the topic to be made available to the Committee in advance of its deliberations. This may take the form of internal spreadsheets, policy documents or committee reports, published research, or other external information. The purpose in providing these background papers is to allow the Committee to have a general awareness of, and access to information on, the matter to be considered. This process is also intended to ensure that all members have access to the same information to assist their deliberations.

Previously these papers were issued in hard copy, but the Committee has moved, in 2011, to making these available on the Ward Pages for members to access.

Setting in context

When the background papers have been made available to the Committee, and any contextual briefing has been provided by the external expert, the investigation process of hearings begins with a session lead by the service(s) concerned, which identifies the current situation relating to the topic under discussion. This session is intended to allow members of the Committee to increase their awareness of the current status of the issue under investigation in addition to providing a service perspective.

Hearing potential witnesses

Once a general grounding has been provided by the lead service, by the external expert, and in background information made available to the Committee, evidence gathering sessions hear from witnesses, either

individually or in groups. The witnesses will have been identified, albeit not exclusively listed, in the terms of reference adopted for the investigation. Witnesses may be either external to the authority, or may be drawn from its staff resources. This may include the undernoted:-

- Councillors and council employees, at any level, asked to attend because they have particular knowledge or expertise relevant to the investigation topic.
- Representatives of the Council's partner organisations invited to give an external viewpoint on the area being investigated. This is an important opportunity to develop relationships with partner and external organisations and to increase the Council's understanding of their work.
- Representatives of service users, invited to attend to give their views on how services are meeting their needs and possible improvements.

For example, in the investigation into the Management of Public Toilets (Investigation No. 14, 2007), five evidence gathering sessions were held, involving a wide range of internal and external witnesses, providers, users and partners. Initially the Committee heard from lead officers in the Planning and Environmental and Transportation and Infrastructure Services, to set the context and provide information as to the current provision in Aberdeenshire. Representatives from Perth and Kinross and the Highland Councils gave evidence of how public toilets were managed in their authorities, and users' perspectives were provided by the Aberdeenshire North Access Panel and VisitScotland's regional Tourist Information Centre staff and manager. The views of internal staff managing the toilets were provided when the Committee met Aberdeenshire Council cleaning staff and representatives of the Community Councils who run some toilets on behalf of the Council.

In addition, the investigations may involve fact-finding visits to council offices or facilities to meet service users and employees on the front line. On occasion, visits to other local authorities or providers of similar services may be undertaken. Both of these methods were used in the Climate Change investigation, (Investigation No. 13, 2007) where site visits were made to Alford to meet school teachers and children to hear their perspective on issues affecting climate change. In the same investigation, members of the Committee also attended a showing of the film, "An Inconvenient Truth" which gave more information on the international assessment of climate change and its implications.

Potential witnesses are contacted, initially by telephone, by the lead officer for an informal discussion prior to a formal letter of invitation being issued. This allows for a more immediate relationship to be begun, and helps the identification of the lead officer as a support and provider of information on the work of the Committee. It also allows some prior discussion of witness availability for evidence gathering sessions, and may suggest replacement witnesses if the one originally contacted is unable to attend. Discussions in advance may be very helpful to both the lead officer and the witnesses. The letter of invitation, when issued, includes information about the topic under

consideration, the Committee and its operating processes, and the arrangements for the evidence gathering session. (See appendix 4). The witnesses are also informed that the meeting will provide them an opportunity to express their views on any strengths, weaknesses and possible areas for improvement of the topic being investigated.

Preparing relevant questions

When a list of witnesses to be heard has been established, discussions take place, coordinated by the lead officer, which seek identify the most appropriate questions to draw out the particular experience of witnesses on the issue at hand. All questions are approved by the Committee before being issued to the witnesses.

The questions to be asked are aimed to allow the Committee to explore the issues which prompted the investigation in the first place. The list of questions to be asked is issued to the witnesses in advance of the evidence gathering session. Ideally this happens at least a week before the meeting. This is intended to allow the witnesses to come prepared and seek out any information that they may need in advance. In the covering letter, (see Appendix 5,) witnesses are encouraged to send an initial written response to these questions to the committee officer before the meeting takes place.

The list of key questions is not fixed. Supplementary issues may be raised depending on the information provided. If a witness is unable to answer a question at the meeting, they are invited to provide it in writing or, if necessary, attend another meeting of the Committee. In addition, it may be that the discussions at the evidence gathering session identify supplementary documentation to be accessed for the Committee. Some of this information may be provided by the witnesses; some may be sourced by the lead officer.

The list of key questions may also be seen as providing a framework for the dialogue which it is hoped will take place between those giving evidence and the members of the Committee.

The lead officer should ensure that all witnesses, including members of staff, are given good advance notice of any invitation to meet members, are properly briefed about the arrangements for the meeting and receive adequate notice of the questions to be discussed at the meeting. The committee officer is responsible for taking notes of evidence and ensuring that these are agreed with witnesses before they become matters of public record.

What happens at the meeting?

The meetings are informal and are conducted in an open and friendly manner and usually last about an hour. Typically members of the Committee will be seated facing those invited to speak. The two officers who support the Committee and any independent external expert will also be present. The Chair will open the meeting by welcoming and introducing those present and outlining the process. The key questions will be discussed, with

supplementary questions being asked where appropriate. Witnesses are encouraged to be open and honest in their responses and to feel free to raise additional issues related to the topic. Notes will be taken of the discussion at the meeting, however these will not be released until the witnesses have agreed to them.

