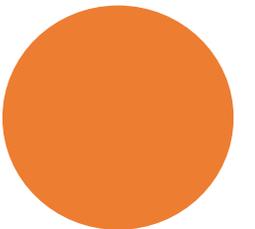




# Programme



1. Scrutiny – essential principles
2. Scrutiny Improvement Review
3. Findings – positives to build on
4. Recommendations
5. Suggested ways to improve
6. Questions



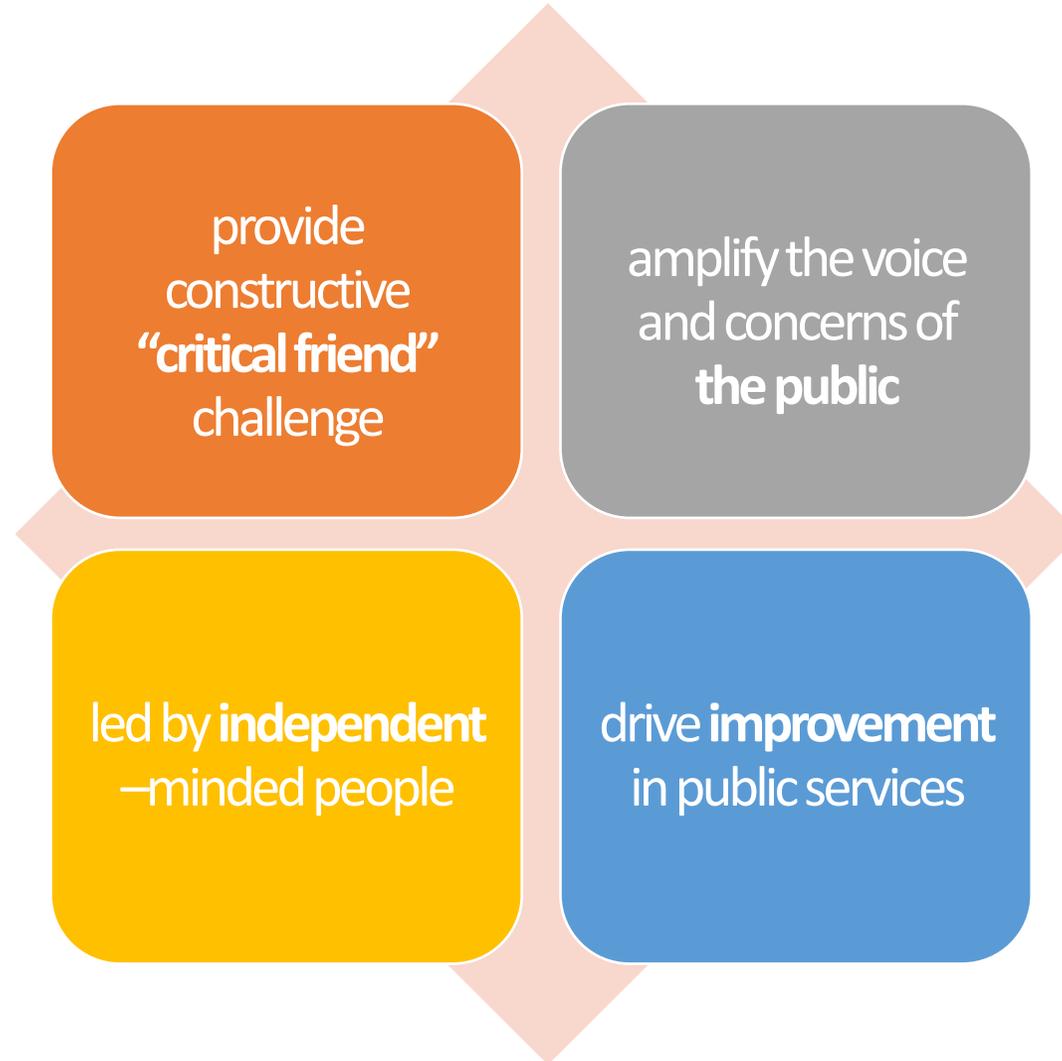


# Scrutiny Improvement Review

- Ian Parry – Head of Consultancy - Centre for Governance and Scrutiny
- Kate Grigg – Senior Research Officer – Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

# Basic principles of scrutiny

Scrutiny should...



