

## **FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** **CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** **WEDNESDAY, 8 JANUARY 2014**

**REPORT BY:** **MEMBER ENGAGEMENT MANAGER**

**SUBJECT:** **WALES AUDIT OFFICE NATIONAL SCRUTINY  
IMPROVEMENT STUDY UPDATE**

### **1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.01 To update the committee on the progress with the Wales Audit Office (WAO) National Scrutiny Improvement Study.

### **2.00 BACKGROUND**

- 2.01 Members will be aware of this on-going project from the previous reports which have been made to the Constitution Committee. The study commenced in September 2012 with a self-evaluation exercise. Subsequently, a 'Peer Learning Exchange Team' (PLET) comprising Members and Officers was established.
- 2.02 The PLET visited Denbighshire County Council on two occasions to observe at Overview & Scrutiny committee meetings and to provide feedback. The Wrexham PLET observed at two of our committee meetings (Lifelong Learning & Environment).

### **3.00 CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.01 The culmination of the exercise was to have been the '*Scrutiny in the spotlight: Investing to maximise its impact*' conference held in Cardiff on 28<sup>th</sup> November. Flintshire was represented at the conference by Cllr Dave Mackie and officers from the Overview & Scrutiny and Performance Teams.
- 3.02 At that conference, the collected learning from the year long scrutiny study, which it was intended would include the 'Characteristics of effective scrutiny' was to have been launched. However, that launch did not take place and is still awaited. It had been intended that the final report would inform elements of our own Overview & Scrutiny action plan, a copy of which is attached. It is suggested that the action plan be revisited again once the WAO final report and the 'Characteristics of Effective Scrutiny' are published. Other elements, relating to public engagement, are awaiting the Centre for Public Scrutiny workshop to be held in Llandudno in March.

3.03 At the conference, the key note speaker was Lesley Griffiths AM, the Minister for Local Government and Government Business, who emphasised the importance of investing in Overview & Scrutiny to benefit the wider organisations of which it is a part. The Minister also emphasised that without appropriate training and development for the Members and officers of the right calibre, Overview & Scrutiny is not able to function effectively, which is to the detriment of the democratic process. A copy of the Minister's speech will be deposited in the Members' Library when it becomes available.

3.04 During the conference, the Flintshire delegates attended and participated in the following workshops:

1. The Role of the Networked Councillor in Scrutiny.
2. Public Engagement in Scrutiny.
3. Evidencing the Impact: getting a return on investment in scrutiny.
4. Taking the fear out of budget scrutiny.
5. Use of Information/evidence based scrutiny
6. Doing collaborative scrutiny: reflections from practice.

When the slides for the presentations are published, a copy will be placed in the Members' Library.

3.05 There was also a presentation '*Accountability through listening – Lessons learnt from the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry*', an object lesson in how problems can arise when there is insufficient scrutiny within a system of governance.

3.06 One aspect of the action plan which it would be beneficial to put in place now would be the creation of an 'Overview & Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-chairs' steering group which could meet from time to time to discuss good practice with the officer support team. This is something which has arisen out of the WAO study and also from the recent training. This would be a similar group to the former Co-ordinating Body which was instrumental in the early development of Overview & Scrutiny within Flintshire. From 2002, the Co-ordinating Committee, which was formally constituted, replaced it.

#### **4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the committee consider the report and endorse the proposed approach towards the development of the action plan and the creation of the Overview & Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs steering group.

#### **5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

None arising directly from this report.

**6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

None arising directly from this report

**7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

None arising directly from this report

**8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

None arising directly from this report

**9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

None arising directly from this report

**10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

Publication of this report constitutes consultation.

**11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

Publication of this report constitutes consultation

**12.00 APPENDICES**

Updated Peer Review Action Plan

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985  
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None

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