

scrutiny frontiers 2019

Experiences from the scrutiny frontline



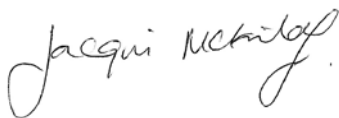
Foreword

We passionately believe that better scrutiny leads to more effective decision-making, reduced risk and ultimately, improved outcomes. Scrutiny is happening across the country in local authorities through overview and scrutiny committees focusing on public services, policies and decisions. Scrutiny has the power to do this by giving a voice to local citizens, examining how tax payers' money is spent within the council and beyond, and can improve people's lives.

This is the second edition of Scrutiny Frontiers, with the first published in 2007 and looking back, it is clear that what makes good scrutiny has not actually changed over the last 12 years. The key components of good communication, strong relationships and open dialogue remain as important as ever, alongside a mindset of constructive challenge supported by shared values of openness, transparency and a guiding aim to improve the lives of citizens and the local area.

We feel there is real value in sharing experiences of scrutiny from around the country and reflecting on the practise of others in order to learn from them and gain awareness of what is possible. With this in mind, we intend to produce further editions of Scrutiny Frontiers in future. It is clear that public engagement, access to information, strong cross party working, and essentially, an organisational culture that is supportive of and open to scrutiny are key elements that contribute to the scrutiny work shared in this publication. In challenging financial times, rigorous topic selection and prioritisation, and openness to creative approaches in order to make best use of resources are also vital components.

Effective scrutiny may look different in each individual authority but the key is that each authority is clear on the purpose of scrutiny, the methods they can use to carry out scrutiny and the positive impact it can have on the lives of citizens and their locality.



Jacqui McKinlay

Chief Executive, Centre for Public Scrutiny



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Councillor Michael Weinhonig and Councillor Lisle Smith

Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Shadow Authority

Local government reorganisation in Dorset has presented scrutiny councillors in the area with our biggest challenge – and opportunity – to date. Councillors in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole have been working together to scrutinise the development of the new Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council which will replace the preceding three boroughs, as well as taking on the services provided by the county council for part of the area. The clock began ticking with just over a year from the receipt of the government green light in February 2018 to Vesting Day on 1 April 2019 and scrutiny members had to work hard and be inventive to keep pace with a project on such an unprecedented scale. At the time of writing, there is now exactly one calendar month until Vesting Day and it is with a sense of achievement (and relief!) that we near the end of this transition period, which has seen scrutiny carve out a clear role for itself and offer meaningful challenge and input to the process of reorganisation.

From the outset we were highly aware of the enormity of the task we faced. Reorganisation on this scale is potentially an unsettling change for residents, particularly those who depend on the daily provision of services. There was a clear need for scrutiny to demonstrate to the wider public that we were examining the right issues and had

our eye on the ball. In this context, the traditional ‘holding the executive to account’ role for scrutiny felt outdated and lacking, and it was clear that the first major task for us was finding a role for scrutiny that added value to the complex and changing governance picture that ensues when three councils become one. For us in urban Dorset, this meant the formation of a Shadow Authority that runs alongside the preceding borough councils of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. The Shadow Authority is responsible for tasks such as the preparation of a budget for the new authority and the development of transition arrangements. None of us had served on a Shadow Authority before and so the role of the Shadow scrutiny councillor (a legal requirement) was also new. It would have been easy to go for a blanket approach of scrutinising everything, as every decision in the context of such a high paced transition really does feel significant. With the help of officers and the Centre for Public Scrutiny we decided to apply a ‘risk lens’ to our work programming, which guided us to prioritise only those matters which we felt were higher risk. This meant using the principle of risk to consider what value we would add through our interaction on an issue and led us to consider matters such as council tax harmonisation, budget development and children’s safeguarding arrangements for the future



council. The tool of selecting a 'lens' through which to focus our input served us really well as the pace of work – monthly meetings of the Shadow executive and scrutiny – meant that there was a potential to be overwhelmed. Risk based agendas resulted in two or three substantive items per meeting, many focusing on budget preparation for the new authority. We also kept close oversight of the programme budget and overarching risk register and by honing in on these key documents we were able to maintain an overview of activity with confidence.

