

## East Midlands Scrutiny Network

Friday 28 September 2018

### Attendees

Bassetlaw District Council	Cllr John	Shepherd
Bassetlaw District Council	Richard	Gadsby
Blaby District Council	Linda	McBean
Blaby District Council	Cllr Louise	Richardson
Blaby District Council	Cllr Les	Philimore
Blaby District Council	Surej	Sammant
Centre for Public Scrutiny	Ed	Hammond
Charnwood Borough Council	Michael	Hopkins
Chesterfield Borough Council	Rachel	Appleyard
Chesterfield Borough Council	Cllr Kate	Sarvent
East Midlands Councils	Kirsty	Low
Erewash Borough Council	Lynne	Ghent
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council	Rebecca	Owen
Kettering Borough Council	Cllr Mick	Scrimshaw
Leicester City Council	Jerry	Connolly
Leicester City Council	Megan	Law
Lincolnshire County Council	Nigel	West
North Kesteven District Council	Duncan	James
Northampton Borough Council	Tracy	Tiff
Nottingham City Council	Zena	West
Rutland County Council	Natasha	Taylor
South Northamptonshire and Cherwell	Emma	Faulkner
South Northamptonshire and Cherwell	Lesley	Farrell
Leicestershire County Council	Cllr Rosita	Page

### Apologies

Chesterfield Borough Council	Cllr Peter Innes		
Erewash Borough Council	Angela Taylor	Angelika	Kaufhold
Gedling Borough Council	Cllr Marje Paling	Helen	Lee
North East Derbyshire District Council	Cllr Reader		
North Kesteven District Council	Cllr Chris Goldson	Cllr Catherine	Mills
Northampton Borough Council	Cllr Graham Walker		
Rutland County Council	Phil Horsfield		
South Northamptonshire and Cherwell	Natasha Clark		
Bolsover District Council	Cllr Karl Reid	Joanne	Wilson

### Welcome and introductions

Cllr Les Philimore, Blaby District Council welcomed network member to Narborough and thanked network members for attending.

### Notes of the last meeting

The notes of the last meeting were agreed.

### **Guidance on overview and scrutiny**

Ed Hammond, Centre for Public Scrutiny provided an update on the guidance on overview and scrutiny that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government are developing and the work of the Centre for Public Scrutiny to support this.

Ed provided details of where the commitment to revise the guidance came from and why involvement from the Centre for Public Scrutiny. Ed provided an update on the Select committee enquiry and the range of recommendations on enhancing effectiveness of overview and scrutiny. He confirmed that the last guidance was published in 2006.

Ed informed the network members that the CfPS want to ensure that the guidance reflects wider scrutiny arrangements and is attending regional scrutiny networks across the country.

Ed informed the network that the aim of this section of the meeting was to collect feedback from network members on some specific areas, but invited the network members to provide any further information. He informed the network that Graham Napper is Civil servant working on it and also keen for feedback. He confirmed that he wouldn't be able to share the draft guidance/information before it is published.

Ed informed the network that the aim of the guidance would be to set out an enabling framework and options and way of working. Decision for how scrutiny operates takes place with local considerations. Statutory guidance, legally have regard for the guidance. If deviate, be clear why deviate.

Ed set out the three main areas that he was looking for feedback on;

- Scrutiny of "external bodies"
- Access to information
- Scrutiny of financial resilience and sustainability of councils

Ed asked for feedback on the broad context of the guidance.

Network members reflected on the format from the 2006 guidance, that it was well written and there was a clear distinction between commentary and explanation of statutory duties and case studies.

### *Scrutiny of "external bodies"*

Ed set out the context to this section of the evidence gathering, setting out the complexities now associated with what is an external body.

Experience of engagement and what guidance should say;

- Relate statutory requirement to outside body
- Scrutiny of NHS - what powers in guidance to persuade partners of good practise to get involved - unsure how this guidance will cover these sorts of issues, more about general partners. Role for scrutiny to be clearer about its reasons. Working with council executive. Set out in contracts at the beginning that the company must adhere to the guidelines
- Procurement and social values
- Approach, open and engaging approach, selling it in a positive light
- Governments scrutiny of LEPs should look like (LEP scrutiny looking at separately)

- Guidance deal with unitary and two tier areas -something that recognises the complexity
- Clarity over what sort of external bodies that they can scrutinise - as a district, maybe examples
- Promote guidance to partners, widely publicised
- Relationship between commissioners and provider, explicit, that open up to scrutiny
- Scrutiny written into contracts
- Appropriate for scrutiny to ask these people in - cfps view
- Members of the Public raising Parish councils, should include Parish Councils to the process

### Access to information

- Being able to get information from the council
- What is actually out there and knowing
- Access in a timely manner
- Ways to share information with councillor informally. Councils being comfortable to share more raw information with councillors.
- Access - use of the information, how do you actually use it to support scrutiny work

### Thoughts

- Forward plan - like to see something in the guidance that reflects that
- Task and finish group arrangements, provides the mechanism to provide information and deal with information
- Culture point - discussion to have more things brought to scrutiny at an earlier stage
- identify where they think information is being held

### Scrutiny of financial resilience and sustainability of councils

Role scrutiny plays with financial resilience, planning to publish some more practical guides around this later in the year. Role for scrutiny medium term financial plan.