In most cases, the evidence gathering sessions are not held in public. This is intended to allow the witnesses greater comfort to give an honest and frank response. The notes of the meeting are published in due course and provide a public record of the information provided.

What happens after the meeting?

After the meeting, witnesses are sent a summary note of the discussion, so that they can check that what they said was properly understood. Witnesses are entitled to make any additions, deletions or amendments to this note and these should be highlighted and the document returned to the support officer. Those councillors attending the sessions are also afforded the opportunity to comment on the accuracy of the record. The note is confidential until it has been agreed by all witnesses.

The evidence, gathered to inform members in coming to their conclusions at the close of the investigation, is published to the Council website only at the time the investigation report is considered by full Council.

In addition, those who have given evidence to the Committee are asked to complete a questionnaire (see Appendix 6) to give feedback on their experience of the evidence gathering process. A similar feedback form was introduced in late 2006 to be sent to the lead services, (see Appendix 7). When received in sufficient numbers to make analysis worthwhile, any common threads will be extracted for Committee consideration of its operating style, as a method of constant self assessment.

Once the Committee has heard all the evidence, and drawn its conclusions and recommendations, a formal investigation report is prepared. This process involves “wrap-up” day(s), where the Committee meet informally, with all the agreed and draft witness evidence available to them, and discuss what has been learnt in the investigation. The lead officer and any external expert who has assisted in the investigation process, support the Committee in its deliberations. Key points are highlighted, and the Committee analyse the evidence which has been presented to it to identify the information which has lead them to particular conclusions. When this has been completed, the lead officer, in consultation with the Committee, drafts the investigation report.

The draft investigation report is then considered by the Committee, again meeting informally, on as many occasions as required until all are satisfied that the report accurately reflects the conclusions of the investigation.

After the investigation report has been agreed, it will then be presented to the Council’s Senior Management Team for their response, prior to its

consideration by Aberdeenshire Council. The Management Team response usually takes the form of a SMART¹ action plan, identifying the steps which would require to be pursued in order for the recommendations of the report to be implemented. The identification of named officers relating to each recommendation is also included. In addition, the action plan provides guidance on which of the recommendations can not be pursued, giving reasons for this. (See Appendix 8 for a sample action plan response).

The investigation report, with the Management Team's response, is then presented to Aberdeenshire Council for formal consideration. On occasion, the Council will remit consideration of the recommendations and Management Team response to the relevant policy committee. Sometimes the matter is deferred for Area Committee input. More usually, the Council itself considers the report's recommendations and will then delegate application of the recommendations to the appropriate policy committee.

The production of an investigation report and its subsequent consideration by Council are highlighted for staff and public attention on the Council's intranet (Arcadia) and website. When this has been done, the investigation report will be made available at <http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/about/scrutiny/asp>

What happens next?

When the action plan has been approved, the Committee's role shifts to monitoring the application of the recommendations. Every investigation is to be reported back to the Committee formally 12 months after the adoption of the recommendations, although interim update reports may be received before the anniversary. Action points which are unresolved will be further highlighted for consideration, in particular, of the reasons for delay in implementation.

From 2007, a process of twice yearly reviews of the investigative work of the Committee has been established. These seek to identify where the successful application of recommendations can be highlighted, issues of residual concern identified and perhaps lessons learnt from the lack of progress in some recommendations. To date, it would appear that the majority of investigation outcomes have been taken forward and applied; very few have proved impractical.

If the Committee consider that some matters are not being progressed as it had expected, it may call for a supplementary report, or even reconsider its original recommendations in the light of circumstances which may have altered. On one occasion to date, a follow-up investigation was deemed necessary (on the issue of leveraging external funding, considered initially in March, 2004 (as Investigation No. 1) and then again in September, 2005 (Investigation No. 7)).

¹ SMART is an acronym for an action that is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.

AUDIT

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee's relationship with Internal and External Audit can take several forms, relating to the Committee's remit within the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

The Committee has a role to formally review, in conjunction with council managers, the adequacy of (i) internal control systems, (ii) policies and practices employed to ensure compliance with relevant statutes, directions, guidance and policies, (iii) financial information presented to the Council, and (iv) risk assessment arrangements and procedures.

It must also check compliance with relevant codes of practice, in conjunction with council managers.

Internal Audit

Internal audit is an independent appraisal function established by the management of an organisation for the review of the internal control systems. It works with management to review systems of internal control independently, provide assurance over their operation or make recommendations for improvement. It should be stressed that "independent" is a key word in this, as internal audit have no line responsibility for, or any involvement in, any activity within the Council other than its own operations. The Chief Internal Auditor reports directly to the Director of Corporate Services, and his reports are also seen by the Head of Finance (in his role as the Section 95 officer). and has the power, if required, to report directly to the Chief Executive or Full Council.

The Committee takes an overview of internal audit to ensure that this function is properly resourced and has appropriate standing within the Council. The Committee reviews the activities of the internal audit function, including its annual work programme, reviewing all audit reports and management delivery of agreed recommendations.

As part of the independent appraisal of the Council's financial systems, a three year internal audit plan is prepared. This is reviewed by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee.