It also quickly became apparent that there was an enormous level of activity taking place within service areas to transition to a new council and that we would struggle to maintain an overview within the committee meetings that would be sufficiently in depth to be meaningful. But ensuring there is no detriment to service users as a result of transition was paramount and so we needed to find a way to understand the activity taking place and act on any risks as they arose. We set up a rapporteur model – a new way of working for most of the councillors which involves pairs of scrutiny members liaising informally with executive members to keep abreast of the progress within each service area. A positive culture in which the executive share information with scrutiny councillors at the right time has allowed for frank and open discussions, which scrutiny members reported back to committee. The committee had the opportunity to act on risks and commission further scrutiny work as required. This mix of formal work and informal discussion has enabled scrutiny members to see the bigger picture and to reserve committee time for meaningful in-depth scrutiny. We also have a new tool to take forward to the new authority in the form of the rapporteur model which we hope will continue to be used in the future.

The importance of a positive culture in the context of reorganisation could not be underestimated. We have been pleased to have good engagement with executive members both at the committee table and behind the scenes. A mutual understanding and respect for each other's roles has enabled effective information sharing, which in turn supported scrutiny to focus in on the areas of work where they could add the most value, providing assurance to residents that issues of high risk have been carefully considered and scrutinised. Working collaboratively cross party and cross borough has been enlightening, as councillors on the Shadow scrutiny committee bring the passions of their own communities and experience to the table. This has led to some lively meetings with meaningful debate and challenge which has been of benefit

to the scrutiny process. It has also been important to us that we facilitated an open and flexible approach to our meetings, with regular attendance and input from other non-scrutiny councillors and mechanisms for them to raise questions. This has ensured that there is opportunity for all councillors to stay apace with the activity relating to transition.

We have high hopes for the new council's scrutiny arrangements. Scrutiny councillors have taken this opportunity of reorganisation to look wider than the current three councils' arrangements and lean in to best practice elsewhere in the country. The model we have designed for day one operation is based on a clear 'vision statement' of six principles, outlined below:

- Contributes to sound decision making in a timely way by holding makers to account as a 'critical friend';
- A Member led and owned function – seeks to continuously improve through self- reflection and development;
- Enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard and reflected in the Council's decision-making process;
- Engages in decision making and policy development at an appropriate time to be able to have influence;
- Contributes to and reflects the vision and priorities of the new council;
- Agile – able to respond to changing and emerging priorities at the right time with flexible working methods.

We hope that the new council will embrace the principles that we have established to underpin a value-added scrutiny function. With elections for the new council in May 2019, we are of course mindful that we are designing a scrutiny function for a council that may include a whole new group of members! We have suggested a commissioning approach to work, where the value of all scrutiny work will be scoped at the outset to ensure scrutiny gets the most out of its resource on behalf of the public we serve. We also hope to bring more of the public voice into the scrutiny work of the future and are keen to mirror good examples of this around the country – for example a listening group. It is an exciting prospect and a great time to be a councillor.

Councillor Alison Kelly

Chair of Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee,
London Borough of Camden Council



As Chair of the Adult Social Care and Health scrutiny Committee in Camden I know that overview and scrutiny plays an important role in improving outcomes for our residents, especially in terms of health inequalities. More broadly a strong scrutiny function makes sure services meet resident needs, explores issues which impact the wellbeing of the borough and supports the Council by providing recommendations based on evidence and resident insight. Last year we launched our new vision for the borough, Camden 2025 and Our Camden Plan, and we are focused on ensuring scrutiny supports the delivery of the bold ambitions these documents set out.



We know that to deliver on our borough vision we will need to work closely with our communities and in Camden we have a strong history of using our scrutiny function to do this. For example, in 2015 I was Chair of a scrutiny panel which explored the health and wellbeing of our Bangladeshi community, putting them at the heart of our activities. Before we began, we recognised that working with one of our health partners would provide valuable insight, so we invited Shelly Khan from Healthwatch Camden (pictured) to be on the panel which worked really well.

The most important part of the panel's work was getting out and speaking to our local community so that we could learn from them and their experiences rather than relying solely on desk-based research. To hear from as many people as possible, we went to where people lived, worked and socialised rather than expecting them to come to us. Our approach involved holding local community

interviews, focus groups and key stakeholder interviews.

This approach helped us to meet with 286 people including pupils, students, teachers, support staff, Imams, board members, community leaders by going to schools, community centres, health centres, mosques and community festivals and events. The process was largely Member led and as Chair I played a lead role in arranging the meetings with our community and writing up their evidence to feed into our end report. Officers were able to assist in the setting up of some of the community meetings and Public Health colleagues provided us with a pictogram of health outcomes for the Bangladeshi community which was a great way to start our meetings. It was also really helpful to have the support of Healthwatch who not only held some of the community meetings but were also a great help when the report was being drafted.

