



A guide to being an **AGMA** **Scrutiny** **Member**

This booklet is designed to give you information on –

- What is scrutiny?
- What is AGMA?
- What is the purpose of scrutiny at AGMA level?
- What is the role of the AGMA scrutiny member?
- What are the desirable skills and knowledge of an AGMA scrutiny member?

July 2009

AGMA Scrutiny Unit

What is scrutiny?

A formal scrutiny function was created as a result of the Local Government Act (2000) further defining the reviewing and challenging element of an elected representative's role.

It is the mechanism by which public accountability is exercised, as executive boards make decisions on behalf of their communities, the powers of scrutiny allow non-executive members to hold them to account for decisions taken on behalf of public interest.

Through the checks and balances made by scrutiny members, the public are able to influence the strategic direction of decision makers and policies. They are able to assess performance, service delivery and challenge local councils and external public sector organisations to make improvements.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny defines the role of scrutiny as –

1. providing 'critical friend' challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers
2. enabling the voice and concerns of the public and its communities
3. being carried out by 'independent minded governors' who lead and own the scrutiny process
4. driving improvement in public services

What is AGMA?

AGMA (the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities) was formed after the abolition of the Greater Manchester County Council in 1986. The 1985 Local Government Act devolved power to local areas but also recognised that there were some functions that needed to be co-ordinated at a metropolitan level. AGMA was formed to undertake these functions.

The Association is a partnership between the ten local authorities within the Greater Manchester area (Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Manchester, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan). These ten authorities co-operate on a number of issues, both statutory and non-statutory, where there is the possibility of improving service delivery by working together.

In 2008 AGMA decided to amend its working arrangements and adopt a new constitution this now means that the main decision making body, the AGMA Executive Board, operates as a Joint Committee under Section 101(5) of the Local Government Act 1972.

The Executive Board

The Executive Board is formed by the Leaders of the 10 AGMA Authorities, plus the following Joint Authorities which operate in Greater Manchester:-

- The Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority
- The Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority
- The Greater Manchester Police Authority
- The Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority

Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Warrington Councils are associate members. Representatives from associate members may attend Board meetings and participate in debates, but not vote.

The Chair of the AGMA Executive Board is elected from amongst the 10 leaders who make up the Executive Board and up to 3 Vice Chairs may be appointed from different political groups.

Executive Board meetings are usually held on the last Friday of the month, in public and tend to rotate around the 10 Districts.

One other important principle enshrined in the new constitution is that wherever possible decisions will be made by agreement, without the need for a vote. Where this is not possible most matters of strategic importance considered by the Executive Board require a 2/3 majority to vote in favour (i.e. 7 of the 10 full member authorities).

The board has power to establish Commissions, Sub Committees and advisory groups.

Commissions

As part of its new Governance arrangements AGMA is in the process of establishing 7 new Commissions with delegated responsibility from the Executive Board for overseeing delivery and the development of more specific strategic work against the aims and objectives set out in the Greater Manchester Strategy.

Seven such Commissions have been or are in the process of being set up and in most cases will be formed from a mix of elected members and other partners.

The Commissions are:-

Commission for the new economy
Environment commission
Health commission
Improvement and Efficiency commission
Planning and Housing commission
Public Protection commission
Transport commission

Committees

AGMA has a number of sub committees including:

- Health Scrutiny Panel
- Select Committee
- Statutory Functions Committee
- Joint Waste Committee

More information on AGMA, its commissions, committees and strategic documents can be found at www.agma.gov.uk

The purpose of scrutiny at the AGMA level

AGMA scrutiny exists to achieve greater public accountability over decisions made and services delivered for the whole of Greater Manchester. Its three key functions are -

1. To hold the AGMA Executive Board to account

Through the use of scrutiny powers to 'call in' decisions made by the AGMA Executive Board that could have significant effects on the residents within the AGMA administrative area.

When a decision is made by the Board, it is published to all scrutiny pool members. If five or more agree to call a decision in, notification to the Board must be made within five working days. Pool

members are then invited to a meeting with the relevant decision makers, to explain their concerns and reasons for the call-in. A decision can then be referred to the Board to be reconsidered.

Full details of this procedure can be found in the 'Protocol for joint scrutiny arrangements' document (copy in the AGMA Scrutiny Pool Member Pack)

2. To provide a 'critical friend' to policy and strategy development

Through regular monitoring of developing policies and strategies of both the AGMA Executive and its Commissions and asking challenging yet constructive questions such as "What is being done?", "Is this the best way?" and "Can it be improved?"

3. To undertake scrutiny reviews into areas of strategic importance for the people of Greater Manchester

Reviews of the AGMA Scrutiny Pool should aim to investigate matters of strategic significance for the Greater Manchester area; its work should complement and not duplicate that of the individual local authorities, but review sub-regional issues that are directly linked to the work of the AGMA Executive and its Commissions.

