



Chester-le-Street
District Council

The Future of Scrutiny

A workshop to assist decision making on the future of Scrutiny Panels at Chester-le Street District Council
22nd June 2006 2.00pm



Outcomes Report

1. Introduction

On 22nd June a Member workshop was undertaken . This was arranged to assist the council in reaching a decision about the future role of Scrutiny at the District Council. Currently there are three Overview and Scrutiny Panels managed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board. The panels are based on pre 2005 council aims which no longer exist. Discussions have been held between members on the need to consider change. The review of Scrutiny is a proposal in the council's new Corporate Plan approved by Council on 25th May 2006.

The Workshop aimed to share the experience form other Scrutiny Members and Officers in the region and as a result challenge the current arrangements. While there will be an element of learning this was not a members training event. It was part of the council's corporate planning process and will help facilitate a further review of the council's constitution and more effective scrutiny of the councils business.

2. Purpose of this document

The Purpose of this document is to provide details of the results of the work shop. By pulling together the nature of discussions at the workshop and the personal comments made by members in the feedback sheets, It will assist the council in making a decision on the future of the structure of scrutiny.

The report is a summary of the workshop. While it does try to summarise the principle underlying view from the day it contains no commentary on the views personal views expressed. It does not provide an options appraisal as this will be the subject of a detailed report to council in due course.

3. Report Structure

The report is Structured as follows:

Part 1 : Workshop programme and slides

This sets out what the workshop was about and provides members with a copy of the presentation Slides

Part 2 : Break out group comments

This provides a summary of breakout group discussions

Part 3: Individual member comments

This provides a summary of views expressed by individual members

Part 4: Summary and Learning

This final part attempts to summarise key points and learning from the workshop



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Outcomes Report Part 1 : Workshop programme



4. Attendance

The Workshop was attended by the following members:

Councillors Armstrong, Barr, Barratt, Brown, Carr, Ebbatson, Harrison, M Gollan, Harrison, Holding, Humes, Kerr, Laverick, Meek, Proud, Turner, Willis, Evans and Richardson.

The workshop was facilitated by Ian Forster, Colin Turnbull, Julie Underwood, Dawn Allison, Jessica Hall and Shelley Marshall.

There were two external contributors. These were Councillor Sue Dungworth of Blyth Valley and Stephen Gwilym of the District of Easington. The council has written to both to thank them for their valuable contribution.

5. Programme

The programme was as follows:

1.15pm Registration and Buffet Lunch

2.00pm *Welcome* by leader of the Council Linda Ebbatson



The Leader outlined the councils commitment to continuous improvement and the importance of the review of scrutiny in the council

2.10pm *Outline of the afternoon* – Assist. Chief Executive Ian Forster



The Assistant Chief Executive briefly outlined the structure of the afternoon

2.15pm ***Back at Blyth* – Councillor Sue Dungworth**
Chairperson Blyth Overview and Scrutiny Management Board



Councillor Dungworth shared her experience of Scrutiny arrangements principally at Blyth Valley where she is Chairperson of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board. This has three overview and scrutiny commissions that act as sub-committees.

2.40pm ***Experiencing Easington* – Stephen Gwilym**
Scrutiny Manager, District of Easington



Stephen shared His experience at Easington where Scrutiny is also subject to a review

3.00pm ***Exploring Options* - Ian Forster Asst Chief Executive**

The Chief Executive the potential options available to the district council

- *The status quo*
- *Priority based options*
- *Portfolio holder based options*
- *Themed options*
- *More innovative ways of working*

3.15pm ***Breakout sessions* – Favoured approaches**

The breakout groups were facilitated and aimed to consider:

- *What is the focus for our Scrutiny? (why do we do it?)*
- *What Structure best supports that focus? (how should we do it?)*
- *What option suits us best?*

4.15pm **Feedback and close**

Slides of the event are provided in the following pages



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Outcomes Report Part 2 : Break out group comments



5. What is the focus for scrutiny?

The views of the groups ranged as follows:

- Working for the well being of the communities, making life better and meeting their needs
- Hold Executive to account and act as challenge to decisions
- Act as a critical friend
- Provide an external challenge and to look outside internal mechanisms
- To keep all members involved
- Act in a community leadership and engagement role
- To balance the concerns of residents with the priorities of the council
- Improve service delivery and ensure a better district
- Maintain effectiveness of performance management
- Engagement from policy development to service delivery
- Need to get our own house in order before we have a more external focus
- Participate in best Value Reviews
- Monitor Partnerships
- Media engagement
- Involvement in decision making
- Meeting the internal requirements of the council
- Delivering a service which is value for money and fit for purpose (economic, efficient and effective services)
- Scrutinising statutory functions of the Authority.