We also engaged with young women and men under and over the age of 18 years, older residents and pensioners. This approach meant that we could use their insights to inform our recommendations and a positive by-product was that we were able to strengthen the council's relationship with our Bangladeshi community.

Having such a strong focus on listening to our communities meant that we were able to get a real sense of the issues they faced and their suggestions for improvement. Members on the panel and officers involved even remarked that they learnt a great deal about the hidden strength and resilience of our borough's Bangladeshi communities through having these conversations. The panel also had a longer lasting impact on residents as a number of programmes and projects have sprung from the networking that occurred at the meetings of the panel. A number of Council officers have also been able to use the resulting Bangladeshi health and wellbeing group to test programme or project ideas which has proved to be a really useful resource.

Building on the success of this panel, Camden's scrutiny, performance management culture and partnership approach has impacted the inclusivity and accessibility of Camden's leisure centres in line with the Cabinet Member for Supporting Culture and Communities' vision for a service that reaches out to underrepresented communities. By supporting officers with regular direct dialogue with our leisure centre operator there has been the beginnings of a change in the service ethos centred on making it easier for disadvantaged citizens to understand the leisure centre offer and how it can meet their needs for healthier living. The operator has bought into the vision, resulting in targeted service improvements over the past 12 months, including:

- More customer friendly and accessible marketing and communication material and activity, making it easy for citizens to understand and access the service
- New digital and printed key service information, e.g. concession membership options and prices made simple
- Introduction of first-time user webpages
- Staff training in supporting and helping customers with choosing the right membership based on their needs, especially 'first timers'

There is much more to be done to make our leisure centres fully inclusive, but the scrutiny process has put us on the right track.

2019 will be an exciting year for scrutiny in Camden as we will be focusing on extending the level of public engagement, we have so that we can work with our communities to align scrutiny with the ambitious aims set out in our borough vision, Camden 2025. Alongside this priority we know that at a time of financial challenge and uncertainty for local government the need for a strong and effective scrutiny function is vitally important. As such, over the coming year we will be actively working to ensure that Camden's scrutiny is even more strategic, outcomes focused and fosters a collaborative approach across our organisation, amongst Committees and beyond.



Councillor Val Armstrong

Chair of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee,
Cheshire West and Chester Council



In June 2018, the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Cheshire West and Chester Council produced its report, 'Scrutiny Review – Care Leavers', to help improve the transitions into adulthood for children in the care and to help bring some normality to their lives. Its aim was to understand the journey of a Care Leaver as they transition into young adulthood and to enhance their lives and future prospects. What makes our review so special is the way we engaged young people in care and involved them in the review and how service areas embraced the opportunity to be scrutinised. This approach also showed to our children in care, that Members are human and that they care about them! This is a testament to how scrutiny is now embedded into the culture of Cheshire West and Chester Council and how seriously Members take their Corporate Parenting roles. The young people feel that the recommendations reflect their input and were given the opportunity to discuss the report at one of their Children in Care meetings prior to publication.

The review has also helped to continually develop a positive working relationship between scrutiny Councillors and officers. The willingness of the scrutiny members to positively challenge methods of working was welcomed by officers.

Corporately, the review has helped show the value of scrutiny to senior officers and Cabinet Members. The review has shown that scrutiny can involve service users, look at difficult issues, highlight areas that need to be improved and then make practical recommendations like establishing the Care Leavers Task Force (with scrutiny involved in setting the Terms of Reference for this group).

During the review, the Task Group uncovered a number of additional issues; we returned to our scope and made what we thought were careful and proportionate decisions to change it in light of the new information we had received. It was surprising how many departments have an involvement with care leavers and all of which worked extremely well together. Members witnessed the Council's strong inter-relationships with officers and partners. What was also evident during the review was the excellent cross party working relationship the Task Group had. Due to the number of housing provider witnesses the Task Group wanted to speak with, it was agreed to divide them up amongst the Members and then share their findings.

