



SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE 5TH JANUARY 2005

REPORT OF ATTENDANCE AT WEST MIDLANDS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY NETWORK (WMOSN), TELFORD, 30TH NOVEMBER, 2004

A) REPORT BY CLLR SAWDON

This somewhat uninspiring event, attended by Cllr Ridge, Peter Barnett and myself was organised by the WMLGA in conjunction with the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS). It was attended by 19 (if they all turned up) out of a possible 38 affiliated authorities and in theory included 20 officers and 23 councillors.

The main purpose of the occasion was to examine the role of Scrutiny in meeting local authority recycling targets and to examine some difficulties with the WMOSN scrutiny website.

The problem of meeting Government recycling targets was outlined by Chris Davy from WRAP (Waste and Resources Programme). He explained the Government's new Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS). This was not entirely relevant to Coventry since we have our Waste to Energy Plant but, gave an indication of the need to reach our targets for recycling and composting together with Landfill Targets. He pointed out that it was possible to 'trade' allowances with other authorities to avoid penalties on failing to reach LATS targets and the need to find markets for recycled and composted material.

There was a minor discussion on how to measure home composting schemes and it was quoted as 'fact' that each baby produces 1 ton of waste nappies!

Gareth Wall from CfPS gave a rather unconvincing resume of two scrutiny reviews that he claimed had led to dramatic improvements in recycling.

This was followed by two perfectly dreadful workshops on how to organise scrutiny reviews to examine and recommend action/outcomes etc on the issue of recycling. Perhaps it was because there was only a short time allocated to the exercise that the workshops appeared to be a bit amateurish but both Councillor Ridge and I felt that we do the job better here in Coventry. Since neither of us feels that we do the job that well here anyway – and the main reason for us going to the conference was to learn something – we came away feeling little the wiser.

The final session of this disjointed event was to discuss the WMOSN website that no one seems to be using. Most of the stuff is available nationally anyway and the cynic in me suggested that this particular item was little more, than a job preservation exercise. The virtues of the website were outlined rather incoherently by an officer of the WMLGA and followed by two 'facilitated workshops' – whatever they may be – to see how the website can be developed. These led to no real conclusions since the discussion was supposed to rely on the experience of those who'd used the website and hardly anybody had!

Apart from the fact that the lunch wasn't bad, the conference was free and the only cost to the council was minimal travelling expenses I would not recommend that we involve ourselves again in the WMOSN.

Councillor Sawdon

B) ADDITIONAL COMMENTS BY PETER BARNETT

Although I would identify with many of the comments made by Cllr Sawdon regarding this event, it was perhaps of more benefit to officers than Members.

Recycling

The problem with the time spent on recycling was that it fell between the two stools of looking in depth into recycling issues, and ideas about how Scrutiny might be involved in improving performance in this area.

The studies of scrutiny done by other authorities (North Somerset and Northamptonshire) were interesting enough, but were far from ground-breaking.

Some of the issues around the development of the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme are of interest, and I did get some ideas of how this area might be approached if and when Scrutiny Board 3 decide to include recycling within their work programme.

The workshop which I attended with Cllr Ridge easily slipped into anecdotes by District Councillors about their local recycling centres, and stories from the session leader about problems he'd encountered with Cherwell District Council. Much of this did not seem pertinent to our work.

West Midlands Scrutiny Website (www.wmscrutiny.org.uk)

Part of the morning was put aside to discuss the WMOSN website. A number of changes were suggested by officers to ensure that this resource added value, rather than duplicated other websites (CfPS or example). The website may prove a useful tool for officers to share scrutiny experiences and pick up tips for future reviews.

WMOSN

West Midlands Overview & Scrutiny Network has identified a series of work priorities for 2005, which are of interest to us in Coventry. These are:

- Evaluation – the monitoring of Scrutiny recommendations and implementation.
- The contribution of Scrutiny to the response of the efficiency review.
- The relationship between Scrutiny and the Executive.
- The role of full council.

This event was not as successful as the previous one, which focused more on "health scrutiny". Whilst I would not recommend that we seek to send full representation to every event, my view would be that we should look at the agendas for future events and decide if attendance by officer, Members or both would be appropriate.

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