

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

21 July 2008



Evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny in County Durham

Report of Head of Overview and Scrutiny

Purpose

1. To seek Member views on proposals arising from the Evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny in County Durham, facilitated by Philip Thompson PhD Student, Northumbria University, as presented to the Committee on 4 June 2008.

Background

2. Members will recall that, at the last meeting of the Management Committee, an evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny in County Durham (commissioned by the County Durham Overview and Scrutiny Officer Network, representing the County Council and all District Councils in County Durham), was considered.
3. Members were advised that the evaluation had been conducted between January and March 2008, with interviews undertaken with Chairs/Vice Chairs of Scrutiny and completion of a Self Evaluation Framework by each authority. The analysis in the evaluation document identified the strengths of Overview and Scrutiny in County Durham and development opportunities, with recommendations on a range of issues presented for consideration by Members to achieve a fit for purpose Overview and Scrutiny function in the new Authority. Those recommendations were:
 - Build capacity for and encourage all Members to be involved in O&S
 - Provide Members with the necessary Officer support and financial resources to undertake effective Scrutiny
 - Meet the training needs of Members and Officers for ongoing effective Scrutiny
 - Develop the structure of O&S to reflect the corporate priorities of the new authority
 - Develop a closer, more formal working partnership between the Executive and O&S
 - Develop procedures to monitor and measure the effectiveness of O&S recommendations

- Consider new and innovative ways of engaging with the public and develop the O&S role to provide public accountability in local government
 - Develop a work-plan to take forward the above issues through the transitional year and into the new authority and across partners
 - Disseminate the findings of the evaluation to partners and interested parties, locally, regionally and nationally.
4. Following consideration of the issues by the Committee, the report was received and it was agreed that a further report would be presented by the Head of Overview and Scrutiny at the next meeting on how the findings and recommendations outlined in the Evaluation document could be taken forward to enhance the development of scrutiny in County Durham.
 5. Since the last meeting, work has been undertaken by the Scrutiny Officer Network (and in particular, Martin Dufferwel from the City of Durham Council and Reece Bowman, Wear Valley District Council) to identify those particular areas which need to be addressed; and to prioritise and identify the work needed to implement the recommendations. In undertaking this process, a Balanced Scorecard approach has been adopted.
 6. Briefly, the Balanced Scorecard is a management tool which focuses on four areas of activity of an organisation/function and seeks to identify those which are most important for success. These areas are – customers; internal processes; innovation/learning; and finance.
 7. Members will also recall the four principles of good scrutiny (as identified by the Centre for Public Scrutiny) which are:
 - Management and Ownership of the Scrutiny Process
 - Demonstrating Challenge (Critical Friend)
 - Addressing Community Concerns
 - Demonstrating impact on Service Delivery
 8. Applying the balanced scorecard to the above four principles and to the key issues outlined in the evaluation report, a number of areas for development have been identified which need to be progressed. These are set out under the four good scrutiny principle headings as follows:
 - (a) **Management and Ownership of the Scrutiny Process**
 - Encouraging Scrutiny Members to attend Executive Meetings
 - Encouraging liaison between Scrutiny Sub-Committee Chairs and relevant Portfolio Holder(s)
 - Publicising Scrutiny Protocol to all Members/Officers
 - Encouraging Leader/Chairman to champion Scrutiny process

- Putting in place a properly resourced Scrutiny Function which is “fit for purpose”

(b) Demonstrating Challenge

- Introduce formal monitoring of scrutiny recommendation implementation
- Greater involvement (of scrutiny) in budgeting process
- Provide better evidence for the influence of Scrutiny over the Executive
- Improve “Challenge” to Executive Members to report progress against priorities

(c) Addressing Community Concerns

- Improving public involvement/attendance at Scrutiny Meetings
- Develop joint overview and scrutiny processes at local level, i.e. Area Action Partnerships
- Be more pro-active in reaching and engaging the public
- Ensure overview and scrutiny addresses Equality/Diversity issues and Community Cohesion
- Forge stronger links between Scrutiny and Local Strategic Partnerships/Local Area Agreement
- Innovative communication/meetings in community/target groups

(d) Demonstrating Impact on Service Delivery

- Better promotion of Scrutiny through greater use of media
- Highlight and monitor successes/improvements
- Raise awareness of Scrutiny involvement in performance planning and target setting
- Ensure that Scrutiny Recommendations are acted upon
- Develop better mechanisms to evaluate outcomes

9. Members may be aware that a number of the issues highlighted under 8(a) – (d) above are areas where some initial consideration has already been given to improvements being made (i.e. community engagement; assessing the impact of scrutiny recommendations; and enhanced liaison between executive and non-executive members). Some of the issues identified will also be considered/addressed as part of the Overview and Scrutiny Member Development process to be facilitated by the Centre for Public Scrutiny. This will also allow Member input into how Overview and Scrutiny is developed in the new Unitary Council. However, it is important that an Action Plan be developed to take all the above areas forward in the period up to 2010.

10. A draft Action Plan has been drawn up and is attached to this report.

Recommendations

11. (i) That the areas for development highlighted in paragraphs 8(a)-(d) above be agreed.
- (ii) That the draft Action Plan be agreed.
- (iii) The Head of Overview and Scrutiny be authorised to amend the Action Plan as necessary (including timescales for projects).
- (iv) Members of the Management Committee consider how they wish to oversee/be involved in the projects identified in the Action Plan (Members will also have an opportunity to influence/shape the overview and scrutiny process via the development work to be undertaken by the Centre for Public Scrutiny).
- (v) Consideration be given to how the findings from the Evaluation, Balanced Scorecard analysis, and Action Plan project outcomes are fed back to the Committee and any appropriate Workstreams in the run up to and following Vesting Day for the New Unitary Council.

Contact:	Tom Bolton	Tel:	0191 383 3149
		E-Mail:	thomas.bolton@durham.gov.uk