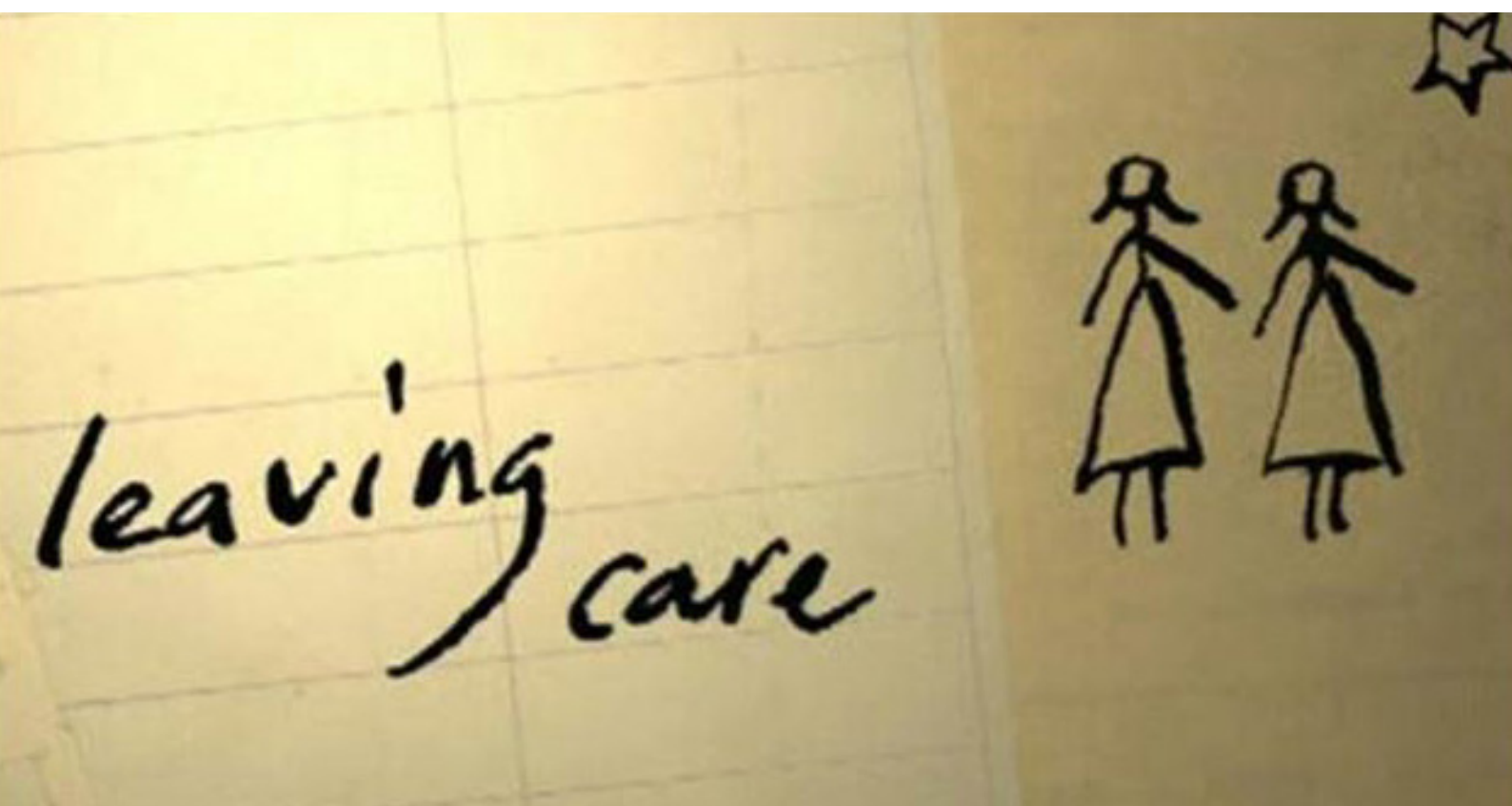
We knew that traditional evidence gathering techniques would not get the information. Young people were unlikely to respond to questionnaires or attend committee meetings. The Task Group took the young people out for dinner and then bowling. These



informal sessions made the young people more relaxed and comfortable to talk to Members. We knew we were onto something special when the group, who had started off so quiet and withdrawn wanted another session. Due to time restrictions, the Task Group agreed to undertake a further phase of the review in a future municipal year in order to focus on Education and Employment and then invite the young people back to further sessions. This approach shows the Task Group's commitment to continued long term commitment to involving children in care in improving services they receive.

