



Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

Scrutiny Essentials & Questioning Skills

presented by Lisa Smart

Session outline

1. Basic principles of scrutiny
2. Scrutiny's powers & authority
3. The role & responsibilities of scrutiny
4. Scrutiny culture
5. Scrutiny's priorities & focus
6. Building blocks of effective scrutiny
7. Good preparation
8. Objectives & key lines of enquiry
9. Key components of effective questioning
10. Types of questions

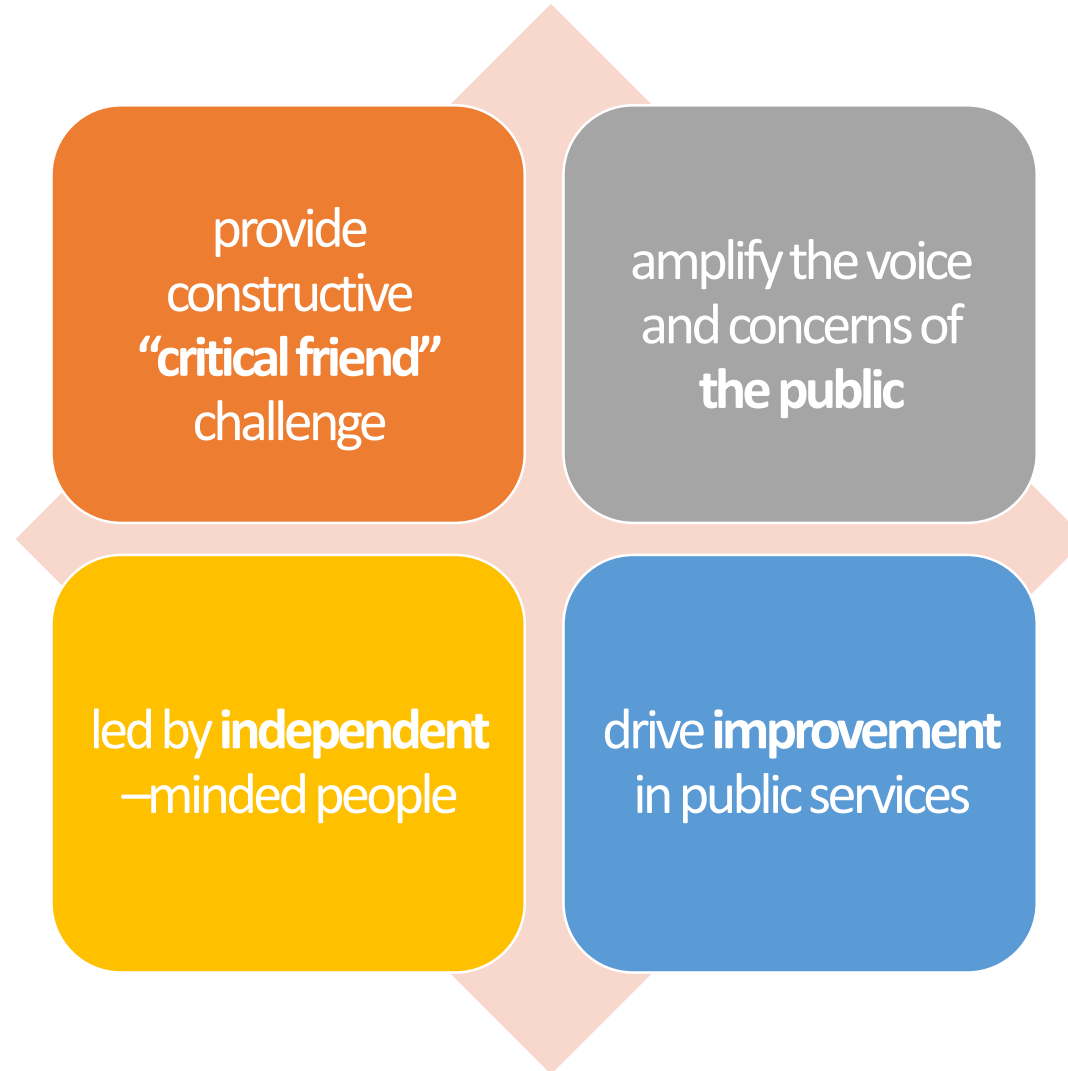
Basic principles of scrutiny

scrutiny *n.* close examination, careful inspection. 1415
scrutinie the taking of a formal vote to choose someone
or decide some question; borrowed from Latin *scrūtini-*
um a search, inquiry, from Latin *scrūtārī* to examine,
investigate, search, rummage (as through trash), from
scrūta, pl., trash, old things, rags, of uncertain origin.
The meaning of close examination, careful inspection,
is first recorded in 1604. —**scrutinize** *v.* subject to
scrutiny. 1671, formed from English *scrutin(y)* + *-ize*.



