

Southwest Overview & Scrutiny and Health Scrutiny

Member's and Officer's Network

Monday 6th March 2023

Attendance

Ceri Williams	Bath and Northeast Somerset Council
Cllr. Vic Pritchard	Bath and Northeast Somerset Council
Bronwen Falconer	Bristol City Council
Cllr. Brenda Massey	Bristol City Council
Cllr. David Wilcox	Bristol City Council
Ed Hammond	Centre for Governance and Scrutiny
Helen Mitchell	Centre for Governance and Scrutiny
Cllr. Stephen Andrews	Cotswold District Council
Cllr. Anne Double	Cornwall Council
Cllr. Alistair Dewhirst	Devon County Council
Camilla de Bernhardt Lane	Devon County Council
Cllr. Phil Bullivant	Devon County Council
Charlie Fisher	Devon County Council
Cllr. Shane Bartlett	Dorset County Council
Cllr. Gill Taylor	Dorset County Council
Lindsey Watson	Dorset County Council
George Dare	Dorset County Council
Anne Hawley	Exeter City Council
Lauren Richards	Gloucester City Council
Cllr Simon Clist	Mid Devon Council
Cllr. Geoffrey Richardson	North Somerset Council
Cllr. Brian Smedley	Sedgemoor District Council
Cllr. Leigh Redman	Somerset County Council
Cllr Marcus Prouse	Somerset West and Taunton Council
Cllr. Ian Boulton	South Gloucestershire Council
April Begley	South Gloucestershire Council
Kathy Eastwood	South Gloucestershire Council
Brenda Langley	South Gloucestershire Council
Julia Parkes	South Gloucestershire Council
Amy Pearce	Swindon Borough Council
Andy Swain	Teignbridge District Council
Trish Corns	Teignbridge District Council
Teresa Buckley	Torbay Council
Julie Bielby	Wiltshire Council

Apologies

Jo Moore	Gloucestershire County Council
Stephen Bace	Gloucestershire County Council
Claire Rees	South Gloucestershire Council

1. Welcome and apologies listed above.

2. Meeting Governance Discussion

- 2.1 Karen Stone, South West Councils asked the members if they would like to establish a rolling chair or a fixed chair for the meeting. The group agreed for future meetings to have a rolling chair until elections are held. It was decided to have 2/3 chairs on a rolling basis. The members will establish and review chairs and facilitation of the network annually.
- 2.2 Elections will be held in May for multiple Local Authorities. The members stated they would be unable to volunteer for chairing the meeting until they have been re-elected. The chair will be discussed at the next meeting in July 2023.
- 2.3 Karen Stone, Southwest Councils stated that the CfGS have raised the topic of network communications. The group were asked whether they wanted to use a forum-based network either teams or basecamp etc.
- 2.4 Leigh Redman noted that circulated information is useful. A central resource for posted documents and articles would be useful. South West Councils agreed to host a forum for shared best practice and common questions. The members agreed a Teams channel would be preferred for circulated information to be posted, while meeting invites, and training options remained emailed to the group.
- 2.5 Karen Stone, South West Councils noted the frequency of network meetings stands at 2 a year, every 6 months. The group were asked if they would like the network meetings to become more frequent. The group agreed quarterly meetings going forward.
- 2.6 Geoffrey Richardson questioned whether the network have a term of reference. Karen Stone stated they were currently being reviewed and they will be circulated for network approval before the next meeting.
- 2.7 The network agreed that due to elections the next meeting should be held in July. The terms of reference will be updated and reviewed in the July meeting.

3. Network Steering Group

- 3.1 Leigh Redman asked the network if they would like to establish a steering group to decide and review agenda items before the meetings.

3.2 The network agreed that due to elections being held in May, they were unable to volunteer for a network steering group. The group agreed a network steering group would be reviewed and discussed at the next meeting after the May elections.

4. **Regional Round-Up of O&S**

4.1 BANES, Ceri Williams noted recent O&S successes included successfully scrutinised the draft budget proposals for 2023-24, with recommendations around the level of detail to be presented on budget proposals accepted by the Executive. There has been on going scrutiny of the Integrated Care System, with regular attendance at meetings by the respective health-place Director. BANES will hold elections on the 4th May, with all scrutiny activity concluding in early March. BANES has focused on the induction programme and agreed legacy items for inclusion in any future workplans.