Since its inception, Cheshire West and Chester Council has always prioritised children in care and Elected Members have taken their Corporate Parenting responsibilities seriously, and delivered their duties with ambition and passion. The new Children and Social Work Act 2017 which came into force from 1 April 2018 has helped Councillors to remind themselves of their Corporate Parenting responsibilities. Given the changes to legislation, this scrutiny review was timely.

Cheshire West and Chester's Scrutiny is not something to be feared or ignored but to be embraced because it delivers significant improvements and also it can even be fun! The Council's future aims for scrutiny are to engage more widely with the public. Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee is currently undertaking a review on how the Council engages with the public and, included in the review is how scrutiny engages in the future.



Councillor Alistair Dewhurst

Chair of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee and Chair of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group, Devon County Council



We are proud of our approach and outcomes in scrutiny in Devon. It's my belief that we all contribute to Devon County Council's motto 'Improving Life for All'. In scrutiny we are reflective on our work and look to improve its impact. Last year we transformed our annual report to ask the question 'what difference have we made?' This went beyond merely writing a report and was a step in looking at the value of scrutiny to the organisation, as well as challenging ourselves, as Members, to ensure that we were making the best use of our time. We also have the express support of the decision makers in the Council, to value and welcome the critical friend challenge and contribution to policy that Scrutiny makes.

I would particularly highlight the number of people that speak to Scrutiny, both as service users, frontline staff and others, in committee and in task groups or visits. We feel it is a particular strength of our approach to develop understanding between policy and decision makers and those who are recipients of services, or unheard anywhere else. Developing this mutual understanding is at the heart of our conception of scrutiny.

Looking back at the journey that we have taken, last year we celebrated twenty years of Scrutiny at Devon County Council. Whilst I think it looked rather different when it first started, I am told there are still some similarities. The Council decided to mark this occasion with a symposium, drawing together

practitioners and experts to reflect and discuss the impact of scrutiny.

Over seventy scrutineers from Districts, Counties, City and Unitary Councils, the Office of the PCC and the NHS travelled across the country to share solutions to the enduring challenges. The importance of the regard for Scrutiny was introduced by Devon's Leader and Chief Executive. Then Sarah Woolaston MP, the House of Commons's Select Committee's Chair of Chairs eloquently compared the challenges of Select Committees with Scrutiny, highlighting the need and value of both!

Across the day there were eight ideas exchange workshops and a panel Q&A.



Symposium Headlines

Hearing the Voice of the Public

- Scrutiny is an opportunity for people to speak but formal meetings can be daunting
- Discussion and debate informed by hearing

Creating conditions for collaboration

- Decision makers should see the value of scrutiny
- Ability to develop or change policy in difficult areas

Health Feedback

- Complicated structure with changing landscape
- Scrutiny is the only democratic check on local Health Services.

Influencing the National Agenda

- Escalating issues to MPs can be useful —but only if scrutiny is listened to.

The message from the day was that the environment for scrutiny is paramount to enable meaningful impact. Delegates were clear that the determinants of this began with lead decision makers welcoming the views and evidence-based challenge that scrutiny can bring. Factors to support effective scrutiny then include independent scrutiny staff, the right training and development for Members and a strong chair. Then scrutiny can meet the challenge of balancing the voice of the public with evidence to challenge the Executive and ultimately ensure the best decisions are made.

I strongly believe that in a Cabinet based system of governance there must be a check and sounding board to enable those who make the decisions to hear the voice of the rest of the Members of the Council. I believe that Scrutiny is the only way for Members to become knowledgeable enough to provide that reflection on the workings of the Council and to hold every Cabinet Member to account.



Councillor David Andrews

Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee,
Hertfordshire County Council



Hertfordshire actively works to increase the involvement of children and their families in service development wherever possible. Our Children in Care Council (CHICC) were consulted on the development of a Children's Services initiative and they expressed some reservations. Children's services then approached Scrutiny for some advice on how CHICC could gain a better overview and constructively challenge officers and contribute to planning of their future services in a meaningful way. Our response was to offer to run a topic of the children's choice through our scrutiny model to empower them to become decision makers.

From this we learned that whatever the constitutional regulations and national legislation, there is always a way to be creative when investigating areas of public concern. This method of scrutiny has definitely increased engagement with our community and more specifically our young people, who can often feel disconnected from the democratic process, and has been evidenced through a second trial of this process, directed by discussions of topics for future investigation determined by CHICC representatives. From the results, I know that we can use it as a template to work with specific under-represented and particularly disadvantaged groups. I witnessed from this single event how much was gained not just by the CHICC representatives, but more importantly by officers and my fellow councillors of hearing first-hand in an open environment what needed to be done to make a real difference to the lives of our young people.