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 powers



Local Government Act 2000

- ⇒ Power to look at anything which affects **“the area or the area’s inhabitants”**;
- ⇒ Power to **access information**;
- ⇒ Power to **require attendance of the Executive and senior Officers** to be held to account or give evidence;
- ⇒ Power to require **response to recommendations**;
- ⇒ Power to **call-in the decisions of Executive members** (criteria).



Expectations of the role

- Who is scrutiny for?
- What do you want to achieve?
- Play to your strengths
- Do the background research
- Invest in building relationships
- Make best use of resources available
- Be committed = have an influence



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



Scrutiny priorities

Member-led work programme

Clear process and methodology

Criteria for topic selection

Align with council's strategic direction

Reflect community interests

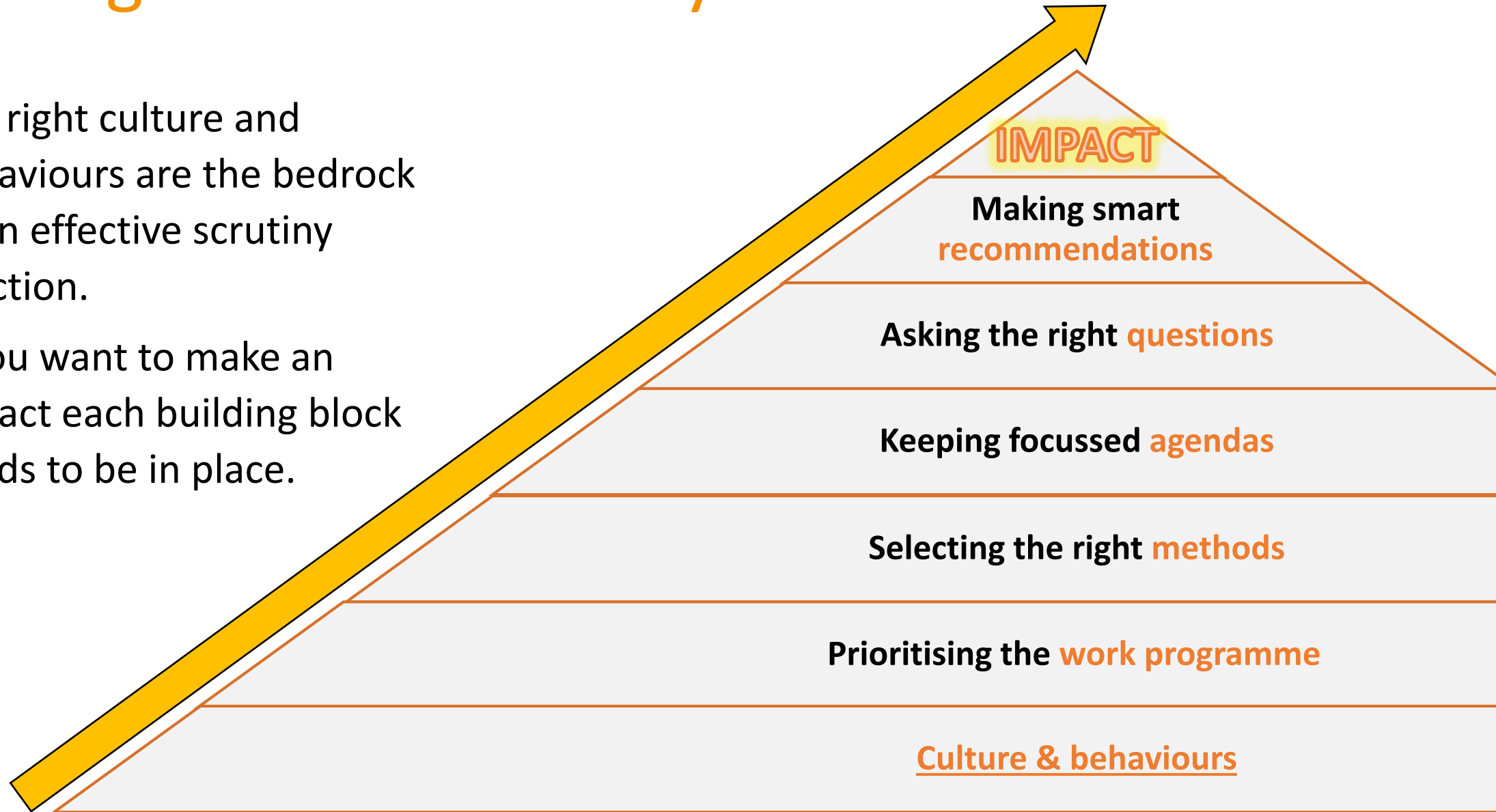
Look into significant risks / opportunities

