

Report to

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee – 2nd November 2005

Report of

Scrutiny Co-ordinator

Title

WMLGA Overview and Scrutiny Network Event -

"The relationship between Scrutiny and the Executive"
held on 14th October, 2005, in Stoke-on-Trent

1. Recommendations

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee are asked to note the information contained in this briefing note.

2. Background Information

- 2.1 The details of the event are set out in the appendix to this note.
- 2.2 It was attended by about 40 people, both Members and officers, representing a variety of Local Authorities (County Councils, District Councils, Metropolitan District Councils).
- 2.3 The event ran from 10.00 a.m. until 1.00 p.m. and consisted of workshops for which participants were divided into groups to consider issues, and facilitated plenary sessions when the workshop outcomes were discussed.

3. Benefits of attending this event

- 3.1 The event was more focused than some have been in the past and resulted in identifying some interesting areas where relationships might be developed between the Executive and Scrutiny, to the benefit of the Authority.
- 3.2 It was clear from the discussions that many authorities were still struggling to make the Scrutiny role effective and to provide a meaningful role for Scrutiny members, although most felt that progress was slowly being made. In some authorities there was a good relationship between Scrutiny and the Executive, but in others this relationship needed to improve.
- 3.3 The event provided an opportunity to pool ideas for how this might be achieved.

4. Cost of attending

The total cost was £58.00 (£20.00 Fee and £38.00 Travel).

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"The relationship between Scrutiny and the Executive"

held on 14th October 2005, in Stoke-on-Trent

1. Aims of the Event

- a) To consider the relationship between Scrutiny and the Executive
- b) To consider how the Executive/Scrutiny can break down barriers and facilitate more effective Scrutiny
- c) Consider "next steps"

2. Key factors influencing the Executive / Scrutiny relationship (the "7 P's): -

- a) People
(Behaviour of key influencers / leaders / chairs / view of purpose of Scrutiny and the Executive functions)
- b) Policy
(Successes / shared recognition)
- c) Politics
(Balance of power / issues / elections)
- d) Previous history of the Relationship
- e) Potential
(Shared knowledge / agreement as to benefits of different ways of working)
- f) Provision
(Resources / Training)
- g) Party Group behaviour

3. High Level Outcomes

The participants considered what outcomes could be achieved if the Executive and Scrutiny were working well together. These were as follows: -

- a) Make things happen to produce lasting benefits for citizens
- b) Provide a focus on key areas of concern or challenge for better decisions
- c) Enhance and support democratic renewal leading to greater public and stakeholder involvement in the Scrutiny role

- d) Improve the profile of Scrutiny so that it is seen as a key driver in policy-making or providing the policy-making framework of the Council
- e) Schedule meaningful meetings with Portfolio holders and Heads of Service
- f) Operate in a more non-partisan and cross-party way and develop more effective co-ordination between the Executive and Scrutiny
- g) Carry out joint authority reviews
- h) Promote and support champions of issues
- i) Support Members through training, mentoring, research and benchmarking visits
- j) Provide checks and balances i.e Executive held to account on budget, decisions and strategy

4. How the barriers between Scrutiny and the Executive can be broken down

The following were possible solutions, which have been adopted by different authorities:-

- a) Joint planning of Scrutiny programme – Devon County Council have used this approach whereby Scrutiny provided the Council with the capacity to carry out detailed investigation which the Executive and the Service Directorates would often not have available otherwise.
- b) Try some joint "Vision Engineering" i.e. events involving the Executive, Scrutiny and senior officers to decide the Council's vision and specific objectives to achieve the vision.
- c) Appoint champions (Members and officers) with drive and determination – Telford and Wrekin have adopted this strategy which has developed the following strengths:-
 - i. Clear leadership from Members
 - ii. Mature relationship with the Executive
 - iii. Value added review work, strongly user focused and linked to service improvement priorities
 - iv. Effective operating methods including going out in to the community, setting up project groups and question sessions with the Executive
 - v. Good cross-party working
- d) A good training programme
- e) Don't re-invent the wheel – carry out benchmarking, including visiting Councils which have demonstrated success in action. Also think about how the successful processes used by those Councils would work.
- f) Explore with the Executive how Scrutiny can be involved more fully in the formulation and review of policies (as at Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council where all major investment and capital decisions are considered by a cross-party panel)

5. Next Steps

The participants identified the following ways in which the relationship between the Executive and Scrutiny could be developed in order to make them most effective;-

- a) Hold regular meetings between the Chair of each Scrutiny Board, related Cabinet Members and Directors and the Scrutiny Officer, so that each are aware of what work is currently being done.
- b) Cabinet Members to give regular reports to Scrutiny Boards on their work (but ensuring that this does not "take over" the agenda).
- c) Informal networking e.g. in party groups.
- d) Develop good relationships between Scrutiny Officers and Directors / Outside Agencies.
- e) Interchange of Executive and Scrutiny roles, so that Members are more aware of how each works.
- f) Pay parity for Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Board Chairs.
- g) Joint publicity for Scrutiny work and reports, to show that the Executive and Scrutiny are working together.
- h) Focusing on priorities for the City together.
- i) Draw up protocols so that everyone knows roles and processes.
- j) Respect from both sides e.g. no frivolous call-ins, Cabinet Members responding to recommendations.
- k) Provide support for Scrutiny equal to that for the Executive.