

Supporting the new scrutiny function following Local Government Reorganisation in Durham



Proposal from the Centre for Public Scrutiny

Introduction

Local Government Reorganisation offers opportunities to think afresh about the roles of councillors and democratic decision-making in the new unitary authorities. Conversely there is a risk that behaviours and cultures from the former councils will be carried over if an active approach to developing the members of the new council is not taken right from the start. In Durham, the new council following the May 2008 elections consists of roughly one-third county councillors, one-third district councillors and one-third brand new councillors. There will therefore be a mix of experiences and skills coming into the new council and a need to develop a shared approach and culture as rapidly as possible to build a sense of common purpose in preparation for the formal investing of the new council in April 2009.

Proposal

This proposed overview and scrutiny development programme for members of the new Durham Council has been developed following a discussion with Co Durham officers and the IDeA Regional Associate, from an initial proposal prepared by CfPS. The programme falls into three parts, will build on the proposed basic induction programme for new members to be delivered in-house by Durham, and will follow on from the IDeA Compass summer events to which leading scrutiny members will be invited.

1. Building the Scrutiny Team

Scrutiny team-building and ways of working sessions, focused around developing a work programme for the common year and on building a common understanding of the aims and principles of effective public scrutiny, particularly in the context of LAA and partnership scrutiny under the 2007 Act, and including session with the executive

2. Future Leaders of Scrutiny

Developmental programme working with the proposed Scrutiny Management Committee (anticipated to consist of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the scrutiny sub-committees and of leading opposition members and co-optees, but subject to confirmation following the Annual Meeting) to develop an appropriate overview and scrutiny model and constitutional arrangements for the new council post April 2009, using the CfPS self-evaluation framework

3. Improving Scrutiny Practice

Themed scrutiny knowledge and skills-based sessions around key scrutiny policy and practice issues:

- finance scrutiny
- scrutiny's contribution to performance management
- community-based scrutiny (to be developed following decisions about the council's locality structures but including sessions with parish and town councils where appropriate)

- scrutiny for non-scrutineers – sessions and materials developed and delivered for senior departmental officers, executive Members, and external partners (these could be delivered as stand-alone events or, more usefully, form part of wider corporate events, inductions, away-days etc)

Aims

The aims would be:

- to ensure a level of basic understanding about the principles and practice of effective scrutiny amongst all members of the new council post the May 2008 elections
- to bring all members up to date with latest policy developments affecting scrutiny arising from the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, particularly around external partner and LAA scrutiny
- to facilitate the development of shared expectations and ambitions for how overview and scrutiny will work amongst members and officers, including those from the executive
- to facilitate the development of a work programme and priorities for scrutiny in the new council
- To support the development of a 'scrutiny leadership team' in the new council and to support them in developing the new overview and scrutiny model for the council post-2009
- to support the development of effective links between councillors' scrutiny role and their front-line councillor roles, including developing area-based scrutiny, links with parish and town councils and the effective implementation of councillor call for action, petitions and scrutiny of ward councillors' budgets

Methodologies

A range of delivery methodologies will be used

- Co-facilitation with Durham Council officers to support delivery to a large group of members and make use of their knowledge of local circumstances and policies
- Presentations and supporting materials drawing on CfPS research and principles of good practice
- On-line electronic versions of all materials for councillors to access in their own time and at their convenience
- Interactive group work facilitated by experienced trainers and facilitators to build shared ambitions and ways of working with the new scrutiny members
- Developmental work with the future leaders of scrutiny in Durham Council to develop their skills and capacity to lead and develop the new overview and scrutiny function
- Facilitated use of the CfPS self-evaluation framework to ensure that the model developed for the new authority are fit for purpose and 'owned' by the new members
- Facilitated joint sessions with scrutiny councillors and the executive, and scrutiny councillors and town / parish councillors to develop constructive relationships and shared understanding of expectations and responsibilities

Costs and logistics

CfPS's rate is £800 a day plus expenses. The IDeA has agreed to fund two days of the scrutiny development programme from the national LGR support programme; the remaining costs are to be met by the authority.

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Who</i>	<i>Cost</i>
1. Building Scrutiny Team		
Session for all members to cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LAA scrutiny and principles of good scrutiny • development of work programme for year for sub-committees and management committee • agreed ways of working for the year • presentation from executive on key priorities (1 day delivery + 1 day preparation to develop co-facilitation with Durham Council officers)	1 CfPS Associate	£1600
Facilitated session with Management Committee to develop outcomes from all member session further and agree their responsibilities as Chairs / leading scrutiny members (1/2 day delivery + 1/2 day prep)	1 CfPS Associate	£800
2. Future Leaders of Scrutiny		
3 facilitated sessions with Management Committee over the year to support and provide external challenge to development of new constitutional arrangements (1/2 day delivery + 1/2 day prep x3 + 1/2 day reading time)	1 CfPS Associate	£2800
1 session with Scrutiny Chairs from other LGR authorities (subject to others agreeing) to share experiences and learning (tbc, CfPS to facilitate and cover costs of organising)	CfPS	£0
Management Committee to participate in Compass event with Cabinet	IDeA	Covered elsewhere
3. Improving Scrutiny Practice sessions		
Finance Scrutiny (1/2 day delivery + 1/2 day preparation to develop co-facilitation)	1 CfPS Associate	£800
Scrutiny and Performance Management (1/2 day + 1/2 day prep to develop co-facilitation)	1 CfPS Associate	£800
Community-based Scrutiny incl CCFA (1 day + 1 day prep to allow tailoring to Durham model and develop co-facilitation)	1 CfPS Associate	£1600
Scrutiny for non-scrutineers (1 day in total + 1 day prep to develop materials)	1 CfPS Associate	£1600
Development of on-line materials for all above (1 day)	Gareth Wall	£800
TOTAL		£10,800
Minus IDeA contribution		-£1600
FINAL TOTAL TO AUTHORITY		£9,200

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