

Your Guide to Participatory Scrutiny

What is participatory scrutiny?

Participatory scrutiny means involving people, especially those directly affected by decisions, in reviewing, questioning, and improving public services or organisations. Instead of decisions being examined and held to account only by officials, community members take an active role. It's about shared accountability and better decisions through lived experience.

Why it matters



Five key steps

1. Planning

- **Choose the focus:** What service, policy, or decision needs to be looked at?
- **Involve the right people:** Who has lived experience or an interest in this issue?
- **Plan the work:** Create a flexible plan that can adapt as new ideas or challenges emerge.
- **Keep it collaborative:** Everyone involved, including community members and officials, should help shape the plan for scrutiny.
- **Review regularly:** Check that your plan still makes sense and adjust if needed.



2. Gathering evidence

- **Collect information:** Use reports, data, surveys, and community insights.
- **Talk to people:** Include different voices - service users, residents, staff, partners.
- **Build relationships:** Work with groups or organisations who can bring diverse perspectives.



3. Analysing what you find

- **Look for patterns:** What's working well? What could be improved?
- **Listen to experiences:** Focus on what people say about how services affect their lives.
- **Ask 'why':** Go deeper to understand root causes, not just surface problems.



4. Reporting and recommending

- **Write it clearly:** Present findings and insights in plain language.
- **Make practical recommendations:** Suggest what should change and how.
- **Share widely:** Communicate the results with decision-makers and the wider community.



5. Following up

- **Track progress:** Check what's been done with your recommendations.
- **Assess impact:** Has anything improved as a result?
- **Keep the loop going:** Make scrutiny an ongoing habit, not a one-off event.



Example: Participatory scrutiny in practice

The Sir Gareth Edwards Cancer Charity

Who's involved

A charity supporting young people with cancer. Their “Board of Experts” is made up of 10 young people who have each experienced cancer themselves.

How the “Board of Experts” practices participatory scrutiny

- The young people meet every three months to discuss and review the charity's decisions.
- They are paid expenses for their time and contribution, recognising their value.
- Between meetings, they stay in touch through a WhatsApp group to share ideas and feedback.
- Each meeting starts with an update on what's changed since the last one, showing that their input leads to action.

An example of listening to lived experience

The charity's trustees proposed raising the age range for support from 15-35 to 15-40, but the young people's board pointed out that doing this would make it no longer a “young person's charity.” The trustees listened, and kept the age range at 15-35. Their decision was directly shaped by lived experience.

How the charity makes participation work

- The young people's travel costs are covered to remove barriers to involvement.
- Meetings are kept short, fun, and engaging (with snacks, changing venues, and occasional guest visits).
- Meetings are held in different locations to make them accessible and interesting.

As a result

Young people feel valued, their views shape key decisions, and the charity stays true to its purpose.



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