Reviews are undertaken by internal audit of particular aspects of the Council's functions, involving preparation, documentation, evaluation, testing, report and follow up. During this process of evaluation and testing, internal audit are looking for a sound control environment, including organisation (management structure), delegation of authority, segregation of duties, accounting arrangements and checks, physical security and staffing systems. Draft reports are issued to management to confirm their factual accuracy before a formal report is issued to the Service Director, the Director of Corporate Services and the External Auditor. The full report is available to Councillors and a summary report placed on the agenda of both the relevant policy committee and, subsequently, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee. As the

policy committee has the remit to respond to the issues raised in the internal audit report, the Scrutiny and Audit function is to take an overview of matters reported, looking at wider trends which may be of concern. It also has a further role if there are subsequent problems where a service, having committed to improvements suggested by internal audit, does not demonstrate improvement, or the guidance is found not to be implemented.

External Audit

In addition, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee has a role to hold internal audit to account. This is pursued in partnership with external audit, Audit Scotland, who monitor the operation of internal audit, holding the scrutineers to scrutiny. The Scrutiny and Audit Committee receive regular reports from external audit on the operation of the Council and its financial management systems. These reports deal with topics such as the annual Audit Risk Analysis and Plans, Priorities and Risks Framework (PRF) Position Statement - National Overview, Efficient Government and annual Financial Statements Strategy.

All aspects of the Council's relationship with its external auditors are managed through the Scrutiny and Audit Committee.

Performance assessed

Audit Scotland have also assessed the work of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee itself, to ensure that it operates in line with the CIPFA best practice principles, 'Audit Committee principles in Local Authorities in Scotland', (as detailed on page 2).

In its 2006 report, Audit Scotland assessed the operation of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee against the CIPFA guidance. The Committee was found to comply with the majority of the good practice guidance for audit committees, fulfilling its scrutiny function by reviewing, through its investigative processes, performance in areas of concern. It was suggested that the Committee could have more of a monitoring role in ensuring reports by investigation agencies are actioned and also greater formal consideration of progress in implementing action plans arising from the acceptance of its own investigations. It was subsequently agreed that an ongoing review of outstanding actions be compiled and regular reports made to the Committee. This process is now well established. The Committee now receive quarterly reports of external inspections, both at strategic level and those relating to specific geographic locations. In a process similar to that of internal audit reporting, the inspection reports will already have been considered by the parent policy committee and area committee (where appropriate). The role of scrutiny is not limited to the Scrutiny and Audit Committee but extends to every member of the Council. The overview report allows the Committee to consider pockets of good practice which may be highlighted to other areas and also to view trends across functions and geographical areas. The main

inspections reported are generally either Social Work inspections (SWIA) or Educational assessments (through HMIE²).

Audit Scotland also highlighted the fact that whilst the Scrutiny and Audit Committee usefully serves the purpose of challenging and scrutiny, this does not absolve other elements of the Council's control systems from playing their part – the Scrutiny and Audit Committee is not the only means of demonstrating challenge and scrutiny.

In 2006, the external auditors also felt greater awareness of the Committee should be promoted, both within, and outwith, the Council. Information on the Committee's operations is available on the Council's website, with investigation reports more readily accessible than was previously the case. Greater use of the Corporate Communications section has facilitated this work, with greater press coverage attained. More information made available to staff and other members of the Council through the intranet (Arcadia).

In June, 2011, it was agreed by full Council that the Scrutiny and Audit Committee should publish an annual report. Arising from Investigation No. 19, evaluating the effectiveness of the Committee, this is intended to raise greater awareness of the work of the Committee to its peers and the wider public. This will afford other members formal opportunity to consider the work of the Committee.

In 2006, Audit Scotland suggested there was a need for more timely agreement by management to action plans arising from the investigation reports, with update on progress also publicly available. It was felt that an overlong process of agreeing action plans could severely reduce the impact of any investigation and delay the implementation of the recommendations. Since that time, progress has been made in the timescale for making the investigation reports available on the website, and a recent update of committee related documentation and information leaflets will be published on the webpage in early course. The creation of the Committee handbook completed this work, as it contains a range of related documentation in one easily accessible form.

Treasury Management Scrutiny

In April, 2010, following consideration of the arrangements for reviewing the treasury management function of the Council, it was agreed that whilst the Policy and Resources Committee was the responsible body, that the Scrutiny and Audit Committee should have a scrutiny role over this aspect of the Council's work. The new arrangements were to meet the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management in Local Authorities, (the Revised Code), previously updated in 2001 and revised in 2009 in the light of the default by Icelandic banks in 2008. In terms of the agreed scheme of delegation, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee has now a role to review the treasury management policy and

² Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education

procedures and make recommendations to the responsible body, in this case, the Policy and Resources Committee. The Scrutiny and Audit Committee is also charged to review and challenge treasury management activities within the context of the risk management policy.

An annual schedule of work will support the Committee in this endeavour and in order to familiarise members with their new role, initial training was provided in May, 2010 on treasury management. This covered (a) Risk Management and CIPFA Code; (b) Balance Sheet Analysis as at 31st March 2009; (c) Corporate Objectives and the Capital Strategy; (d) Economics and the markets; (e) Proactive treasury management; (f) Overview of investment credit rating approach; (g) Treasury strategy going forward; and (h) Governance Framework.

Service Savings Monitoring

This new duty was agreed by Council in 2011. From September, 2011, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee will, at its formal meetings, be asked to consider how services are making the savings to which they have committed as part of the 2010 and following budget constraints.

It is a new process and may evolve over time, to ensure that the added value of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee having oversight of matters already being monitored by services, senior management team and the relevant policy committees, is valid.