# Role of scrutiny

- Test assumptions
- Explore alternatives
- Support policy development
- Hold to account
- Develop substantive recommendations



“If scrutiny members are not fully prepared and able to ask relevant questions, the committee will not be able to fully interrogate an issue and committee meetings can become little more than educational sessions for councillors to learn about a service, rather than scrutinise it”

- House of Commons CLG Select Committee report, December 2017



# Scrutiny culture

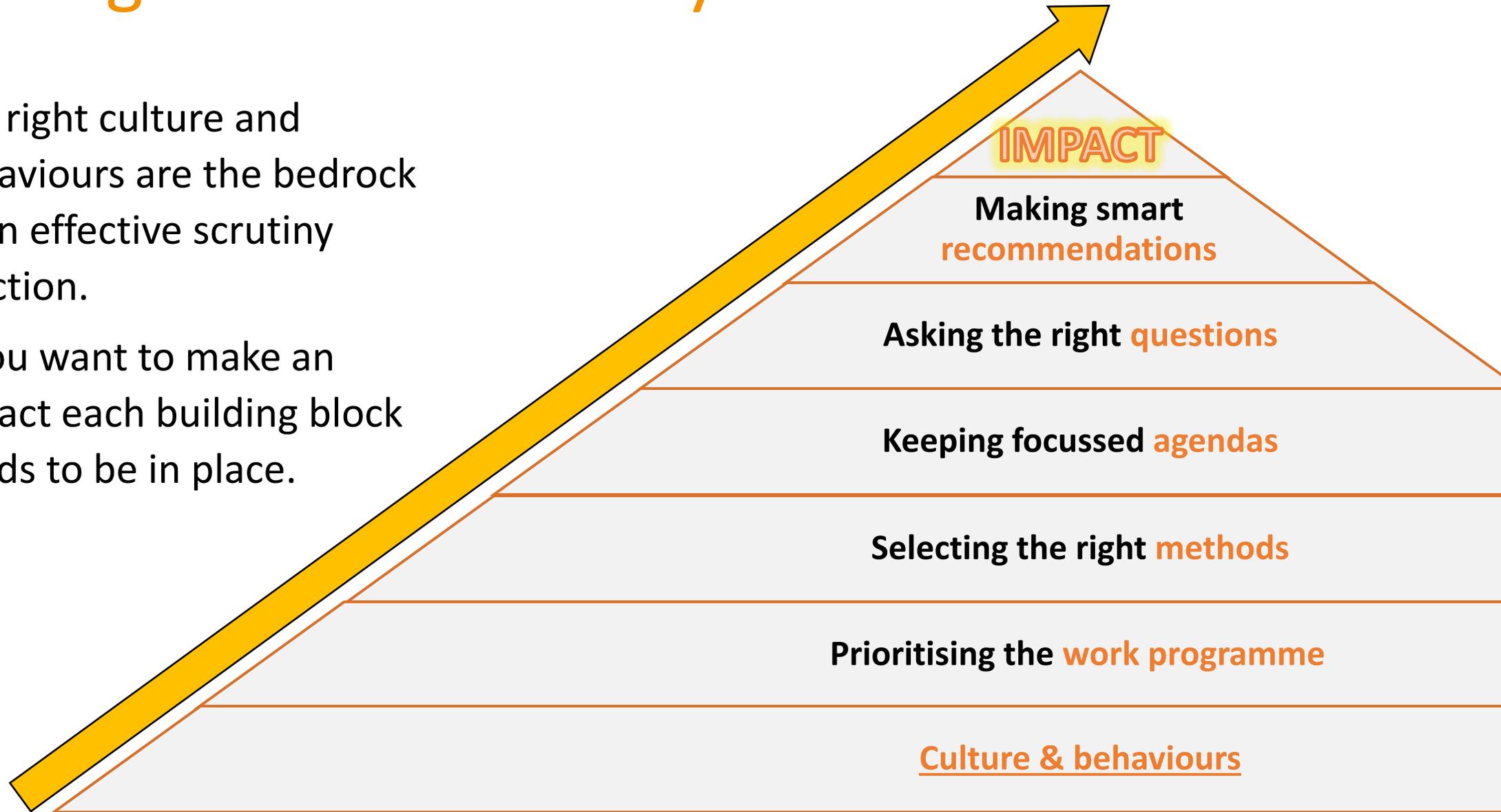
Scrutiny will be most effective with the following elements underpinning its culture...

