



## **Useful Information** **Questioning Techniques**

Extract from the Local Government Association - Guidance for Scrutiny Members

- Questioning is a crucial component of the ‘critical friend’ challenge and an important principle of good public scrutiny.
- The key to successful questioning is balancing the need to get answers with the need to build relationships. This can be achieved by a combination of good preparation, knowing what questions to ask and when to ask them, and understanding which style is appropriate for different situations.
- Questioning is best carried out after some initial evidence gathering and research so that questions can be targeted on the appropriate issues.
- Questioning is a powerful and essential tool.
- Good questioning can enable you to:
  - get to the ‘heart of the matter’
  - gather evidence and clarify and expand on initial views or early information
  - draw information without making the respondent feel intimidated or prejudged
  - facilitate inclusion, buy-in and ownership of problems and build a rapport
- Questioning needs to be probing but not destructive - incisive but constructive.

### **Question Types**

There are different types of questions which can be utilised to help achieve a desired outcome, OSC members should consider the type of question they wish to use in order to get the information in the response that they require.

#### **Open Questions**

Open questions allow the witness to open up and to share all the information they have. Useful phrases:



### **Comparative Questions**

These can be used to compare situations, for example on a before and after basis. Useful questions could be phrased as follows:

- What has it been like since.....?
- What difference has.....?

### **Closed Questions**

Where a simple yes or no answer will suffice it is advisable to stick to closed questions (such as when checking a fact). Closed questions are harder to avoid and easier to challenge.

Useful phrases:

- Did you ...?
- Have you told.....?

### **Rephrasing or paraphrasing**

This technique can be used to clarify something that has been said by the witness, it may also encourage the witness to elaborate on their previous answer and provide more detail.

Useful phrases:

- Are you saying that...?
- Let me see if I understand the problem completely...

### **Reflecting Questions**

These are used to clarify something which has been said, and/or to get the respondent to speak about a subject in more depth. Useful phrases could include "You said that..." and "You sound as if ...." Or "I get the feeling that....."

### **Linking Questions**

Linking questions rely on active listening on the part of the scrutineer. By linking previous responses offered by the witness to other issues the scrutineer is able to demonstrate that they have valued the witness's input. This technique may then encourage the witness to offer further explanation. Useful phrases:

- You mentioned earlier that...
- How would you....?

### **Extending Questions**

Extending questions invite the witness to offer more information, and to elaborate on what they have already said. Useful phrases:

- How else could...?
- Could you tell me more about..?