Training on how matters, and which matters, are to be regularly reported, and consideration of whether the report should be a standing item of business on the Committee agenda, or be considered on a "by exception" basis, is to be held in early September, 2011.

Risk Management

Whilst the main line of governance for risk management and risk control is through the Council's Policy & Resources Committee, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee maintains a watching brief with the risk manager providing an annual progress report.

Having considered in detail the corporate and individual service risk registers in 2010, and being satisfied with the content, reporting style and established monitoring systems, the Committee now consider the registers on an annual basis. The Committee can ask at any time for additional reports on areas of specific interest, should this be deemed necessary.

Current risk management and control strategy, together with supporting policies and procedures and linked documents can be found on the Council's website.

Appendix 1 – Service Briefing Information

The Role of the Committee

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee is a central Committee of Aberdeenshire Council and under the terms of the Council's Scheme of Delegation is empowered to:

- a) Review the effectiveness of Council policy implementation and Council service delivery and to identify potential improvements;
- b) Undertake an annual programme of reviews; and
- c) Make recommendations regarding improvements to the performance of services.

In carrying out its reviews, the Committee is able to:

- Call upon any officer of the Council, or Chair/Vice-Chair of the Council's Committees, to give evidence or provide written reports, as appropriate; and
- Call upon expert witnesses, or members of the public to give evidence where necessary.

Selection of Topics for Investigation

Potential topics for investigation are identified by the Committee members using a variety of sources of information including:

- Residents' and Employees' Surveys;
- Internal and external audit reports;
- Previous Scrutiny and Audit Investigations
- Issues raised with Councillors by constituents, local community groups and external organisations;
- Government policies/priorities; and
- Comments, compliments and complaints system.

Before considering potential investigation topics for the coming year, the Committee seeks background information about them from senior officers. The proposed topics are then ranked by the Committee, against criteria to establish a level of priority. On the basis of this ranking, the Committee determines the topics appropriate for investigation and those issues that can be addressed through a formal report to Committee. Investigations may involve areas of work covered by more than one Service and external bodies and members of the public also participate. Generally the Committee undertakes 3-4 in depth investigations per year, in addition to their monitoring role.

From 2006, the Directors and all Councillors have been, and will continue to be, asked to intimate possible areas for investigation.

The Current Investigation

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee are currently investigating <topic>.

The purpose and objectives for the investigation are set out in the attached investigation brief.

Details of the background documents and research, together with an indicative list of witnesses are also provided in the brief. The Committee may also want to consult with service users where appropriate and information on possible consultation activities is also included in the brief. An approximate timescale for the investigation is given. The names of the officers in the project team for the investigation are also included.

The Process

At the beginning of the investigation process, the officer supporting the investigation meets with the senior officer in the area being reviewed, usually the Service Director or a Head of Service, to brief the service about the scope of the investigation, the background information required for the investigation and the arrangements for meeting with officers, external witnesses and members of the public. This briefing also provides the Service with an opportunity to comment on the proposed arrangements and make suggestions about evidence and witnesses.

The investigation officially begins with the relevant senior officer being asked to give a presentation to members of the Committee, setting out the current position relating to the investigation topic and providing some information about how Aberdeenshire Council's situation fits into the national context.

Staff members with relevant knowledge and/or expertise are invited to meet with Committee members to discuss areas of enquiry the Committee wishes to explore. The staff members are fully briefed about how the Committee operates and what is expected of them (see attached briefing note). To enable staff to prepare for the meeting, approximately a week before the meeting, they are sent four or five key questions which will form the basis of the discussion at the meeting. Witnesses are encouraged to send an initial written response to these questions to the Committee Officer in advance of the meeting.

The Committee likes to conduct these meetings in an open and friendly manner, with each meeting usually lasting about an hour. Staff members are normally invited in groups of two or three to provide a more relaxed atmosphere. The Chair will open the meeting by welcoming and introducing those present and outlining the process. The key questions are then discussed, with supplementary questions being asked where appropriate.

Notes are taken at the meeting and afterwards witnesses are sent a summary of the discussion for checking and/or amendment. The evidence meetings are held in private and the note is confidential until it has been agreed by all

witnesses. The final version of the note is lodged on the Council's website when the investigation report is approved at full Council.

Witnesses from external organisations and members of the public may also be asked to attend meetings with Committee members. If appropriate, Committee members also make site visits to meet frontline staff and service users. Depending on the nature of the topic, the Committee may also engage in other activities to collect further information, including sending out questionnaires, commissioning focus groups and attending external events.

Once the Committee has heard from all the witnesses and considered any other evidence, members of the Committee hold a workshop meeting to draw up their conclusions and recommendations. A report is drafted by the lead officer, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, on behalf of the Committee. The senior officer in the relevant service is sent a copy of the draft report so that he or she can make any comments on factual accuracy. Once the Committee have reviewed and agreed the final report, it is submitted to full Council for consideration. Usually this is accompanied by a Management Team response to the report, setting out how, and whether, the investigation's conclusions and recommendations should be implemented. Council then decides how the recommendations in the report are to be addressed and this response is then submitted to the appropriate policy committee for implementation.

Committee Responsibilities

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee undertakes to conduct itself according to the following principles of operation:

Open, Transparent, Investigative, Deliberative, Evidence-based, Accountable, Responsive, Inclusive, Influencing, Flexible, Proactive, Non-partisan and Outward Looking.

