

Argyll and Bute Council
Scrutiny Framework
March 2026



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Introduction

1. The purpose of this document is to explain the framework for scrutiny at Argyll and Bute Council (the Council). It is for the use of anyone who has any involvement in the scrutiny process including:
 - members of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee
 - all elected members of the Council
 - staff involved in the scrutiny process and those who may be required to provide evidence as part of a scrutiny review
 - members of the public, partners and external organisations who may be invited to provide evidence as part of a scrutiny review.
2. In 2017 a decision was taken that the responsibility for the remit of scrutiny would move to a newly established Audit and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee approved a new Scrutiny Framework in March 2018 and this updated version was approved by the Committee in March 2022.

What is Scrutiny?

3. Overview and scrutiny committees were established in England and Wales under the Local Government Act 2000 to provide the opportunity for members of the Council to examine services provided, ask questions on how decisions have been made and consider whether service improvements can be delivered.
4. In Scotland there is no requirement for scrutiny established by statute and consequently scrutiny committees in Scotland have no prescribed powers. This contrasts with the position in England and Wales where scrutiny committees have formal powers to require council officers and elected members to give evidence, require information from the council and require a response to any recommendation put to the council's management team.
5. Whilst there is useful guidance available there is no definitive view on what the role and objectives of scrutiny are in Scotland. Consequently this provides the Council with the opportunity to frame the delivery of governance in the way it feels is most beneficial. The Council's approach to scrutiny focuses on:
 - reviewing the council's effectiveness in achieving policy objectives
 - assessing the impact of council policies
 - making suggestions for improvement.
6. As the primary focus of scrutiny is on council policy it is appropriate to provide a definition of policy.

'Policy – A policy is a formal, concise, accessible statement on how the council intends to conduct business and deliver services. Generally it will be a statement of intent with rules that influence and enable decision making. A policy statement will lessen the risk of conflict and remove the opportunity for unfair selective application of rules'.

Audit and Scrutiny Committee

7. The Council is made up of 36 elected members representing the 11 wards of Argyll and Bute. Elected members play a key role in the Council through their involvement in full council meetings and their representation on the Council's strategic and area committees. A degree of scrutiny is carried out at these committees through performance reporting, ongoing monitoring of service delivery and the consideration of the conclusions from the Council's Performance Improvement Framework (PIF) which sets out the Council's approach to continuous improvement and the agreed mechanism for achieving best value across all services. It is therefore important that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee do not replicate any of the existing scrutiny arrangements and focus its resources in an efficient manner which complements those arrangements.
8. In particular, when assessing potential topics for scrutiny, the Committee should ensure the topic is not already being considered by an existing committee (area or strategic). The Audit and Scrutiny Committee should not generally be seen as the first committee to contact in relation to a topic meriting potential review nor should it be seen as a committee to deal with complaints.
9. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee is a cross-party committee made up of six elected members, (three each from the opposition and the council administration) and an independent chair. This provides an appropriate political spread within its membership however it should be stressed that it is not a political committee and should always conduct itself impartially.
10. The terms of reference for the scrutiny element of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee are included in Appendix 1 to this framework however its overall remit is to 'perform a scrutiny role through the provision and delivery of scrutiny work focused on improving the performance of the Council.' The remit of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee would extend to those organisations with whom the Council have entered into any form of formal agreement with for the delivery of statutory services, this would include the Health & Social Care Partnership and Live Argyll. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee is required to meet at least four times every year.

Principles of Good Scrutiny

11. To ensure scrutiny is effective the Centre for Public Scrutiny has put forward four key principles. They being that scrutiny should:
 - provide a 'critical friend' challenge to the council, council officers and agencies
 - reflect the voices and concerns of residents and communities
 - drive improvement in the delivery of public services
 - be delivered by independent minded members.
12. These principles underpin the work of the Council's Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

Scrutiny Support

13. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee is supported by the Chief Internal Auditor and staff from the internal audit section who will be responsible for carrying out scrutiny reviews and drafting the scrutiny reports for the Committee. This ensures impartiality and access to appropriate skills and experience to effectively investigate any aspect of council activity.