Will it result in outcomes?



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.





Group discussion

1. What is the purpose of questioning in scrutiny?
2. Who should scrutiny hold to account through questioning?

Good preparation

1

- A **pre-meeting** gives space to plan and co-ordinate questioning as a team

2

- the whole committee should be clear on the **objectives** of scrutinising each item on the agenda

3

- developing **key lines of enquiry** within a **questioning strategy** for relevant and constructive questions with follow-ups



Objectives & key lines of enquiry

- Overall purpose → smaller objectives
- Link objectives to questions - part of your questioning strategy
- Questions are the roadmap
- Build questions around themes to focus and explore the subject – key lines of enquiry
- Requires a good prep and a degree of ‘stage-management’



Key lines of enquiry

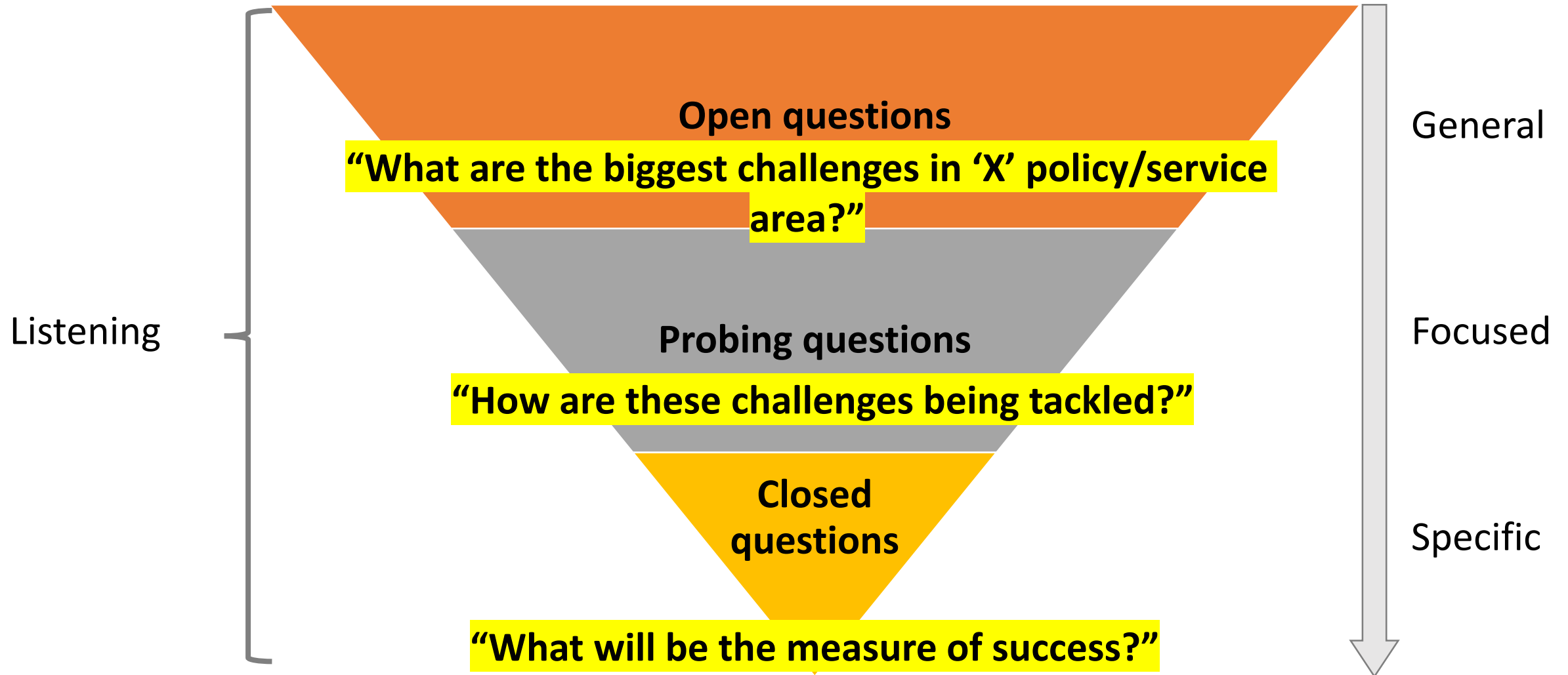
<p>1</p> <p>Is there the leadership capacity and capability to deliver high quality, sustainable care?</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Is there a clear vision and credible strategy to deliver high quality, sustainable care to people, and robust plans to deliver?</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Is there a culture of high quality, sustainable care?</p>
<p>4</p> <p>Are there clear responsibilities, roles and systems of accountability to support good governance and management?</p>	<p>Are services well led?</p>	<p>5</p> <p>Are there clear and effective processes for managing risks, issues and performance?</p>
<p>6</p> <p>Is appropriate and accurate information being effectively processed, challenged and acted on?</p>	<p>7</p> <p>Are the people who use services, the public, staff and external partners engaged and involved to support high quality sustainable services?</p>	<p>8</p> <p>Are there robust systems and processes for learning, continuous improvement and innovation?</p>