Service Responsibilities

The Service(s) should assist the Committee in its investigation in every possible way. It is therefore necessary for all members of staff, who are involved in the area under investigation, to be made aware of:

- the investigation, its remit, timescale;
- the possibility that they may be invited to attend a meeting with Committee members; and
- the possibility that they may be asked to provide relevant documentation and information.

Managers should support, encourage and reassure all staff who are involved in the process.

Support Officer Responsibilities

Each investigation has a project team. The team includes the Scrutiny and Audit Lead Officer who is responsible for overseeing the investigation and writing the investigation report. The lead officer's responsibilities include briefing the senior officer(s) in the Service about the investigation, briefing and being the main point of contact with the independent external expert, (see information on next page), providing guidance and support to the Committee and carrying out research on the Committee's behalf.

The Lead Officer is Jan McRobbie, based in Corporate Services in Woodhill House. Jan may be contacted on 01224 664617.

The other member of the project team is the Scrutiny and Audit Committee Officer, Jackie Buchanan, also based in Woodhill House. She supports, coordinates and undertakes an administrative role for all aspects of the Committee and can be contacted on 01224 665515.

These officers are responsible for ensuring that witnesses, including members of staff, are given good advance notice of any invitation to meet committee members, are properly briefed about the arrangements for the meeting and receive adequate notice of the questions to be discussed at the meeting. The committee officer is also responsible for taking notes of evidence and ensuring that these are agreed with witnesses.

External Expert

An independent external expert, who has expertise in the area of investigation, may be appointed to assist the committee. The expert provides independent advice and technical knowledge to the committee throughout the investigation. They may be in attendance for evidence gathering sessions. In this case, the external expert is <insert name of expert> OR no external expert has been deemed necessary.

Monitoring Follow Up

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee monitors progress with the implementation of investigation recommendations. This normally involves the relevant Service or, if it is a cross-service topic, a lead officer designated by Management Team, providing a progress report approximately one year after the submission of the report to Council. If considered necessary, the Committee may require further progress reports.

Feedback Questionnaires

A questionnaire about the operation of the committee will be available at the end of the investigation. It should be completed by the main Service contact for the investigation.

A separate questionnaire will be sent to all witnesses taking part in the investigation to provide feedback on the format and administration of the meeting.

In order that we can effectively monitor our performance and make any necessary improvements, we would be grateful if these feedback forms could be completed and returned to Jan McRobbie as soon as possible after receipt.

Further Information

If you need any further information or advice please contact Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer, (Scrutiny and Audit), Woodhill House on 01224 664617, or Jackie Buchanan, Committee Officer, on 01224 665515. Alternately, they may be contacted at the undernoted email addresses:
jan.mcrobbie@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or
jackie.buchanan@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Appendix 2 – Terms of Reference Proforma

Scrutiny and Audit Committee – Investigation Brief			
1. Subject to be reviewed	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">Investigation No.</td> <td style="width: 30%;"></td> </tr> </table>	Investigation No.	
Investigation No.			
Purpose and objectives of investigation			
1.1 Investigation methodology			
Background documents/ evidence/ research.			
Witnesses to be invited to provide evidence.	Chief Officers External Staff		
Site Visits.			
Consultation process.			
Trade Unions Contribution.			
Project Team (officers).	Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Jackie Buchanan, Committee Officer, Legal and Governance		
Other estimated costs.			
External expert.			
Investigation Timetable.			
Agreed by Committee.			

Appendix 3 – Terms of Reference for External Expert

1. "Up-Front" briefing meeting with the Audit and Scrutiny Committee

Attend an "Up Front" briefing meeting where the formal terms of reference of the review will be agreed. This meeting will also be the opportunity to brief the Committee on high and detailed features of care commissioning and provision by local authorities, including any experience of best practice and other key characteristics and issues experienced elsewhere.

Briefing will include regular opportunity for cross-examination and questioning by members.

Outcomes: Agreement of Terms of Reference; comprehensive briefing to Committee Members; agreement of proposed key lines of enquiry for evidence gathering.

2. Lead Service Briefing Meeting

Attend the Lead Service Briefing Meeting provided by key officers from Aberdeenshire Council's relevant function.

Act as an objective advisor to the Committee during and after the meeting and provide advice on statements made and documents submitted, including follow-up challenge as required.

3. Evidence Gathering

Attend additional Evidence Gathering Meetings with key internal and external witnesses to Aberdeenshire Council and again act as an objective advisor to the Committee during and after the meeting, providing advice on statements made and documents submitted, including follow-up challenge as required.

4. "Wrap Up"

Attend a "wrap-up" (or series of wrap up) meeting(s) with the Scrutiny and Audit Committee where the outcomes of the investigation can be discussed.

In preparation for the "wrap-up" meeting, compile a briefing note outlining your views on the processes currently in place, the robustness of the views expressed and documents existing in support of these processes and any additional areas of risk, concern and potential implications.

5. Input to draft report

Have sight of the draft report prepared by the lead officer and provide guidance as to its accuracy as evidence based conclusions.

Appendix 4 – Letter of Invitation to Witnesses

Our Ref: SAC/ JMMcR
Your Ref:
Please ask for: Jan McRobbie
Direct Dial: (01224) 664617
E-mail: jan.mcrobbie@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Dear

INVITATION TO ATTEND A MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY AND AUDIT COMMITTEE ON < INSERT DATE >

We are writing on behalf of the Council's Scrutiny and Audit Committee to invite you to attend a meeting of the committee on <INSERT DATE> in Committee Room <INSERT LOCATION> to help us with our current investigation into <INSERT INVESTIGATION TITLE>.