Developing the Scrutiny Work Programme

14. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee will identify topics for scrutiny whilst maintaining a degree of flexibility to change these as new topics emerge in an ever changing environment. As there is only a finite amount of resource available to perform scrutiny a clear and transparent prioritisation process has been adopted for assessing multiple potential topics to determine those most likely to have a positive impact on council performance. The prioritisation process will only be required if there is insufficient resource to review all the topics identified by the Committee or if there is any question over whether reviewing the topic would be of material benefit.
15. Stage 1 asks five filtering questions to determine whether the topic passes to stage 2 or is rejected at stage 1. Stage 2 is used to determine whether the topic should be considered as a high or medium priority topic. Appendix 2 illustrates the two stage process.
16. Stage 3 of the prioritisation process applies a weighted scoring system to those topics that successfully progressed from stages 1 and 2. The topic is assessed against eight criteria with weighted scores allocated to each criteria. An overall score is then reached for the topic and this allows the topics with the highest overall score to be prioritised. The score allocated to each criteria will require an appropriate balance of subjective and objective analysis. Appendix 3 illustrates stage 3 of the prioritisation process. There may be circumstances where there is an emerging issue which cannot be fully assessed using the prioritisation process due to there being a lack of supporting evidence. In this circumstance the prioritisation process will still be completed with the selected answers based on a realistic expectation rather than historic evidence. This provides scope for the Audit and Scrutiny Committee to determine whether a topic should be scrutinised despite not being fully subject to the agreed process.

Scrutiny Reviews

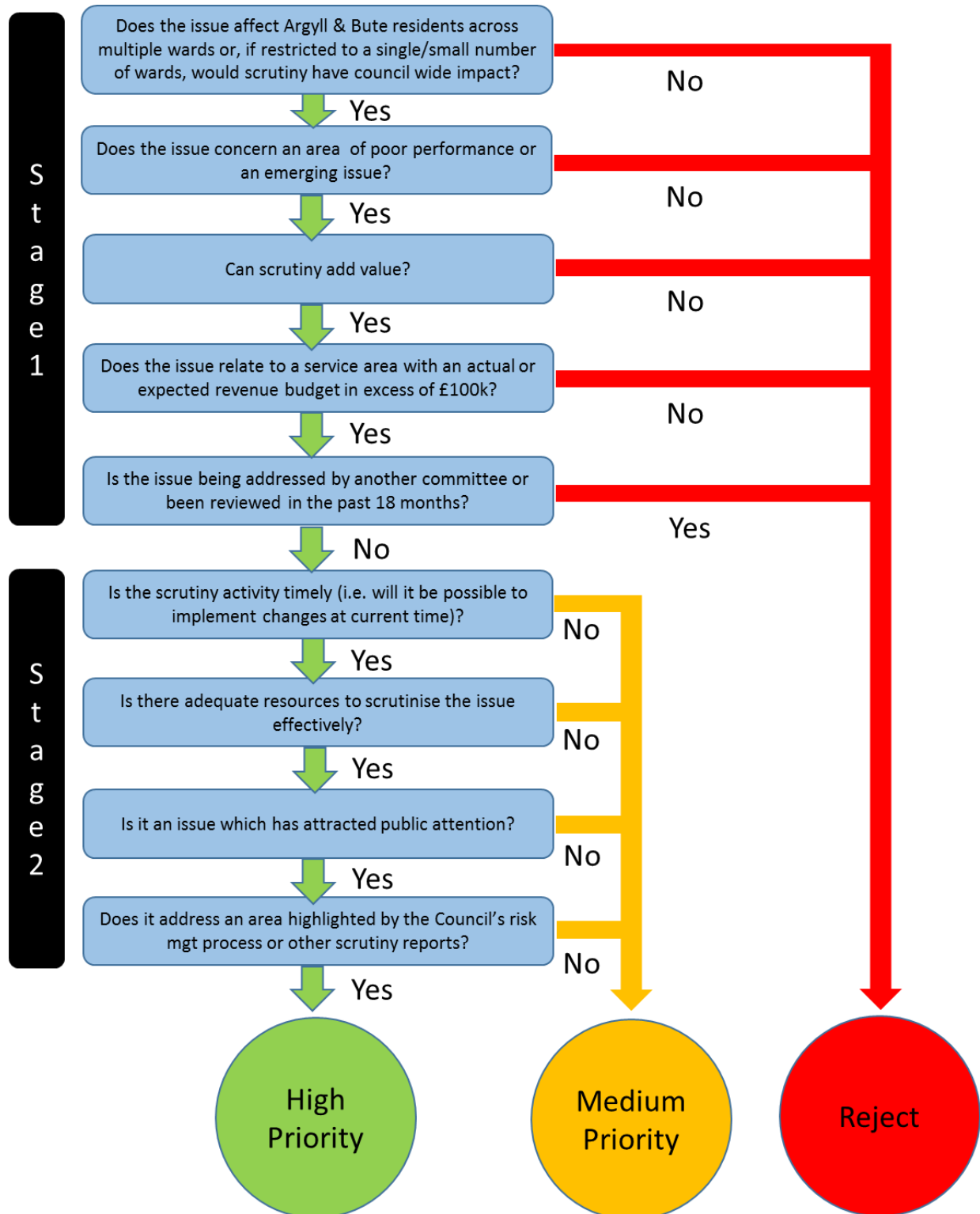
17. Scrutiny reviews are carried out by the scrutiny officer who reports to the Chief Internal Auditor. A review follows a five stage process as set out below:
 - Stage 1 – Scoping
 - Stage 2 – Identifying evidence required and key stakeholders
 - Stage 3 – Evidence gathering
 - Stage 4 – Conclusions and recommendations
 - Stage 5 – Submission of final report
18. Guidance on each of these stages will be developed and maintained by the Chief Internal Auditor.
19. Between 2018 and 2021 scrutiny activity has involved the ‘full panel’ approach which is appropriate for large scale reviews however may be less appropriate if the Committee want to review an emerging issue or where there may be an alternative way of performing scrutiny. Consequently the scrutiny process has evolved to consider alternative ways to perform scrutiny which complement the full panel approach. For example the Committee may wish to invite officers to prepare a formal report or a presentation on a particular topic for Committee to consider or invite them to attend a development session for a more informal discussion.

