

Centre for Public Scrutiny Call In advice

- In many Council's, call in is a method for the minority party to carry out political opposition to Cabinet's agenda. In others it is an infrequently used, judicial review-type process that focuses on things like the way that decisions were consulted on before being implemented. There are other core purposes for call-in, and which one is the most prevalent in your authority will govern how call-in operates.
- Procedures should not actively seek to militate against call-in - they shouldn't place an unreasonably high bar that members have to meet. Some authorities do require that call-ins must be requested by members from two different political parties, which can be effective in limiting the amount of purely political opposition.
- It is important to develop an understanding of how call-in fits into your other scrutiny processes. It is one of a collection of tools available to members - others being CCfA, petitions, ordinary scrutiny reviews and so on. Members should understand that there may be some circumstances where it will not be appropriate, but another tool might be.
- It is important to think about the way that a council's Forward Plan operates at the same time as considering call-in. Often, councils with lots of call-ins have poor Forward Plans (so members have little opportunity to consider decisions before they are made). By making the Forward Plan more effective, scrutiny has more of an opportunity to influence decisions and the need for call-in will decrease.
- It is also important to consider whether special meetings should be called which just consider call-ins; those meetings could operate in a specific, prescribed way - in the manner in which they take evidence, how they engage with witnesses and how they produce recommendations. For things as politically controversial as call-in, the more that people know what they can expect before they go into the meeting, the fewer nasty surprises there will be and witnesses are likely to be more open.
- Members bringing call-ins should put some thought into why they are doing it. "To get the decision quashed" is not really acceptable except in exceptional circumstances. There really should be a pressing and urgent need to call a decision in rather than just political disagreement. This process could help you to identify other potential avenues for members to take their concerns, without needing to resort to call-in.
- The issue of Call-in should be considered in more general terms about making the best use of member and officer time. Whatever arrangements are agreed, careful negotiation and agreement will be required with all political groups before putting any new call-in processes into place. Ideally, you will need a full debate at Full Council.