4.2 BANES, Vic Pritchard noted issues on communication in bringing Adult Social Care back into the confides of the Council. There has been an inspection on a care home that required further attention and special measures, the second inspection maintained that it required special attention.

4.3 Teresa Buckley stated Torbay have had experiences of providers not working. There are difficulties when there are supplier contract changes. Councillors are advised to work closely with healthcare. There is a role for scrutiny to hold suppliers accountable, professional steer in the scrutiny network is necessary.

4.4 Cheltenham, recent successes include a finalised O&S Task group to investigate and report on deprivation in Cheltenham. Cheltenham have supported the Monitoring Officer in a review of the Constitution, and established a reporting process for a major infrastructure project. Cheltenham are currently reviewing the Constitution. The current composition of the O&S committee is mainly councillors with less than two years' experience of being a councillor.

4.5 Devon, Alistair Dewhirst noted that the Head of Scrutiny, Camilla de Bernhardt Lane had returned from a 6-month secondment to CfGS. As such backfilling arrangements and officers within the Scrutiny (and wider Democratic Services) Team have gone back to their original posts. Devon is currently reviewing the modernisation of the Corporate Finance System, Cost of Living, and Motorhomes.

4.6 Camilla de Bernhardt Lane stated the Executive Cabinet asked scrutiny to look at the community pharmacy and how that works within the Integrated Care Board. The budget for the scrutiny board has been approved, all the recommendations made by scrutiny has been approved. Devon will look at the annual report and will share it at the next Network meeting.

- 4.7 Somerset West and Taunton, Marcus Prouse noted Somerset County Council will become an Unitary authority, Somerset Council from the 1st April 2023. Somerset West and Taunton have received approval of recommendations from Public Transport Task and Finish Group and Executive agreed to send the report to the new Council Executive. It was noted that all District Scrutiny Committees gone, the four new Somerset Council Scrutiny Committees include, Policies and Place Committee, Policies, Adults and Health Committee, Policies, Children and Families Committee, and Policies, Environment Committee.
- 4.8 South Gloucestershire Council, Ian Boulton noted upcoming elections in May. Task and Finish groups will be drawn to a close before then. In October 2022, Cabinet accepted in full, recommendations from a Task and Finish Group on Education, Health and Care Plans.
- 4.9 Recommendations have been made to Cabinet and responses are awaited in mid-March 2023, on Early Intervention Task and Finish Group. This task and finish group focussed on early identification and intervention with girls with autism.
- 4.10 Recommendations and responses are awaited on Support for Carers Task and Finish Group. This group looked for ways of better supporting carers in South Gloucestershire. It also influenced the development of a new Carers Strategy. The report made recommendations to the Council, to schools, to the NHS and to Government.
- 4.11 South Gloucestershire noted that work has continued Access and Response Team standing group. This Task and Finish group now meets as a Standing Group to support and challenge the service on its improvement journey. The scrutiny Commission will decide whether to continue the group after the 2023 elections. The focus of the March 2023 meeting was qualitative information. Current reviews also included a Climate Emergency Standing Group, Waste Contract PFI, and Health Scrutiny.
- 4.12 Somerset, Leigh Redman stated Somerset will move from 5 Councils into 1 Unitary Council. The Council's have put the Constitution together and what the Scrutiny Network will look like.
- 4.13 Dorset, George Dare noted over the past 6 months Dorset have had a Scrutiny Peer Review and have received a report back with positive recommendations. Dorset have worked closely with the Integrated Care Board and have established a positive relationship and will be collaborating with them in July to update on what has been achieved this year.
- 4.14 Cornwall, Anne Double noted Cornwall do not have elections coming up. They have the devolution deal and the possibility of having a mayor.
- 4.15 Gloucester City Council, Lauren Richards noted a finished Task and Finish group which looked at engagement with young people, 10 out of 12

recommendations were accepted. Gloucester City Council have commissioned a new Task and Finish group to look at damp and mould in rented accommodations.