Appendix 1 – Audit and Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference (Scrutiny element only)

- To oversee and co-ordinate the scrutiny function including approval of the scrutiny framework and associated policies or procedures.
- To scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to the achievement of policy objectives and performance targets in relation to all functions of the Council.
- To identify topics for scrutiny work in relation to the performance of the Council and funded third party organisations.
- To consider and make recommendations in respect of scrutiny reports brought to the Committee for consideration.
- To monitor the implementation of scrutiny recommendations accepted by the Council.
- To provide an annual report to the Council on the work of the scrutiny function.
- To periodically review the scrutiny function to ensure it is operating effectively.
- To receive the Council performance report.

Note that the responsibility for scrutiny at service committee level will be incorporated into the service committee terms of reference.

Appendix 2 – Scrutiny Prioritisation Process Stages 1 and 2



Appendix 3 – Scrutiny Prioritisation Process Stage 3

TOPIC TITLE:	Increasing recycling rates						
SUBMITTED BY:	AN Other						
DATE OF SUBMISSION:	08 November 2017						
STAGE 2 ASSESSMENT OUTCOME:	Medium Priority						
	QUESTION	OPTIONS	SELECTION	SCORE	WEIGHTING	TOTAL SCORE	JUSTIFICATION FOR SELECTION
1	What is the current performance based on the council's performance scorecard?	> 10% under target < 10% under target < 10% over target > 10% over target Not applicable	< 10% over target	2	3	6	Business outcome BO24 - Waste is disposed of sustainably has two performance measures. Reduction in waste to landfill of 21,500 and % of waste recycled, composted and recovered of 40%. Current performance is 9,932 and 49.3%. This means we are under target by 54% for target reduction but 23% over for % recycled. As the focus of the topic is increasing recycling the Committee decided to focus on the missed target for reduction.
2	To what extent does the issue contribute to a business outcome aligned to the Council's corporate plan?	Major contribution Significant contribution Medium contribution Slight contribution No contribution	Medium contribution	2	3	6	Whilst recycling is not specifically referenced in the corporate plan, business outcome BO24 ' features in the Roads & Amenity Services service plan. The plan references one of the challenges to the service as being 'Delivery of a revised waste strategy that is affordable and compliant'
3	To what extent is this issue being highlighted as a public concern?	Widespread Significant Medium Slight Not applicable	Slight	1	2	2	There has been a degree of interest and campaigning by local environmental groups however this is not considered to be Council wide and has been mainly isolated to two ward areas.
4	What is the revenue budget commitment to this area of service?	>1m 500k-1m 250k-500k 100k-250k	>1m	4	3	12	Business outcome BO24 has an allocated revenue budget of £11.7m
5	In the past three years what is the pattern of budget performance for this area?	Major under/over spend Significant over/under spend Medium over/under spend Slight over/under spend Largely on budget	Slight over/under spend	1	2	2	Outturns in the previous three financial years have been consistently over budget however in none of these occasions has the budget been exceeded by more than 1.5%.
6	What is the status of national legislation on the issue?	Failure to implement = penalties Current legislation Definite future legislation Possible future legislation Not applicable	Definite future legislation	2	2	4	The service plan established that there is future legislation which will impact upon the service however the full detail of that legislation is not currently clear. Discussion with the Head of Service confirmed that it is likely to involve financial penalties if recycling rates are missed.
7	How widespread is the impact of the issue?	Council wide Multiple wards Single ward Small no of residents No impact	Council wide	4	1	4	For the council to meet future recycling targets our reduction in land fill will need to be improved across all wards. Simply focusing on one or two areas will not deliver the required improvement in performance.
8	Does the issue feature in the Council's risk management registers?	Yes - red risk Yes - amber risk Yes - green risk No	Yes - amber risk	3	3	9	The ORR for D&I includes the following which are relevant to recycling. (RA06-01) Demand Risk - Failure to reduce environmental impact through minimisation of waste to landfill and increasing recycling rates – risk score 8 (RA06-02) Demand Risk – Recycling targets increase – risk score 8
					WEIGHTED TOTAL	45	
					HIGH / MEDIUM FACTOR	1	
					TOTAL SCORE	45	