Review panels are similar in approach to Parliamentary Select Committees, panel members collect evidence through a variety of sources including –

- Questioning expert 'witnesses'
- Receiving reports and other literature
- Undertaking consultation
- Communication with stakeholders

The AGMA review panels work with this information to make suggestions for improvement, acknowledge good practice and make recommendations, they do not deal with individual issues or queries that are more suitably dealt with by a local authority or specific organisation. The findings of each review will be submitted to the relevant body within AGMA in order to influence the relevant decision makers.

Each authority undertakes the scrutiny review process slightly differently, below is a diagram which illustrates the method by which a scrutiny review will be undertaken at an AGMA level.

AGMA review process

The subject for review is presented to the Scrutiny Pool via a Member, the public, the Executive Board, or an AGMA Commission. The pool will judge its appropriateness against the AGMA scrutiny review checklist.



The pool determines which panel will undertake the review, and who will sit on it.



The relevant panel will scope the review to determine what exactly its terms of reference will be (i.e. what it will look at)



The panel will gather information through interviews, consultation, and research for evidence.



The panel will analyse the information gathered and decide the findings of the review.



The panel will make recommendations as to improvements that could be made to any element of the review subject.



The recommendations will be referred to AGMA Executive for their discussion and endorsement and then to the relevant organisation/body for their action.



Recommendations will be monitored and followed up on a timescale agreed by the panel.

AGMA scrutiny reviews checklist

Is the review topic...

- a. Strategic
- b. Significant
- c. Clear objectives
- d. Of added value to AGMA
- e. Timely
- f. Able to influence performance
- g. Capable of leading to effective outcomes

The role of an AGMA scrutiny member

The scrutiny function works differently in all local authorities, therefore the role of the AGMA Scrutiny member has been clearly outlined below -

Scrutiny Pool activities:	Roles of the member:
Design of scrutiny structures and mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To discuss fully any proposals to introduce new structures and mechanisms To recommend mechanisms that would prove most effective
Selection of topic areas and work programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To propose areas or policies to review To discuss fully the proposed work programme and topic areas
Agenda development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To pro-actively share agendas for scrutiny pool meetings – chair to lead on this To propose future agenda items
Scrutiny process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To prepare effectively for scrutiny meetings and panel meetings To take a lead in directing and contributing to scrutiny meetings and panel meetings To ensure effective follow up of discussions To prepare questions following the receipt of initial reports and/or presentations To undertake further research where appropriate To be included and involved in any information gathering/consultation for scrutiny reviews To contribute to the analysis of scrutiny findings
Reports and recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To propose and shape recommendations To pro-actively shape and revise reports prepared on behalf of the scrutiny pool
Review and reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To take a lead in instigating reviews of progress on scrutiny To include periodic discussions on progress and necessary improvements within scrutiny meetings Examine any areas of best practice regarding regional scrutiny
The impact and wider remit of scrutiny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop constructive ‘critical friend’ relationships with AGMA, its Commissions, and member Local Authorities Develop professional relationships and participate in joint working with Local Authority Scrutiny Committees and other Regional Scrutiny Bodies Monitor and highlight national issues that may be of relevance to the AGMA Scrutiny Pool

Members of the scrutiny pool should be selected based on their scrutiny experience and skills. Below is a list of essential and desirable knowledge and skills of a regional scrutiny pool member:

Essential	Desirable
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of roles and responsibilities of key organisations in the region General knowledge of the work of AGMA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of policy areas being scrutinised Wider knowledge and understanding of regional scrutiny Knowledge or experience of scrutiny in other public sector contexts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questioning skills Influencing skills Policy analysing skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research and analytical skills Information retrieval and presentation skills A willingness to develop scrutiny skills and

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills • Working collaboratively skills • Project management skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • undertake training • Ability to support new scrutiny members in developing their skills
---	--

AGMA Scrutiny member checklist

- ✓ Be persistent and inquisitive
- ✓ Offer constructive challenges
- ✓ Participate fully
- ✓ Remember that scrutiny is about learning and being a 'critical friend' and should be a positive process
- ✓ Ask questions, even if you think they are too basic
- ✓ Keep focussed by undertaking manageable sized reviews
- ✓ Be realistic with timescales
- ✓ Be mindful that scrutiny should result in improved value and enhanced performance
- ✓ Take an overview approach and be aware of the 'bigger picture'
- ✓ Practice effective listening
- ✓ Remain strategic
- ✓ Take account of local needs, priorities and policies
- ✓ Ask effective questions – be constructive, not judgemental
- ✓ Be open minded and flexible
- ✓ Listen to the public, and help them engage with scrutiny
- ✓ Praise good practice and seek to spread this within your authority
- ✓ Be politically neutral
- ✓ Take time to review your own performance
- ✓ Remember that scrutiny is not opposition, but a balancing tool for effective democracy
- ✓ Keep to the remit and brief