I pride myself on the independence of scrutiny. It is this culture that allows scrutiny to operate effectively with councillors from all parties having an equal voice. We ensure that services are effective and meet the needs of residents. We are always looking to innovate and evolve what we do and seek to involve the community in scrutiny in ways that will be most valuable.

To this end when we conducted the scrutiny of Looked After Children, we invited young people from the CHICC to sit on the scrutiny panel in place of Councillors, to provide evidence as experts-by-experience. These young people were supported by our scrutiny team, in exactly the same way that any councillor would be assisted in the development of key lines of enquiry and formal briefings. Their programme was built around what the young people wanted to investigate, which in this instance was returning to birth families.

The senior officers providing evidence and responding to the challenges young people put to them, were those that councillors would typically hear from in scrutiny. The recommendations focused

on ensuring children and young people are more involved in the planning and processes that impact them and enabling direct input from children and young people to feed into what is expected of their care provision. The recommendations included:

- That a meeting is arranged with young people to discuss what questions they would want to go into the reunification questionnaire.
- Children's Services assessments need to make sure that they include information and comments from all individuals around a young person.
- That the Children Looked After team does more work with birth parents in preparation for young people returning home.

The Committee and all councillors put their full support behind the resulting recommendations which the Cabinet Member responded to within our standard two-month deadline. To keep track of, and follow up on, the implementation of our recommendations we have a separate committee, the Impact of Scrutiny Advisory Committee (ISAC) with cross party membership. The response was shared with the CHICC and the ISAC followed up on the recommendations to make sure that they were implemented. CHICC was invited to attend the ISAC.

Throughout the process we engaged with CHICC representatives to make sure they were happy with the implementation of the recommendations. This was a rare and welcome opportunity to directly engage with a seldom heard group and to check with them that the recommendations had been enacted as in a way that as service users they had truly expected. CHICC representatives were very positive about the experience and felt they had had their voices heard. As this had such a positive impact on the service we have since repeated this process with the All Age Autism Board, where service users held officers to account on developing deliverable recommendations for person centred support.

Involving young people in this way was invaluable and demonstrated the impact of putting the citizen at the heart of policy development. By conducting the scrutiny with active services users, we gained greater insight and it meant that

the recommendations were meaningful to those affected. The young people involved had greater insight into local democracy, creating more engaged citizens, and it enhanced their self-confidence. Scrutiny in Hertfordshire will always look to measure its effectiveness through outcomes and the impact on our residents. I know that this can only be achieved by not being complacent, trying new approaches, sharing innovative practice with colleagues and drawing on the national network to adapt our methods and improve outcomes.



Councillor Jamie Lane

Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee,
Northampton Borough Council



Our Overview and Scrutiny work at Northampton is completely member-led and evidence-based. I feel that it is vital that the work of scrutiny adds value and improvement and the conclusions and recommendations from the in-depth reviews undertaken each year have really demonstrated that. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee sets up Scrutiny Panels that carry out in-depth scrutiny reviews, whilst the Overview and Scrutiny Committee concentrates on strategic issues, including holding the Cabinet to account, performance management and scrutiny of crime and disorder. I am really pleased that this structure attracts increased public participation and the involvement of non-executive in scrutiny reviews.

From involving the public in our scrutiny work, the profile of overview and scrutiny has continued to be raised with a number of important and successful reviews carried out each year. We are keen to keep this up and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee invites suggestions for the work programme from various partners, agencies and members of the public. We welcome and encourage members of the public who live or work in the borough to get involved in Scrutiny.

I was delighted that last year over 90 suggestions for future Scrutiny review were received from the public. A short survey monkey questionnaire was published - asking just one question "What would you like Overview and Scrutiny to look at over the next year?". Simple but effective; the questionnaire can be easily and quickly filled in. This is something that I would recommend to other scrutineers, asking the public to suggest an item for Scrutiny to review. We left the question open ended so that residents had the freedom to suggest an issue that they genuinely felt needed looking at and felt passionately about, rather than providing set options which would mean the choices were being led and limited by the Council.



