

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE

DATE: WEDNESDAY, 24 OCTOBER 2012

REPORT BY: MEMBER ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

SUBJECT: WALES AUDIT OFFICE SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT STUDY

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.01** To advise the Committee of the Wales Audit Office Scrutiny Improvement Study, an extensive piece of work which commenced in September 2012.

2.00 BACKGROUND

- 2.01** The Wales Audit Office Scrutiny Improvement Study has been in the offing for some time, but matters of detail were only made apparent with the publication of the Project Brief which was received on the 18th of September.
- 2.02** Officers had already raised concern at the timing of the Study, given the proximity to the recent Elections, the ongoing training programmes within individual authorities and the commitment of staff to supporting the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections to be held on the 15th of November. However, the Wales Audit Office, having already factored the study into their work plan and thus having the resources available, need to commence it in the current year.
- 2.03** It is reasonable to say that all Local Authorities in Wales are keen to support Overview and Scrutiny and to ensure that it flourishes as well as it can, within the resources available to each individual authority. Thus this study, whilst it may not be regarded as timely, should be recognised as being beneficial as the learning which is derived from it should contribute to more effective overview & scrutiny.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.01** There are to be six phases to the study as follows:-

3.02 Phase 1 – Collaborative scoping

This was how the approach and outline for the Study was developed,

and has included Local Government representatives (Leaders, Chief Executives, Policy & Performance Officers and Scrutiny Officers) the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Welsh Government (WG) and the Scrutiny Officer Network

3.03 Phase 2 – Initial Self Evaluation

The Wales Audit Office issued each Council with an Electronic Scrutiny Self Evaluation Tool to gather evidence and evaluate their scrutiny arrangements on the 18th of September (around a week later than originally anticipated). The intention was that the Self Evaluation Tool would be returned to the Wales Audit Office by the 31st of October.

3.04 Each Authority is required to establish a Learning Exchange Team which should comprise up to 5 people and be a cross section of appropriate Members, both Executive and non-Executive from a mix of political groups as well as Officers. The Guidance has indicated that the commitment out of county between November 2012 and April 2013 would be around 4 days.

3.05 The Council has already, as required, identified a lead officer, Margaret Parry-Jones, the Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator who currently supports the Environment, Lifelong Learning and Social & Health Overview & Scrutiny Committees. It is suggested that the Learning Exchange Team should also comprise one cabinet member, one overview & scrutiny chair, two Overview & scrutiny members and the Member Engagement Manager.

3.06 The Wales Audit Office (WAO) has already sent authorities a 'self evaluation form', an extensive document which the officers are preparing in draft before the deadline which is 31st October. It has been suggested by WAO that Councils may want to involve their own Learning Exchange Team members in preparing the response to the self evaluation.

3.07 Phase 3 – Regional Workshop

Phase 3 consists of a regional workshop for sharing and learning with other Councils across North Wales. As part of this, each Council will pass on their initial Self Evaluation and Comparative Analysis Summary to a peer Learning Exchange Team from another Council in the region. It has been suggested by the North Wales Scrutiny Officer Network that it is suggested that for logistical reasons, it would be beneficial for the six North Wales Authorities to work together in two teams of three: Wrexham, Denbighshire and Flintshire in the north east and Conwy, Gwynedd and Anglesey in the north west.

3.08 Phase 4 – Peer Learning Exchange Field Work

Each Peer Learning Exchange Team will hold a focus group for the Chairs of Scrutiny of the partner Council, facilitated by the WAO study team leads and where the Peer Learning Exchange Team of each Council would attend and observe at two Scrutiny Committees of their partner Council. To make the Peer Learning Exchange work effectively and to remove any potential problems from Council A reviewing Council B, which then reviews A, it has been suggested by the Scrutiny Officer Network that in the two divisions of North Wales that Council A will review B, which in turn would review C, which would be the reviewing council for A. No decision has been made as to which Council would be which.

3.09 Phase 5 - Second Regional Workshop

The Second Regional Workshop is where the Peer Learning Exchange Teams will feed back their reflections and refine their final self evaluation.

3.10 Phase 6 – Reporting

This phase is reporting and the dissemination of information and is likely to take place in June or July of 2013. The exercise will end with a National Scrutiny Conference to be held in the autumn 2013. A copy of the project study brief has been deposited in each of the group rooms and an electronic copy is available from the Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator.

4.00 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (i) That the committee notes the arrangements which have already been made for Flintshire's participation in the study;
- (ii) that the composition of the Peer Learning Exchange Team be approved;
- (iii) that nominations be sought for the one cabinet member, one overview & scrutiny chair and two overview & scrutiny members to work alongside the officers who have already been identified.

5.00 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Participation in the study will involve offering refreshments to a peer learning team from another authority on two occasions together with the travel costs incurred by Flintshire's Learning Exchange Team members. This can be met from within the Overview & Scrutiny budget.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

None

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

None

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

None

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

Members and officers who are engaged with the project will have to incorporate participation into their existing workloads.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

Publication of this report constitutes consultation.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

See 10.00, above.

12.00 APPENDICES

None

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

Wales Audit Office Scrutiny Improvement Study Project brief,
published September 2012.

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