

August 2005

scrutiny champions' network

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August 2005

Thanks to everyone who was able to attend our 3rd annual conference at the end of June and those who stayed on for the "officer development" event the following day. Feedback has been very positive and a report of the conference will be available from our website in September.

The officer day proved very popular and CfPS has since launched a full "officer development forum" that will run initially from 2005-06. Details of the forum, and how to book your place, were sent to all members of this network in July and are available from www.cfps.org.uk/officer.

One consequence of that initial invitation was a mistake in the way it was sent out, with email addresses visible and available for reply. CfPS would like to apologise for any confusion caused, and take this opportunity to gauge your thoughts. We would like to learn more about what you would like from the Scrutiny Champions Network, including how we can most usefully communicate with you and members can communicate with each other.

To this end we have set up a short and simple survey that can be completed online in under 5 minutes. You can take part by visiting: www.cfps.org.uk/champions/survey

CfPS, August 2005

The scrutiny champions network aims to develop a powerful and persuasive voice on behalf of scrutiny practitioners throughout the country.

If you would like to contribute an article, or have an idea for inclusion in a future edition of this bulletin, please forward to: info@cfps.org.uk

News in brief

Parent Governor Representative Packs

Earlier this year the CfPS published two packs designed to help new parent governor representatives (PGRs) elected to serve on the local authority overview and scrutiny committee dealing with education matters.

One is an "induction pack" for PGRs which outlines their role and the context in which they will operate. The other is a tailored version of the first pack, designed for those willing to perform a "mentoring" role for new PGRs.

We have suggested that this mentoring role could be undertaken by an officer responsible for the scrutiny function but might be another PGR, a former PGR, another local authority officer or councillor: whatever is most appropriate in the local circumstances.

Copies of the induction pack were sent to all PGRs directly and one mentor pack was sent to each local authority. Further copies will be available in booklet format shortly and are available to download from our website at www.cfps.org.uk/publications.

Child Focused Scrutiny

This new publication from The Education Network offers a practical overview of the scrutiny function and draws on experiences from around the country to present a comprehensive and constructive approach to scrutinising children's services.

It is essential reading for councillors, scrutiny support staff, and local authority partners who will want to monitor services delivered to children, young people and their families and effect change through scrutiny.

The publication:

- provides a practical overview of the scrutiny function
- explains what key changes in the children's services agenda mean for councillors conducting local scrutiny investigations
- gives examples of best practice in children's services scrutiny from councils around the country

Details available at www.lgiu.gov.uk

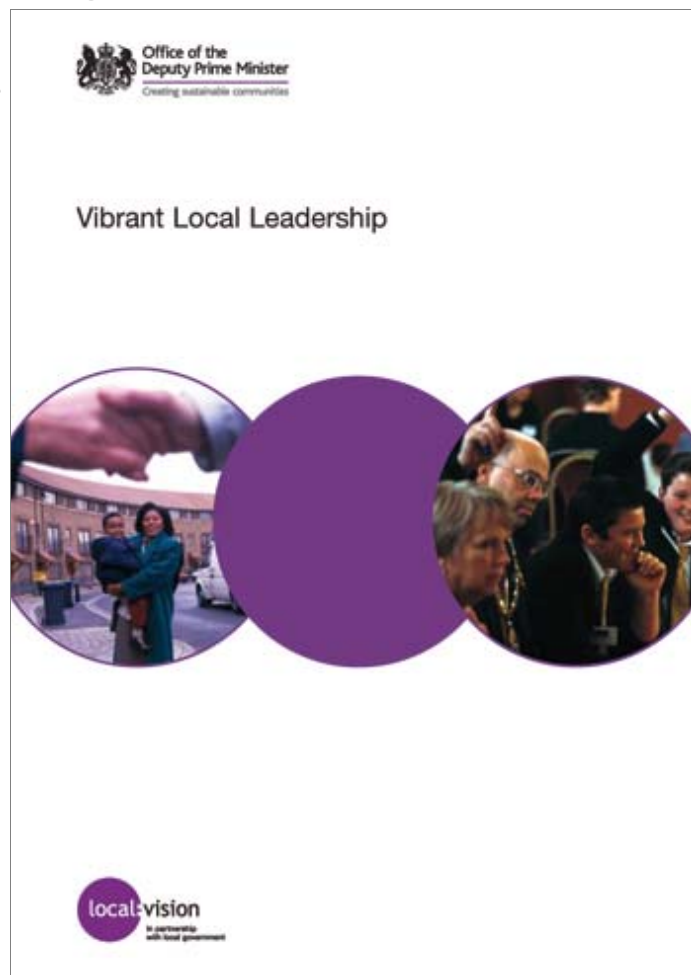
Vibrant local leadership: your thoughts

The Government's recent local:vision document "Vibrant Local Leadership" poses several questions regarding the effectiveness and future of overview and scrutiny.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny will be providing a response to this document and would welcome additional input from members of this network.