Approaches to questioning



Questioning & listening process



Active listening



Uses body language



Builds trust



Broadens your perspective



Increases understanding



Adds value



Helps form recommendations



Types of questions: open/closed

Open questions – Allow the respondent to share all the information they have. Helps set the scene and ascertains their perspective on matters.

“What are your thoughts regarding the provision of X service?”

Closed questions – Where a simple yes or no answer is needed, such as when checking a fact. Closed questions are harder to avoid and easier to challenge.

“Did you...?”

“Can you?”

“Will you?”

“Have you?”



Types of questions: probing

Reflecting Questions – These are used to clarify something which has been said, and to get the respondent to speak about a subject in more depth.

“You said that...”

“Talk me through...”

“Explain to me...”

Extending Questions – Extending questions invite the respondent to offer more information, and to elaborate on what they have already said.

“How else could...”

“Give me an example...”

“Could you tell me more about...?”



Types of questions: probing

Linking Questions – Linking up the respondent’s comments with information that the scrutineer requires is an effective way to politely guide and control the exchange.

“You mentioned earlier that... how would you...?”

“Can I pick up on the question that one of my fellow councillors asked a moment ago and ask...?”

Hypothetical Questions – The use of hypothetical frameworks allows the witness to answer a question from a safer theoretical position and may encourage them to explore issues more in-depth.

“If we were to try... what might happen?”

“How might residents be affected if...?”



Types of questions: probing

Comparative Questions – These can be used when the scrutineer wants to compare situations, approaches or to benchmark.

“What has it been like since...?”

“What difference has... made?”

“How do other authorities test for the same problems?”

Challenging Questions – This method allows the scrutineer to ‘dig deeper’ into an issue and discover how decisions are formed.

“How is that measured and who made that judgement?”

“Can you give me an example of why you think project X was successful?”





Things to avoid

- **Rambling**, ambiguous questions that cover a number of issues
- Making **statements** or political speeches
- Asking to hear a report on an important issues, but just noting it with no questions
- Questions about **issues not in the witness's knowledge**
- **'trick' questions** designed to confuse witnesses
 - **Double-bind questions** such as *'have you stopped manipulating the figures?'*
 - **Biased questions** with an inbuilt bias towards a particular perspective
 - **Leading questions** that unfairly lead a respondent to a particular answer.
 - **Tag questions** (i.e.) that end with *'wasn't it/won't they/isn't it'*. With these you could be making an assertion in order to gain agreement or compliance





Final thoughts and discussion