Public suggestions do inform the Work Programme at Northampton. Councillors carefully consider the suggestions at a workshop held annually and select items for the scrutiny work programme for the year from these ideas, along with Cabinet's priorities for the year and suggestions put forward by Councillors. Everyone who suggested an issue is notified of the final Work Programme and invited to attend future meetings of the Committee and its Panels. Meetings are very well attended, for example the public gallery was full for two recent meetings of the Scrutiny Panel looking at the impact of the move of the university.

It is important for me to highlight that our Scrutiny Panels really benefit from the expertise and knowledge of co-optees. For example, a representative from Northants Carers sat on the Dementia Friendly Town Scrutiny Panel, a Funeral Director sat on the Cemeteries Scrutiny Panel and the Chief Executive of the local theatres sat on the Culture and Tourism Scrutiny Panel.

“Being co-opted was an interesting and enlightening experience for someone, such as myself who has had no previous experience in this area. The opportunity to express both the opinion of my industry as well as my own and to have such opinions recognised was appreciated. Moreover was the Panel's interest and acceptance of the opinions of external groups and individuals, all of which were considered seriously. The discussions and evidence presented will help in the development of a plan going forward to ensure that the maintenance and availability of cemeteries as well as the ongoing provision of grave space in Northampton will remain an important consideration for the council.”

Simon Hollowell, Hollowell's Funeral Director

We always make sure that the public who come along to our Scrutiny Panel meetings are informed of our recommendations and, further down the line, how they have been implemented and the difference they have made. I think that by taking the time to do this, it ensures the public will continue to take an interest in our scrutiny process.

There were two individual suggestions from the public in 2017/2018 for a Scrutiny Review to look into the town becoming dementia friendly. This topic was prioritised by Councillors and included in

the work programme for the year. The review came up with recommendations, which have begun to be implemented. One example is for Northampton to become a Dementia Friendly Town (DFT) in liaison with the Northampton Dementia Alliance (DAA), Northamptonshire DAA and University of Northampton. As a result of this recommendation, Northampton Borough Council has become a member of the Northampton and Northamptonshire DAA and the Northampton DAA has recently had confirmation of its 'working towards Dementia Friendly Community Status' which means they will start evidencing the work carried out throughout Northampton to support the town gaining Dementia Friendly Community Status.

The Scrutiny Review also found there was a 'lack of support for young people living with dementia', and recommended the creation of a dementia forum, which has now been set up and activities such as dog walks are being offered. The Review also recommended the appointment of a Dementia Friends Champion to oversee the project and raise awareness of those living with the condition. The 'champion' has been appointed and is due to work towards the introduction of ID cards for carers, and 'Keep Safe' cards for vulnerable people.

We obviously have some challenges for next year, including a continued focus on pre-decision scrutiny and positive contribution to policy development and improvement of the Council's operations; ensuring the overview and scrutiny work programme continues to reflect the concerns of service users, community and the public; continued work with the community and key partners to respond to concerns and a continued drive to increase public participation in Overview and Scrutiny, building - something that has continued to increase year on year and we are keen to build upon our success in this area.



Councillor Darryl Dixon

Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, Sunderland City Council

The importance of overview and scrutiny committees cannot be over emphasised in the current climate of organisational change, service developments and reconfiguration. I feel that the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee has embraced its role through a varied and detailed work programme. One of the strengths of the way we work is our continued development of relationships and consideration of the issues facing the health landscape in Sunderland and more importantly how such changes will impact on local residents.

The health services commissioned and delivered across Sunderland continue to change due in part to central government legislation, the ideals of the NHS long term view and the need to get as much value for money as possible. This is clearly reflected in the work of the committee throughout this year as we have challenged, collaborated and been involved with council health colleagues and NHS health partners.

The Committee acknowledges that health covers a wide remit and involves a number of organisations that contribute to the running of health services. In Sunderland we recognise the importance of a good level of understanding of our health partner's roles

and the development of positive relationships. To this end the committee holds an annual workshop with partners including Northumberland Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust, North East Ambulance Service, Sunderland and South Tyneside Hospitals and local GP's to improve the Committee's collective knowledge and develop relationships. These events, which are organised in a 'speed-dating' style of interaction, have been a great success from both the Member and partner perspective.

One of the key issues for us, as a committee, has been Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group's (CCG) consultation on the way urgent care services are structured and delivered across the city. Through discussions with the CCG we understood that their drivers for change were confusion in the current system, increased demand, national guidance and policies and the need to spend and use resources providing value for money. As a committee we engaged with our partners and local communities and provided a formal response to the consultation outlining a number of issues including on transport and travel, the proposed location of the urgent treatment centre, the enhanced NHS 111 service and on aspects of the consultation itself.