We are particularly keen to incorporate your thoughts and comments on any of the following questions raised in the document:

1. Should there be a more formal requirement for executives to act on scrutiny findings?
2. Can the scrutiny function oversee the effective implementation of triggers for improvement to services at neighbourhood level?
3. Does call-in provide effective accountability or is it misused, misunderstood and lacking in teeth?
4. Is there a case for the extension of the formal scrutiny remit (as currently in relation to health) to reinforce further some important aspects of the community leadership role?
5. Do political parties need to look at how, formally or informally, party discipline impacts upon the effectiveness of scrutiny on behalf of local people?
6. How can resources be redirected to support effective scrutiny and realise the potential of non-executive councillors?
7. What more could be done to ensure that the opportunity that scrutiny by local councillors can offer is grasped more firmly?
8. How can scrutiny be developed as part of the advocacy and leadership role played by local councillors?
9. Might there be a clearer separation and specialisation of different roles among non-executive councillors?
10. How can non-executive councillors be visible leaders in local communities and neighbourhoods within a ward as well as an



effective elected representative on scrutiny

11. How could effective scrutiny be supported and strengthened in more locally tailored leadership structures?

All comments will remain anonymous unless otherwise indicated by you.

Please send your responses to:
info@cfps.org.uk

If you would like to discuss these points more generally, a topic is open in the discussions forum at <http://tinyurl.com/9jego>

WRAP: procurement and the efficient use of material resource

WRAP (the Waste & Resources Action Programme) have published authoritative new guidance on best practice in sustainable procurement. The new report could help councils to significantly boost their performance when it comes to efficient use of resources.

David Moon, WRAP's Procurement Programme Manager, said.

"Councils could be missing out on very simple ways to dramatically improve resource efficiency at no extra cost across a range of procurement activities, as well as overlooking significant potential cost savings in some cases,"

Developed in conjunction with the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), the guidance is targeted at councillors in England with a particular interest in scrutiny, sustainability or procurement. Providing advice on how councillors can shape procurement strategy to deliver on sustainability at no extra cost, it offers practical examples of how to improve resource efficiency by specifying higher recycled content in goods, works and services.

David Moon added,

"Specifying recycled is an effective Quick Win. It enables councils to measure and improve their contribution to sustainable development, stimulate local and regional markets for recycled materials, and increase the value of the recyclables collected by local authorities."

The guidance focuses particularly on construction, highways maintenance, estates management and printed materials and provides real-life examples of the benefits of specifying recycled, for example:

- 16-17 per cent of the value of materials used in exemplar designs for secondary schools is derived from recycled content at standard

practice - using 400-500 tonnes of material that might otherwise have gone to landfill. However, using alternative products and specifications currently available at no extra cost could increase this figure to 18-22 per cent and divert a further 3,000-4,000 tonnes from landfill

- Essex County Council has agreed targets for the use of recycled content with its highways contractor. In financial year 2002/03, 59 per cent of material was recycled against a target of 20 per cent, which enabled savings of £150,000. This money was used to deliver extra maintenance projects



- 1,500 plastic bottles are used to make every 1.5m of recycled plastic walkway. This product has proven highly durable and slip-resistant in wet areas, such as nature reserves. High-performing kerbside collection schemes typically generate 100-200 plastic bottles per household per year

- At least two local authority buying consortia in the UK have been able to provide recycled copying papers at the same price as equivalent virgin papers

Copies are available to download from www.cfps.org.uk/publications

To request hard copies of the publication, please contact:

Judith Moore
Procurement Programme Project Officer
Telephone: 01295 819924
Email: judith.moore@wrap.org.uk

Additional versions written specifically for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will be available shortly.

WRAP are also offering a free workshop on the issues raised in this paper to regional scrutiny networks across the UK.