5. Short Form Training Discussion – What two standalone training sessions would members like this year?

- 5.1 Ed Hammond stated the training offer to the Network from the CfGS. Part of the ongoing support involves standalone training sessions. Member development is important throughout the network. Ed noted the four offered training sessions: Charing Skills, Scoping and managing scrutiny reviews, Skills in reviewing and understanding performance information, and developing effective member/officer relationships. It was noted that financial training will take place in June for the network.
- 5.2 Geoffrey Richardson noted maximising scrutiny effectiveness should be included, how to look at outcomes and what scrutiny do. It was noted that effective scrutiny would be useful to the network.
- 5.3 Stephen Andrews stated developing a successful scrutiny programme would be a useful training session. Decisions should come to the scrutiny panel earlier. The legal right for scrutiny is important, scrutiny culture within a council can develop, it is a matter of legal right.
- 5.4 Alistair Dewhurst stated training should revolve around developing the scrutiny process within Councils. Teignbridge District Council have introduced another Scrutiny Officer into the budget.
- 5.5 April Begley noted effective scrutiny should be recognised and the importance of scrutiny within Councils. It is important to know how scrutiny is effective and why they are effective.
- 5.6 Gill Taylor noted issues related to being told no previews due to local authorities having an Overview committee. Gill asked if this was a common issue throughout the South West.
- 5.7 The network agreed that scrutiny panels need to be able to preview decisions before they are made. May 2019 guidance on Overview and Scrutiny sets out how they work together. There are provisions, statutory guidance must be followed unless there is good reason not to follow it.
- 5.8 The group agreed that effective scrutiny will be the first training session and the next training session will be decided at the next meeting.

6. Question Skills Training, Helen Mitchell

- 6.1 Helen Mitchell stated it is for the Council to decide membership of committees. However, that does not prohibit Overview and Scrutiny from having good representation and hold conversations with the leader to make it

strong and positive. In order to have a successful scrutiny committee it is vital to raise awareness of what kind of skills or commitment needed.

- 6.2 Leigh Redman noted when members have a lack of knowledge on a topic, they are less likely to speak. It is important to educate the members.
- 6.3 Alistair Dewhirst stated it is important to have a programme of interest. If you have a topic that the admin have little to do with or of concern, it holds less interest. If you have people who are too invested in a topic, they can end up moulding something into a particular view.
- 6.4 Helen Mitchell asked the group what the choice of location and layout communicate. The network agreed the Scrutiny committee stage is important. If it is a C shape it is difficult, a V shape is better so the Chair can see everyone. The staging is important, especially where the public sit in parliamentary scrutiny.
- 6.5 Vic Pritchard noted the choice of location is important. Bath holds their panel meetings in the Council chamber as it carries authority. Bath have attempted to spread it around the local authority rooms for public access, but it fails to carry authority.
- 6.6 Helen Mitchell discussed the different types of inquiry and types of questions to be used, the pros and cons of different styles of questioning. The humble inquiry notes asking the simple questions, not making assumptions. The diagnostic inquiry tries to understand specifics of a process or a decision. The confrontational inquiry uses assumption to ask questions as an on-the-spot approach. Finally, a process-orientated inquiry makes visible the interactions in order to understand how to improve.
- 6.7 Vic Pritchard states BANES has looked at different approaches if you are acting as chairman. Children and adult social care are merged into 1 panel, BANES alternate between the 2 complete both agendas. The administration governed by the Chief Executive fails to prioritise scrutiny, there were 5 panels and there are currently 3.
- 6.8 Helen Mitchell suggested for the network to use pre-meets before the meetings take place to discuss potential questions before hand and gain answers to these beforehand. Vic Pritchard noted BANES attempted before, the panel have been granted permission to view statutory reports before hand and fill in questions before hand. It is an enormous agenda and takes up 80% of the Councils budget.
- 6.9 Alistair Dewhirst noted Devon previously had a people's scrutiny committee which looked at adults and children. The week before the election, OFSTED deemed Devon's children services unfit, therefore, the Children's element took over. Devon created a standing overview group to look at children's services, they worked with a commissioner on a weekly basis that enabled the committee to come back and give a highlight report.

- 6.10 Stephen Andrews stated ICB's should look at the whole chain of care, everything from primary care to discharge. It is a huge subject; the chain of care can not be scrutinised in one go.
- 6.11 Helen Mitchell noted effective tips for questioning. This included open exploration questions, reflective questioning, rephrasing, and triangulation questioning.

7. Next Meeting Date

- 7.1 The network agreed the next meeting date would be Monday 10th July.