Enclosed is a guidance note setting out the purpose of the committee's investigations and advice on how to prepare for the meeting. The committee likes to conduct its meetings in an open and friendly manner, in accordance with its principles of working set out on the enclosed sheet.

We look forward to meeting you and learning from your experience and knowledge of the investigation topic.

Please advise the lead officer, Jan McRobbie, (01224 664617) whether you will be able to attend. She will also be able to assist you with any queries.

Yours sincerely

**Councillor
Chair of the Scrutiny and Audit
Committee**

**Councillor
Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny and Audit
Committee**

GUIDANCE SHEET FOR WITNESSES



Attending Meetings with Members of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee - Internal Witnesses

What is the Scrutiny and Audit Committee?

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee is a central committee of Aberdeenshire Council. It is made up of the following 12 members:-

Cllr Peter Bellarby (Chair), Cllr Amanda Allan (Vice-Chair), Cllr Nan Cullinane, Cllr Sandy Duncan, Cllr Tom Fleming, Cllr Ian Gray, Cllr Fergus Hood, Cllr Andy Ritchie, Cllr Michael Sullivan, Cllr Debra Storr, Cllr Ian Tait and Cllr Robert Thomas.

What does it do?

It reviews the performance of the council, looking at the effectiveness of council policies and service delivery and identifies any potential improvements. Part of the committee's work involves carrying out an annual programme of reviews or investigations into aspects of the council's policy implementation and service delivery. In order to carry out its work successfully, the committee needs to seek information from Councillors, Council employees, external witnesses and services users.

The committee has adopted the following principles of operation:-

Open, Transparent, Investigative, Deliberative, Evidence-based, Accountable, Responsive, Inclusive, Influencing, Flexible, Proactive, Non-partisan and Outward Looking.

What does it not do?

The committee does not make policy and does not take decisions about the operation of council services, but it may make recommendations to Council on policy matters.

Officers Supporting the Committee

The committee is supported by a lead officer responsible for all aspects of the investigations. The lead officer is Jan McRobbie, (Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit)) who can be contacted on 01224 664617.

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee also have a Committee Officer, Jackie Buchanan, who supports, coordinates and undertakes an administrative role for all aspects of the Committee. Jackie can be contacted on 01224 665515.

These officers are responsible for ensuring that witnesses, including members of staff, are given good advance notice of any invitation to meet committee members, are properly briefed about the arrangements for the meeting and receive adequate notice of the questions to be discussed at the meeting. The committee officer is also responsible for taking notes of evidence and ensuring that these are agreed with witnesses. They will be happy to answer any questions that you may have in relation to the investigation.

Why have you been invited?

You have been asked to meet members of the committee because you have knowledge or expertise that is relevant to the topic being investigated. The meeting also provides you with the opportunity to express your views on any strengths, weaknesses and possible areas for improvement.

What are the arrangements for meeting members of the committee?

You will be contacted by phone or e-mail by an officer supporting the committee. The officer will explain:-

- why you have been invited;
- background information about the committee;
- background about the topic being investigated; and
- arrangements for your attendance.

Approximately a week before the meeting, you will be sent key questions which will form the basis of the discussion with the committee. This will allow you to come prepared and seek out any information that you may need in advance. You are encouraged to send an initial written response to these questions to Jackie Buchanan (Committee Officer) before the meeting takes place.

You should inform your line manager that you have been invited to the meeting. If you have any problems or questions, please contact Jan McRobbie on 01224 664617 or Jackie Buchanan on 01224 665515.

What happens at the meeting?

The meetings are informal and are conducted in an open and friendly manner and usually last between half an hour and an hour. Typically members of the committee will be seated facing those invited to speak. The two officers who support the committee and any independent external expert will also be present. The Chair will open the meeting by welcoming and introducing those present and outlining the process. The key questions will be discussed, with supplementary questions being asked where appropriate. You should be open and honest in your responses and feel free to raise additional issues

related to the topic. Notes will be taken of the discussion at the meeting. The meetings are held in private and notes of the evidence will not be released until you have agreed to them.

What happens after the meeting?

After the meeting, you will be sent a summary note of the discussion, so that you can check that what you said was properly understood. You are entitled to make any additions, deletions or amendments to this note and these should be highlighted and the document returned to the committee officer. The note is confidential until it has been agreed by all witnesses. The final version of the note will be made public only when the investigation report is considered at full Council.

Once the committee has heard all the evidence, and drawn its conclusions and recommendations, a report will be written and submitted to full Council meeting. The reports are available on the council website at <http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/about/scrutiny.asp>

Feedback Questionnaire

A questionnaire will be sent to you asking for feedback on the format and administration of the meeting to help us make any necessary improvements. We would be grateful if you could complete and return this form to Jan McRobbie as soon as possible after receipt.

Further Information

If you need any further information or advice please contact Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit), Woodhill House, Westburn Road, Aberdeen on 01224 664617

Appendix 5 – Witness Questions Cover Letter

Our Ref: SAC/ JMMcR

Your Ref:

Please ask for: Jan McRobbie

Direct Dial: (01224) 664617

E-mail: jan.mcrobbie@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Dear <insert name>

SCRUTINY AND AUDIT COMMITTEE ON <insert date> - QUESTIONS.