One group summarized the focus as Follows:

The focus is to ensure the organisation is ‘fit for purpose’ to meet the needs of the community.

The following issues were raised in group discussions:

- Attendance is an issue
- There are issues of time and focus with current structure
- Need to make the best use of scales and talents
- Need to acknowledge that this is a small council
- A structure where there is one Scrutiny with task and finish groups could work
- Currently 3 scrutiny panels is about right there could be a change in function or there could be rotation
- There could be four panels based on the LAA blocks or other themes
- There could be mileage in Easingtons current Structure
- The focus could be on Directorates and this may create the need for 4 panels
- Need for new names an remit review?

- Don't need wholesale review as current system has worked well in previous year
- Two groups with task and finish may be easier to manage and could be better planned?
- Maintain current set up with member training and skilled members to enable flexibility within the structure
- Need to take account of the volume of business
- Maintain the current three panels with changes as follows:

Strengthening the role of the Panels

To improve on the lack of resources for Scrutiny

Improve links with the Executive and OSMB

More engagement with the Leader and the OSMB

Scrutiny function to be ranked as important as Executive

To have Task and Finish Groups within the Panels

To involve the Portfolio Holders

Clearer Work Programmes with greater effectiveness

Short recommendations within reports

7. What option suits us best?

- Not the Status quo but some updates to current structure
- Possibly Portfolio based but would this internalize the process
- Possibly themes including LAA, partnership focus
- An outward approach which encourages participation
- That the three Scrutiny Panels remain under different titles.
- That there be a crosscutting of Portfolios holders with the Panels so that the Terms of Reference of the Panels include the responsibilities covered by two Portfolio Holders

One group did not reach a consensus on what suited the council best. One Group considered that One Panel was not an option. Finally one group felt that while scrutiny subjects ought to be linked to outside bodies the scrutiny of individual bodies was not favoured.

9. Feedback sheet comments

A small number of feedback sheets and comment sheets were submitted at the end of the event. The key issues raised can be summarised as follows:

- Should keep the status quo
- Groups should be more flexible (membership interchanging)
- Themed approach to committees workload (Community based)
- Workloads should be planned
- Remits of Panels are too big
- Importance of scrutiny has been emphasised internally and by CPA teams
- Scrutiny is no less important than the Executive
- Scrutiny Panels have not always carried out functions with the appropriate degree of vigour
- There has been a shortfall or complete lack of resources available to panels
- It is unacceptable that the scrutiny officer post has been vacant for 6 months
- Support for the Executive has always been in place
- There are concerns of the Executive wishing to control Scrutiny
- Scrutiny needs to be taken in a proper and accountable fashion
- Executive members should be no more senior than scrutiny members
- Respect requires a two way flow between Executive and Scrutiny
- A single panel option is not supported by many members and a three panel solution is albeit with rationalisation of processes
- There is a need to put in place adequate scrutiny support staffing
- If it is not is scrutiny being taken seriously
- Points and questions raised by Scrutiny panels ought to be answered promptly and comprehensively by Executive
- Scrutiny panels should decide how they wish to operate



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Outcomes Report Part 4 : Summary and Learning



9. Summary

There was no consistent message across all groups. However there appeared to be more support for a structure which reflect the existing three Panels but which was more focussed on current issues and backed up by changes in process. Members supported the retention of OSMB if three panels were retained. There were some concerns about the support provided to scrutiny panels to enable them to be effective.

10. Learning

It is considered that the workshop was generally a success. It was reasonably well attended by Members. The external speakers were excellent and Members valued their contribution. Feedback suggests that members found the workshop to be useful. The general format of the event appeared to work. Officers who participated welcomed the opportunity to engage with members outside of administering the panels and considered that they could provide better support to members if they had the capacity to do so.