**County and Unitary Councils’ Officer Overview and Scrutiny Network**

**Minutes**

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| **MEETING** | **COUNTY & UNITARY COUNCILS’ OFFICER OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY NETWORK** |
| **DATE** | **FRIDAY 30 JUNE 2023, 11.00 AM – 12:45pm** |
| **VENUE** | **VIRTUAL (MICROSOFT TEAMS)** |
| PRESENT | John Cade (Chairman), Melanie White (Secretary, Isle of White), Charlotte Cameron (Minutes, Peterborough City Council), Helen Taber-French (Suffolk County Council),  Teresa Buckley (Torbay Council), Michael Turner (Medway Council), Tom Fowler (Buckinghamshire Council), Andrew Clayton (Milton Keynes City Council), Laura Noonan (City of Wolverhampton Council), Gennie Holmes (Coventry City Council), Rachel Allan (West Sussex County Council), Lee Booker (City of Wolverhampton Council), Sophie Foster (Shropshire Council), Jessica Mann (Braintree District Council), Kate Morris (Nottinghamshire County Council), George Dare (Dorset Council), Fiona Bottrill (Birmingham City Council), Kate McLoughlin (Newcastle City Council), Stacey Worthington (Telford & Wrekin Council), Mark Beeley (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead), Leslie Ayoola (Nottingham City Council), Kiara Chatziioannou (Lincolnshire County Council), Rachel Sweeney (East Sussex County Council), Sean Nicholson (Northumberland County Council), Jane Garrard (Nottingham City), Tristan Godfrey (Kent County Council), Mark Pirnie (Southampton City Council), Stephanie Cox (Southend-on-Sea City Council), Chris Ward (Buckinghamshire Council), James Edmunds (West Northamptonshire Council) |
| GUESTS | Mel Stevens (CfGS) and Joanne Pitt (CIPFA) |

1. INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIRMAN AND HOUSEKEEPING

The chairman welcomed all parties and the secretary to the network gave an outline of the proceedings for the virtual session.

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2023 were noted.

1. INTRODUCTION TO MEL STEVENS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE CFGS

Mel’s contact: [mel.stevens@cfgs.org.uk](mailto:mel.stevens@cfgs.org.uk)

Mel provided an update on what she had been up to in the two months she had been in post. She had been looking at what could be done better, at the emerging future of scrutiny and how CfGS could support that.

She reflected on the quality of the organisation, their expertise and shared her ambition for CfGS moving forward.

1. CENTRE FOR GOVERNANCE AND SCRUTINY UPDATE

Anette’s contact: [annette.aiken@cfgs.org.uk](mailto:annette.aiken@cfgs.org.uk)

Annette provided an update on the Centre’s activities since the last meeting.

The Annual Conference had been a great success and had highlighted information on OFLOG, the devolution accountability framework and gave practical guidance on various issues impacting the work of scrutiny.

CfGS continued to support authorities and regional scrutiny networks. Annette promoted the monthly newsletter and noted the future external speakers scheduled for the network.

There were no updates at the time of the meeting on the progress of the Health and Care Act.

The various links mentioned in discussions were collated and shared with the network.

1. COMMITTEE SHAKE-UP AND THE EFFECTS ON SCRUTINY

There were preliminary discussions on the implications of a change in administration or change in political responsibility on scrutiny committees.

1. TRAINING SESSION – FINANCIAL SCRUTINY

This session was delivered by Joanne Pitt, Head of Local Government Policy at CIPFA.

Joanne referred to the essential role of scrutiny and noted that the Thurrock financial review mentioned scrutiny 150 times.

The session covered the following points:

1. Ensuring that financial scrutiny is undertaken all the year round and not just in February.
2. Ensuring that scrutiny has access to all the latest financial information and budget projections.
3. Benefits of having a lead scrutiny member for overseeing the process.
4. Working relationship between scrutiny and the section 151 officer.
5. Role of the Audit Committee and how to avoid duplication with scrutiny.

Andrew Clayton (Milton Keynes) asked about monthly/regular reporting and what sort of things/policies that would need to be looked at. Joanne advised that savings, reserves, capital and investment would be good themes to cover.

Gennie Holmes (Coventry) asked about Members who sat on both audit and the financial scrutiny committee and was advised that they would need to be clear on their roles and responsibilities for both.

Fiona Bottrill (Birmingham) referred to the equal pay dispute at Birmingham and was advised to ask how realistic the plan for recovery was and understand where the scrutiny responsibilities would lie in that recovery.

The slides and various links mentioned in discussions were collated and shared with the network.

1. ASK THE NETWORK

Ideas were shared for the upcoming year:

Kate McLoughlin (Newcastle) asked about commercial sensitivity and closed scrutiny sessions. The network discussed themes around the redaction of papers, choosing the right time to scrutinise and identifying what information could be shared.

1. FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates for future meetings were 8 September and 1 December 2023. Both would commence at 11am and be virtual.

Suggestions for future agenda items were welcomed.

The meeting closed at 12.45pm.