Further to our letter of <insert date> inviting you to attend a meeting of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee on <insert date>, in<insert location>, to help us with our current investigation into<insert investigation title>, please find attached the key questions which will be asked of you.

These are not exhaustive, and previous experience suggests that supplementary questions will be raised as the discussion progresses, but the questions will form the framework for the evidence gathering session. You should be open and honest in your responses and feel free to raise additional issues related to the topic.

As the guidance previously issued suggested, you are encouraged to make an initial written response to these questions. Notes will be taken of the discussion at the meeting, held in private, which will not be released until you have agreed them.

After the meeting, you will be sent a summary note of the discussion, so that you can check that what you said was properly understood. You are entitled to make any additions, deletions or amendments to this note and these should be highlighted and the document returned to Jackie Buchanan, Committee Officer, at Woodhill House, Aberdeen, AB16 5GB.

We look forward to meeting you and learning from your experience and knowledge of the investigation topic.

Yours sincerely

**Councillor
Chair of the Scrutiny and Audit
Committee**

**Councillor
Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny and Audit
Committee**

Appendix 6 –Feedback Proforma

Aberdeenshire Council - Scrutiny and Audit Committee

Questionnaire for witnesses who participate in a Scrutiny and Audit Committee investigation

We would be grateful if you could provide feedback on your experience of meeting with members of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee. Your comments will enable us to maintain or improve on the investigation process.

Thank you for your help.

Chair of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee

Vice - Chair of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee

Investigation Title:

Relationship questions to be asked of witnesses in responding.

ABOUT YOU

Which statement BEST describes your role at the Scrutiny and Audit Committee?

I am a Director of Service, responsible for an internal service which the Committee is investigating.	Yes/No
I am an officer responsible for an internal service which the Committee is investigating.	Yes/No
I represent an external organisation with an interest in the matter which the Committee is investigating.	Yes/No
I am a user of the service which the Committee is investigating.	Yes/No
I am an officer from another local authority/organisation which provides the service which the Committee is investigating.	Yes/No
I am an expert witness providing information to the Committee on the matter which the Committee is investigating.	Yes/No
Other (please specify)	

Please give your impressions of aspects of the arrangements for the meeting

Not satisfactory –1

Satisfactory – 2

Very satisfactory –3

Excellent - 4

Any other comments

	1	2	3	4	
How satisfactory were the arrangements for inviting you to meet with the Committee members, briefing you, and notifying you of questions for discussion?	1	2	3	4	
How satisfactory was the format and style of the meeting in providing an atmosphere for an open and relaxed discussion?	1	2	3	4	
How satisfactory were the notes of the meeting?	1	2	3	4	
How satisfactory was the process for checking and amending the note of the meeting?	1	2	3	4	
How did you find the overall experience:					

Name:

(optional)

Date:

Please return the completed form to Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit), Chief Executive's Service, Woodhill House, ABERDEEN. AB16 5BG

Lead Service Feedback Form

Questionnaire on the operation of a Scrutiny and Audit Committee Investigation

We would be grateful if you could provide feedback on the operation of the investigation in which you and your colleagues participated. You should consult with the staff in your service who were involved in the investigation before completing this form. This feedback will enable us to maintain or improve on the investigation process.

Thank you for your help.

**Councillor
Chair
Scrutiny & Audit Committee**

**Councillor
Vice-Chair
Scrutiny & Audit Committee**

Investigation Title:

Please give your impressions of aspects of the investigation process by circling the appropriate number

*Unsatisfactory – 1
Satisfactory – 2
Very satisfactory – 3
Excellent - 4*

Any other comments

	1	2	3	4	
The clarity and comprehensiveness of the terms of reference for the investigation	1	2	3	4	
The adequacy of the briefing you received at the start of the investigation from the officers working with the Committee.	1	2	3	4	
The process for inviting and briefing witnesses, and notifying them of questions for discussion	1	2	3	4	
The selection and use of external witnesses	1	2	3	4	
The format and style of meetings with members of the Committee	1	2	3	4	
The performance of Committee members at the meetings	1	2	3	4	

Please give your impressions of aspects of the investigation process by circling the appropriate number

*Unsatisfactory – 1
Satisfactory – 2
Very satisfactory – 3
Excellent - 4*

Any other comments

	1	2	3	4	
The relevance and completeness of the material/ background information for the investigation e.g. background documentation, research, consultation activities, and service questionnaires.					
The quality of the final report					
The time taken to produce the report					

If there are any other areas not covered above which you would like to comment on please add them below:

Name:
Service:
Date:

Please return this form to Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit), Woodhill House, Westburn Drive, Aberdeen. AB16 5GB.

SCRUTINY AND AUDIT INVESTIGATION EVALUATION FORM – COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Investigation Title:

Investigation Number:

To evaluate how effective this investigation has been, please answer the following questions to assist in the continuous improvement of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee. Please circle the response which most closely matches your experience.

1. Planning the investigation

1(a) How well do you think the Committee planned this investigation in terms of setting clear terms of reference and timescales for completion?

Very effectively	Effectively	Not very effectively
------------------	-------------	----------------------

1(b) How could the planning be improved next time?

--

2. Conducting the investigation and gathering evidence

2(a) Did the Committee have the right background information to gain sufficient knowledge and understanding of the subject being investigated?

Yes	Could have been better	No
-----	------------------------	----

How could it have been better?

--

2(b) Did the Committee see a sufficient number of, and the right balance of, witnesses in order to conduct a fair, transparent and objective inquiry?