CfPS: blog

At the end of July CfPS launched a blog as a means of keeping you up-to-date on what we are doing and what's happening in the world of scrutiny generally.

Why this rather than more regular updates on the news pages? Because blogs are a quicker, more informal way to signpost information and stay in touch.

Different members of the team will be posting entries on a regular basis and, as always, your feedback is more than welcome.

If we're not covering the things you're interested in, please let us know by using the "comment" form at the bottom of each entry, or by writing to info@cfps.org.uk.

Recent entries have covered issues related to:

- proposals from the Healthcare Commission to involve health overview and scrutiny committees in the new annual healthcheck that is replacing star ratings with a

declaration of performance from PCTs and NHS Trusts

- a point raised in our discussions forum regarding the requirement for an 'independent' audit and finance committee to meet level four of the Audit Commission's key lines of enquiry on "Use of Resources"
- the way that overview and scrutiny has been reported in various local newspapers including those from: Greenwich; Doncaster; Richmond-upon-Thames; Manchester; and Norfolk
- new research and consultations such as that on the "participation of citizen volunteers in school governance" and the reform of public sector ombudsmen services in England

If you would like to contribute as a blogger, please write to info@cfps.org.uk.

Visit the blog at www.cfps.org.uk/blog.

The screenshot shows the CfPS website interface. At the top left is a search bar with a 'Go' button. Below it is the CfPS logo: 'cfps the centre for public scrutiny' with the tagline 'better scrutiny for better government'. A navigation menu includes 'home', 'news', 'reviews', 'scrutiny map', 'champions', 'forums', 'events', 'publications', and 'about us'. On the left sidebar, there are sections for 'Entries filed under:' (listing CIPS work, Scrutiny in the media, Health scrutiny, Local government, Education) and 'Websites that link here' (RSS / Atom feeds (what?)). The main content area shows a blog entry titled 'Online conference report' dated 'Wednesday 10 August 2005, 16:42hr'. The text of the entry describes an online conference on 'Members' Roles in Performance Management' held in March, in partnership with IDeA and the Audit Commission. It mentions a report is available from IDeA Knowledge. Below the text are 'Relevant links:' including 'Online conference report (pdf file, 24 pages, 249 KB)', 'Online conference proceedings', and 'Performance Management, Measurement and Information'. At the bottom, there is a 'Comments' section and a footer indicating the entry was 'Filed under: CfPS work' and 'Posted by: Gareth Wall'.



Library of scrutiny reviews: new entries

Local Strategic Partnership London Borough of Southwark

A look at governance arrangements around the LSP, its links to the council's constitution, and some of the issues arising for councillors.

The overarching issue that emerged was that of a democratic deficit - not an intrinsic problem of the model but rather a question of working through how it should feature in governance arrangements in the borough.

Consultation Derby City Council

A consideration of the effectiveness and inclusiveness of Council consultation methods and how outcomes of consultation are used to inform policy.

Recommendations are made for improvements to present practices which need to be heeded if fuller coherence is to be achieved and duplication and fatigue minimised.

Anti-social behaviour Ashford Borough Council

During the course of the review the Committee spoke to a large number of witnesses to 'build a picture' of ASB problems in Ashford borough.

20 recommendations were made in total, including: the production of a written ASB policy; a guidance book for officers tackling ASB; a free-phone number and email address to report ASB.

Child obesity Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council

This review looked into the extent of child obesity (ie children aged 11 and under) in Doncaster, inquiring into what was being done to reduce the levels, what was working well, what needed to be improved and what could be learned from approaches elsewhere.

A range of far reaching recommendations are made for action at local, regional and government level.

Getting the hump South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council

Assessing effectiveness of the council's traffic-calming policy and what measures could be put in place to improve traffic calming schemes.

This involved looking at:

- how schemes for traffic calming are identified
- how residents and other stakeholders are consulted on schemes
- what methods are used for this
- cost of methods/effectiveness/acceptability

Annual report Northamptonshire County Council

Presenting the overall achievements of the o&s function and committees against the criteria for effective scrutiny set out in County's Guide, which include:

- improvements to policy
- changes implemented as a result of scrutiny
- enhancing the role of councillors
- engagement with public and partners
- engagement with the cabinet and cabinet members

You can view over 1,000 other entries in the library at www.cfps.org.uk/reviews