Q1 **What is Overview and Scrutiny**
A Wakefield Council wants its policies to be relevant to the needs of local people - and its services to be of the highest quality.
To achieve this, the Council aims to examine and review its policies and services in an open and accountable way that involves local people.
The Council's Overview and Scrutiny process is its way of achieving this.
Through a series of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Councillors and members of the local community work together to review services or policies and make recommendations for improvement to the Council's Executive and/or partner organisations for improvements or alternative ways of working.
Overview and Scrutiny Committees will look to work in partnership with the Council's Executive - but will not refrain from offering constructive criticism where they think services are being poorly provided or failing to meet the needs or desires of local people.
Local people are at the heart of effective scrutiny. With their involvement, Councillors are able to hear the views of people who receive services.

Q2 **What are the aims of Overview and Scrutiny in Wakefield?**
A Overview and Scrutiny is about working alongside providers, partners and local people to improve policies and services.
Overview and Scrutiny is part of the Council's aims to:

- Improve its performance
- Consider all options to provide better services
- Listen to the community, to deliver services which are relevant and meet local needs
- Ensure decision-making is clear, transparent and accountable.

Q3 **Why does Wakefield Council think Overview and Scrutiny is worthwhile?**
A We think scrutinising the Council properly will enable Wakefield to:

- meet the challenges of the 21st century
- measure its performance against its promises - and continuously improve its performance
• compare itself to other local authorities and providers in the voluntary and private sector and learn from what they do well  
• listen to all local people and work hard to try and make sure that it uses its resources in the best way it can, to help meet local needs and priorities  
• make decisions in clear and transparent ways  
• enable local people to hold to account executive councillors - responsible for proposing Council policies.

Q How does Wakefield's Overview and Scrutiny Process Work?  
A The Council has five Overview and Scrutiny Committees consisting of councillors from all political parties on the Council plus community representatives. The committees will identify areas of need or issues of concern to local residents. These may be: 

• an existing policy  
• a policy proposal  
• a service  
• a community issue

With support from the Overview and Scrutiny Office, each committee agrees a work programme and terms of reference for particular inquiries. This process clearly identifies the scope of what each committee will look at over the coming year.

Q How do the Overview and Scrutiny Committees operate?  
A Committees meet once a month and Executive Councillors, Council officers and expert witnesses may be invited to provide information to members in relation to the topics on the committee’s agenda. Having heard the information members of the committee will then have the opportunity to ask questions. The Chair will manage the meeting to allow a range of questions to be put and give the opportunity for answers to be given. Members of the committee will then be able to have an informed discussion around the evidence given.

The committee may also choose to gather its information in other ways outside of formal meetings, for example: 

• One to one discussions  
• Site visits  
• Community meetings  
• Surveys/questionnaires

Once the committees have gathered all the information they need, they will evaluate it and if appropriate make recommendations for improvements. These will usually be presented in a report to the relevant decision makers: the Cabinet, Full Council, Wakefield Together or individual partner organisations.
How can Overview and Scrutiny influence policy and improve local services?

Once an Overview and Scrutiny Committee has gathered all the information together and drawn their conclusions they will produce a report with a practical list of recommendations, to address the issues and improve the service. This report will be forwarded to the Council's Executive for their consideration. The report will then be debated in public at the Cabinet or Council where Executive Councillors can make their response to the report. They will advise the meeting what they will do to carry out the recommendations or explain why they reject certain recommendations.

If the recommendations relate to services provided by the Council's partners, the report may also be forwarded to the Wakefield Together Partnership or to individual partners such as the police, health service, housing and transport providers for their consideration as well. However, partner organisations as are under no obligation to respond.

What does Overview and Scrutiny mean for councillors?

Councillors play a crucial role in making sure the Council uses its resources effectively, efficiently and in a way which is responsive to the diverse needs of the local community. The Overview and Scrutiny process allows Councillors to examine service areas and discuss areas of interest and to make recommendations for change and improvement.

Taking part in Overview and Scrutiny Committees is hard work and time consuming. There are a number of meetings to attend - and papers to read. Having heard all the evidence, the committees are expected to draw conclusions and make recommendations. However, there is dedicated officer support in the Overview and Scrutiny Office to assist members. The role of the Chair of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee is vital in guiding the direction of the review and in making sure that Councillors make the best use of their time. The Chair keeps the meeting focused on the particular service area or issue being considered and ensures that the Committee hears all the evidence it requires from those it has asked to give evidence.

Individual councillors have different interests but all have something to contribute to the process.

I work for the Council. How will Overview and Scrutiny affect me or my colleagues?

Scrutiny's role is to find ways of improving services. It provides officers giving evidence with an opportunity to highlight areas where they perform well, indicate areas of difficulty and suggest changes they would like to implement.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees offer the opportunity for officers to give councillors a more detailed understanding of the way services are provided and therefore leads to better informed recommendations. Committees want to work in partnership with others. They provide the opportunity for a constructive dialogue between officers and councillors, to move services or policies forward. Overview and Scrutiny also provides officers with a valuable opportunity to learn from the experience of co-opted members. The evidence from external witnesses may also provide staff with innovative ideas that have not previously been considered.

I'm a resident - How can I get involved?
A If Overview and Scrutiny is to be successful, it is essential that local people are involved, if councillors are to gain a clear picture of the issues that affect the local community. For this reason the committees welcome the views of local people in relation to the topics on their work programme. You can contribute in a number of ways:

Contact the Committee Chair
This can be done by:

- Email: scrutinycontact@wakefield.gov.uk
- Telephone: 01924 305957
- Letter: c/o Overview and Scrutiny Office, Room 53, County Hall, Wakefield WF1 2QW

Attend an Overview and Scrutiny Meeting
All Overview and Scrutiny meetings are open to the public to attend as observers. You may be able to speak at the meeting but this is at the discretion of the Committee Chair, who will manage the meeting to allow a range of questions to be put and give the opportunity for answers to be given. Members of the committee will then be able to have an informed discussion around the evidence given.

Become a Co-opted Member
Co-opted members are members of the wider community who work alongside councillors as part of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. As a co-opted member you are expected to attend meetings of the committee, listen carefully and ask questions in a way which is non-judgemental and respects confidentiality. They also help to draw conclusions and formulate recommendations.