Yes	Could have been better	No
-----	------------------------	----

How could it have been better?

--

2(c) How satisfied were you with the questioning techniques used by the Committee when interviewing witnesses?

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
----------------	-----------	--------------	-------------------

How could they have been improved?

--

- 2(d) If the Committee conducted any site visits during the course of this investigation, what was learnt from them and how did they “add value” to the evidence gathering process?

--

3. Performance

- 3(a) How well did the Committee perform in terms of working to the timescales set out for the investigation?

Very effectively	effectively	Not very effectively
------------------	-------------	----------------------

Could this have been improved, and if so, by what means?

--

- 3(b) Did the Committee meet its objectives?

Yes	Partially	No
-----	-----------	----

Could this have been improved, and if so, by what means?

--

- 3(c) How well did the Committee communicate with and engage key partners in this investigation?

Very effectively	effectively	Not very effectively
------------------	-------------	----------------------

Could this have been improved, and if so, by what means?

--

- 3(d) How well did the Committee communicate with and engage users of the service under investigation in its processes?

Very effectively	effectively	Not very effectively
------------------	-------------	----------------------

Could this have been improved, and if so, by what means?

--

3(e) Do you think the Committee had the right skills to undertake this investigation?

Yes	Partially	No
-----	-----------	----

Could this have been improved, and if so, by what means?

--

3(f) Have any areas been highlighted as potential future topics for training and development?

Yes	No
-----	----

Please give details:

--

4. The final report and recommendations

4(a) How satisfied were you with the quality of the Committee's final report in terms of content, structure and clarity of the Committee's findings and conclusions?

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
----------------	-----------	--------------	-------------------

How could it have been improved?

--

4(b) How satisfied were you with the recommendations put forward by the Committee?

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
----------------	-----------	--------------	-------------------

How could they have been improved?

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5. Monitoring and follow-up work

5(a) How much impact do you think this investigation will have on improving the lives of the people of Aberdeenshire?

Significant positive impact	Little impact	No impact
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5(b) How will you monitor the implementation of the recommendations and their impact? How will you know if this investigation has made a difference?

6. What lessons can be learnt from this investigation? What could be done differently to make the next investigation more effective?

7. If you have other comments, please use the space below:

Name:

Date:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this evaluation form. Please return it to:

*Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit),
Woodhill House, Aberdeen, AB16 5GB.*

Appendix 7 – Sample Action Plan Response to Investigation Recommendations

SCRUTINY AND AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT No. 10 – DECENTRALISATION OF DECISION MAKING IN ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL DRAFT ACTION PLAN

<u>Para.</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Management team response</u>	<u>Proposed action</u>	<u>Responsible officer</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
5.2.1	Strengthening Area Committees – no recommendation	Reports proposing new policies should go to Area Committees for their input before final proposals are developed. Properly timed during the process of developing a policy this need not cause delay.	Services to take policy issues papers to Area Committees at early stage of all policy development. Standard committee paper format to be developed.	Directors R. White	May 2007
5.2.2	Include papers on Area Committee agendas for information and discussion	Items for information should continue on the Area Committee Bulletin. There is merit in providing room on agendas for discussion items however given the current size of agendas this needs to be limited. What happens to the output from discussion items needs to be addressed. The structure and order of agendas should be considered in the light of	Continue to place items for information on the Area Committee Bulletins. One discussion item per Committee agenda (if required) until the effects of the new planning legislation can be properly assessed. A review of the structure and order of	Area Managers Area Managers Area Managers	Ongoing May 2007 3 months after new planning

<u>Para.</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Management team response</u>	<u>Proposed action</u>	<u>Responsible officer</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
		future changes to how planning applications are dealt with.	agendas to take place then.		legislation impacts on Area Comm. agendas Ongoing
5.2.3	Monitoring and scrutiny of service delivery by Area Committees should be developed further – Monitoring of large capital contracts;	Agreed that Area Committees have a key role in scrutinising the performance of services. The practical involvement of members in projects should be at the level of monitoring progress against the project plan once all necessary consents have been obtained and any contracts have been commenced. This should prevent the potential for conflict of interest with other responsibilities e.g. planning application consideration.	Area Committees should be encouraged to exercise their delegated powers to monitor service performance	Area Managers	
	Need to improve and refine performance indicators, and develop the reporting by area of those activities where it is meaningful to do so; Need to adopt more explicit service standards.	Work is ongoing to improve performance indicators. Agree the need to adopt more explicit service standards	Presentation to 1 st March Council on new software to aid presentation. Service standards will continue to be refined. New software will aid that development.	R White	1 st quarter of 2007/8 indicators to be in new format.
5.2.4	Area Top Up Budgets should be increased	Agreed	Budget bid for increase to Area Top Up	Charles Armstrong	Council Meeting of 8 th Feb when

<u>Para.</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Management team response</u>	<u>Proposed action</u>	<u>Responsible officer</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
			Budgets.		budgets determined. May 2007
		Services encouraged to put reports on draft revenue budgets to Area Committees (T & I exemplars) where feasible	Services to investigate opportunities to put draft area based budgets to Area Committees.	Directors	
5.3.3	Members of Area Management Teams should have this responsibility written into their job description. Area Management Teams should meet periodically with Area Committees	Agreed	Rewrite AMT members' job descriptions	Directors	By May 2007
		Agreed	Meetings to be arranged twice yearly	Area Managers	Commencing as soon as practical after new Area Committees formed post May elections