- Cross-party
- Inclusive
- Collaborative
- Shared expectations
- Clarity of purpose
- Robust challenge, but not adversarial
- Objective
- Constructive
- Parity of esteem



# Building effective scrutiny

- The right culture and behaviours are the bedrock of an effective scrutiny function.
- If you want to make an impact each building block needs to be in place.



# The Scrutiny Improvement Review



- Best practice accumulated by CfGS
- Aligns with latest statutory guidance

## Evidence gathering in Jan 2021

- Internal conversations

CfGS met with 13 Members and 8 Officers, including the Council Leader, Deputy Leader, members of Cabinet, Group Leaders, Scrutiny Chair, Members of the Scrutiny Committee, the Council's Chief Executive, Cabinet and Senior Leadership Team as well as Governance and Democratic Services Officers.

- Observed scrutiny meeting
- Reviewed key documents

# Findings



## Positive areas to build on:

### Scrutiny has the conditions for success

- The Council and Members recognise the benefits of scrutiny in good governance, and the value in working with scrutiny for it to support and challenge

### Officer support

- Organisational commitment, senior level officer buy-in and highly dedicated officers supporting scrutiny

### Committee structure

- The single committee approach allows scrutiny to be more focused and prioritise well



# Findings

## Suggestions for improvement:

### Clarity on scrutiny's role and responsibilities

- Emphasis on holding Executive (not Officers) to account as vital to council governance
- Recognising scrutiny's important role in improving/shaping policy and decision-making
- Ensuring constructive challenge is encouraged and normal
- Being collaborative and all-Member inclusive



# Findings

## Suggestions for improvement:

### Cabinet – Scrutiny relationship

- Regular communication and information-sharing
- Emphasis on challenge and questions directed at Cabinet
- Feedback provided to scrutiny regarding recommendations

### Scrutiny's focus

- More strategic: alignment with council priorities, greater and earlier involvement with core policy and decision-making activities of Cabinet
- Budget and financial scrutiny: needs to be explored further

# Recommendations



## Report conclusions:

### Need for greater clarity on scrutiny role

- Creating a shared understanding of how scrutiny adds value to council governance. Scrutiny as a vital part of council business, with clear ownership regarding its important role in improving policy and holding to account.

### Scrutiny Member role

- All Members have a duty to uphold their responsibilities as a scrutineer, attend meetings and work towards a shared goal in the committee.

### Scrutiny-Cabinet

- Improve communication and co-ordination between scrutiny and the Cabinet. Formalised and record committee recommendations and Cabinet response



# Discussion 1

**How can these improvement issues be addressed?**

## **Need for greater clarity on scrutiny role**

- Creating a shared understanding

## **Scrutiny Member role**

- All Members have a duty to uphold their responsibilities as a scrutineer

## **Scrutiny-Cabinet**

- Improve communication and co-ordination between scrutiny and the Cabinet.

# Recommendations



## Report conclusions:

### Budget and finance scrutiny

- More scrutiny involvement in budget process, and at an earlier stage for any meaningful input.

### Work planning

- A clear mythological process for developing the work programme of the scrutiny committee which engages Members, Cabinet, Officers and appropriate partner organisations in considering the topics for review.

### Pre-planning

- Introduce pre-meetings before formal committee between all scrutiny Members to provide the space to set common objectives and possibly to reach consensus on lines of enquiry and questioning strategy. Using on-line conferencing if preferred.



## Discussion 2

**How can these improvement issues be addressed?**

### **Budget and finance scrutiny**

- More scrutiny involvement in budget process, and at an earlier stage for any meaningful input.

### **Work planning**

- A clear mythological process for developing the work programme of the scrutiny committee.

### **Pre-planning**

- Introduce pre-meetings before formal committee between all scrutiny Members to provide the space to set common objectives and possibly to reach consensus on lines of enquiry and questioning strategy. Using on-line conferencing if preferred.

# Recommendations



## Report conclusions:

### Member development

- Refresher scrutiny training, with a focus on good questioning skills and use of information and data.
- **Support for Chair + Vice Chair**
  - Scrutiny Chairs have an important role in providing leadership, modelling constructive behaviour and ensuring well managed meetings.
  - The Chair is respected and works hard to lead the committee.
  - Useful to have further skills and leadership training and development.



# Thoughts and questions?