The final decision on urgent care services in Sunderland has now been taken by Sunderland CCG governing body at a meeting held in public. The CCG governing body acknowledged a number of the public concerns and has looked to address these in the final decisions taken. In particular that the final decision now includes an improved option for the extended access services in the Washington and Houghton areas, both outlying parts of the city where concerns had been highlighted over transport and travel. Further issues around communication, opening hours and building resources are also to be considered and worked through following opinion from the public consultation. The Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee has discussed their response at great length and we will continue to monitor progress on mobilisation and development of the urgent care service in Sunderland, mindful of the concerns raised throughout the consultation period.

The committee will continue to monitor progress through the coming year to seek assurances on the new urgent care service and ensure that some of the remaining key issues are resolved. The committee will look to the evidence from key performance data on a number of facets of the urgent care system to ensure the service is providing the expected care to local communities. I believe, in Sunderland, we have a solid and cooperative relationship with our partners that allows for a level of constructive discussions and, when required, that crucial element of challenge. I think this is where our real strength lies, in our confidence to voice the concerns of the public and look to ensure that changes in services are not to the detriment of local people.



Councillor Tom Usher

Chair of Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council



More than ever, Overview and Scrutiny Committees need to get under the skin of policy and strategic decisions. As Chair of my committee, I understand that the best way to scrutinise our service area is to visit the coalface of practice, meet with frontline staff and, where possible, service users themselves.

Following the inadequate Ofsted inspection of 2016, we considered possible approaches to gain a better picture of our business. Following this consultation, we developed a programme of Children's Services 'Reality Check' visits.

Benefits of the reality checks include improved understanding of services for vulnerable children and families, enhancing engagement with partner organisations and aiding assessment of integrated health and care. The work also aligns with the children's services improvement plan developed as a result of Ofsted inspection and visits. The approach enables triangulation of evidence from different sources to ensure scrutiny receives a robust and comprehensive picture on which to base their recommendations.

Visits are planned based on intelligence including Ofsted inspection findings, service improvement planning, safeguarding arrangements and integration of health and care services. The visits are focused on the work of relevant stakeholders, including:

- Health Safeguarding Leads for Children Looked After
- Frontline Children's Social Workers across all service areas
- The Leaving Care Team - staff directly supporting young people leaving care
- The Early Help Service
- Children's Centres including a nationally pioneering community birthing centre.

Through the programme, Scrutiny also reviewed the tools and information that social workers access, ensuring case management systems and performance analysis are fit for purpose and used systematically. We also included an assessment of new agile working equipment designed to improve working practices.

Visits are co-operative and health partners have seen the value and invited scrutiny to visit. This is evidence of their real value, not only for members but also frontline staff who have felt their views are under-represented.

Visits seek to improve the effectiveness of services for our children and families. We have highlighted the importance of collaborative working, the wide-reaching role of the Corporate Parent and have sought reassurance that the child's voice is paramount.



Recommendations made include improving pathway plans to ensure care leavers' voices are captured. We have addressed concerns regarding re-referral rates to social services, putting in place an action plan monitored through the Committee. We have identified concerns about staff communication and recommended co-location of staff across the borough and this has been implemented across children's services. Development of staff IT training has been endorsed and encouraged by scrutiny and agile working is now being introduced throughout the Local Authority. All recommendations were fully accepted by all agencies and are shared with the Cabinet Member and Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

There is always a risk that once the visits have concluded, services go back to 'business as usual'. I ask for regular update reports, so the committee gets the opportunity to check on the status of recommendations. To date everything had been delivered or is on track.

Reality check visits encourage a culture that allows us to gain assurance that children's services are providing the best outcomes for our children and young people. As recommendations and reports are made in partnership with the services visited, it has evolved into a collaborative approach.

Overview and Scrutiny in Wirral has a strong culture of cross-party collaboration, robust pre-decision scrutiny, a clear focus on outcomes for residents and ensuring scrutiny has real impact. Scrutiny is at its most powerful when it is bold, innovative and visible to all parties. It promotes a culture of transparency and openness, embracing different perspectives. I am proud as Chair, to have contributed to entrenching a culture of due-diligence and delivering tangible outcomes for residents.





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