- Experience of Blaby District Council, how financial scrutiny operates - budget proposal and a narrative to the changes and movement
- Spend three weeks across January, involving all councillors
- NKDC - 10 year financial plan, engaging members early and constantly. How do they take the learning to other areas
- How spend is managed and scrutinised
- Question for government about how strong they want to make the guidance in that area - things to think about - expectation of training requirements for particular roles, expectations made explicit by government?
- NKDC - reflection on their survey of members on scrutiny
- Blaby - PDPs for all councillors, and preferred working parties and committees, basic allocation of skills
- Will be something on training in the guidance
- More financial training - examples of where members focused on easy 'stuff'

### Broader issues

- Guidance - to include examples of what that could include, access to training, roles, day to day access to officers.
- Scrutiny is an ongoing process, not just in committee meetings, how does the organisation facilitate and respond to it
- Full council debates - examples of how that could work
- Lessons that have been learnt when scrutiny hasn't worked
- Offer from Blaby on Refuge
- Case studies in the guidance - fictionalised case studies will be included.
- Role of communication
- Who scrutinises the scrutiny?

Further thoughts and comments to Ed Hammond [Ed.Hammond@cfps.org.uk](mailto:Ed.Hammond@cfps.org.uk) . Ed informed the network that the plan currently is to launch the guidance at the CfPS Conference on 4<sup>th</sup> December.

Cllr Phillimore thanked Ed for attending the network meeting.

## **Scrutiny Induction**

Kirsty invited network members to reflect on approaches to scrutiny induction. A discussion followed on the opportunity presented by the new guidance.

The discussion covered;

- CfPS 10 questions very helpful in the training
- Scrutiny role to make councillors feel involved, good process to engage. Explain and engage, valuable job. Scrutiny not to overlap, clear alignment to executive where most effective in experience, golden thread.
- Don't miss the Executive in training on scrutiny - Executive need to be open to robust scrutiny. What they are actually scrutinising - outputs, deliverables and whether on track.
- Working with officers, talk to officers about what scrutiny is. Training sessions for middle managers in local government on scrutiny. Offering something on scrutiny to middle and senior managers.
- Placed in the wider context of what members do, presented as a tool that can be used across all responsibilities.
- Discussion on what authorities have done to explain how scrutiny works to officers, a number of examples were cited.

## **Current scrutiny work**

### North Kesteven District Council

Communication, task and finish group on Section 106 contributions on health.

A discussion followed on Section 106.

### Blaby District Council

Colleagues from Blaby shared details of their approach to mapping out scrutiny work programme, what could they scrutinise, how best to prioritise the work programme to be able to fit within time constraints and the key areas to focus on in depth through the year.

### Rutland County Council

Natasha Taylor updated the network members on a recent scrutiny task and finish group on contentious town centre issue, where the authority chose to appoint an independent chair. The task and finish group met in Public. Panel will report to Full Council in December.

### Northamptonshire County Council

Cllr Scrimshaw provide an update from Kettering Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council. He reflected on those represented at the meeting, drawing attention to the number of authorities not represented. He provided details of the current scrutiny situation at Northamptonshire County Council. One main scrutiny committee which Cllr Scrimshaw will chair, commissioners will decide who will be on the committee.

Kirsty reflected on the continuing need to engage with scrutiny colleagues from across the region and committed to ensure invitations were sent to all authorities. She expressed a need of support from network members to help spread details of the network to neighbouring councils to help understanding of the network.

Rachel Appleyard informed the network that the next Association of Democratic Service Officers conference would take place in November in Nottingham. She highlighted this as an opportunity to connect with this group and make links with the scrutiny network.

Waste - Bassetlaw District Council and Blaby

Commercialisation Strategy

### **Work programming**

Kirsty invited network

- Commercialisation
- Scrutiny Review of Charnwood - pre-meetings of scrutiny, extend to all members of the committee, to extend lines of enquiry, mixed experience. Interested in what councillors feel about that (LCC example)
- Small scale reviews - task and finishes groups. Protocol and procedures
- Peer group challenge
- NKDC - questionnaire, share questionnaire. Not to be shared more widely than the group.
- Permission in Principle - government initiative <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/permission-in-principle>
- Involvement of the Public - Rutland County Council's recent task and finish group