

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

24 September 2008



Scrutiny Café – Event for Co-optees – The Way Forward

Report of Feisal Jassat, Head of Overview and Scrutiny

Purpose of Report

- 1 To provide details for members of the Management Committee about the Overview and Scrutiny training event 'Scrutiny Café' training event for Co-optees, held on Monday 28 July 2008 at the Leadership Centre, Spennymoor.
- 2 To inform members of the issues raised during the session by Co-opted, Faith and Parent Representatives the proposed action to be taken and approximate timescales for implementation.
- 3 In addition, it is intended that the implementation of the Action Plan (attached at Appendix 1) will be monitored to ensure that where possible the timeframe/timescale stated in relation to each issue, is achieved.

Background

- 4 The training session was attended by Co-optees, Faith and Parent Governor Representatives and the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- 5 The Event was planned, organised and facilitated by the Overview and Scrutiny Team with the objectives of the event clearly defined as follows:
 - To provide Co-optees, Faith and Parent Governor Representatives with up-to-date information about the Overview and Scrutiny functions (including forthcoming developments) and their respective roles as co-optees/representatives.
 - To obtain from Co-optees, Faith and Parent Governor Representatives their views/feedback on their involvement in the Overview and Scrutiny process to date so as to better inform the future development of Overview and Scrutiny.
 - To provide an opportunity for further engagement with Co-optees, Faith and Parent Governor Representatives and so demonstrate the value placed upon their role and the inclusiveness of the Scrutiny process.
 - To provide an opportunity for Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen to work in an informal setting with Co-opted, Faith and Parent Representatives and further develop working relationships.

Structure of the Scrutiny Café Event

- 6 The training session began with a short presentation outlining the current role of Overview and Scrutiny within the Authority, how the role of Overview and Scrutiny is widening/evolving as a result of recent legislation and finally, how this would affect the role of Co-optees, Parent and Faith Representatives in the future Overview and Scrutiny structure.
- 7 The 'Scrutiny Café' concept is informal, based on groups working with a facilitator discussing a question and then recording their views/comments, opinions, issues on a paper tablecloth. Following the discussion and recording, two points are then highlighted by each Group in relation to each question for feedback at the end of the session.
- 8 Following the session the attached Action Plan (Appendix 1) was produced focusing on the issues highlighted by the individual groups during feedback, the proposed action to be taken and timescales for implementation.
- 9 It is intended that the implementation of the Action Plan will be monitored to ensure that the timescales/timeframes, where possible, are achieved.

Issues Raised during Feedback Session

The following issues were raised by the three groups during the feedback session.

- 10 There is a need to consider a more flexible approach in relation to the timing of meetings to ensure the attendance of Co-optees, Faith and Parent Governor Representatives.
- 11 In relation to the notification of meetings, it was highlighted that Co-optees, Faith and Parent Governor Representatives have a number of conflicting demands and that early notification of any additional meetings is essential.
- 12 There is a need to increase the profile of Overview and Scrutiny particularly within local communities.
- 13 In order for Overview and Scrutiny to be effective there is a need to ensure that it is resourced adequately in relation to dedicated officer support and the discretionary element for research, development, equipment and witnesses.
- 14 With reference to the use of acronyms it was suggested that this should be kept to a minimum to avoid any confusion.
- 15 There is a need to keep Co-optees, Parent and Faith Representatives involved/updated in relation to the work being carried out by the various Committees i.e. 'Light Touch' and 'Cross Cutting' Review Working Groups.
- 16 It was suggested that there is a need to provide an opportunity for Co-optees, Parent and Faith Representatives to have the opportunity to raise potential items of business to be placed on the agenda in advance of the meeting of Committee. This would allow sufficient time for views to be sought from Services in relation to these issues.

- 17 Documents produced for Overview and Scrutiny should be in plain English, avoiding the use of jargon and acronyms and should appeal across the age spectrum.
- 18 With reference to the recommendations of Overview and Scrutiny in relation to 'Light Touch' and 'Cross-Cutting' Reviews it was considered essential that in the future the appropriate Service Department undertake a cost benefit analysis of the implications of any recommendations.
- 19 It was suggested that a Mentoring Scheme for Co-optees, Faith and Parent Governor Representatives be initiated with members and officers undertaking the role of mentors.
- 20 In order to enhance liaison between Chairmen/Vice-Chairmen and the respective Co-optees, Faith and Parent Governor Representatives, it was suggested that a system of quarterly informal meetings be established to facilitate this process.
- 21 With reference to presentations, it was suggested that the number per meeting should be limited, together with a maximum time per presentation allocated. In addition it was suggested that alternative formats for presentations be explored, i.e. the use of pictures with dialogue from the officer.
- 22 It was requested that some training be made available in relation to project planning/scoping of projects.
- 23 With reference to training it was thought appropriate that all Co-optees, Faith and Parent Representatives be given the opportunity to attend the Equality and Diversity training currently provided by the Authority.
- 24 It was highlighted that there is a need to keep Co-optees, Faith and Parent Governor Representatives updated in relation to legislative changes and that any training provided for members of the authority should also be extended to Co-optees, Faith and Parent Governor Representatives.
- 25 With reference to training, it was suggested that in addition to in-house training opportunities, where appropriate, Co-optees, Faith and Parent Governor Representatives should also have an opportunity to attend external conferences and seminars.

Recommendations

- 26 That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee note the issues raised by Co-optees, Faith and Parent Governor representatives during the training event.

- 27 That the Management Committee agree the attached Action Plan detailing the proposed action to be taken and the approximate timescale for implementation in relation to the various issues raised.
- 28 That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee receives information via a six monthly update on the progress made in relation to the Action Plan.

Contact: Feisal Jassat Tel: 0191 383 3506 E-Mail: feisal.jassat@durham.gov.uk
