

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE**

DATE: **WEDNESDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2013**

REPORT BY: **MEMBER ENGAGEMENT MANAGER**

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

1.00 **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.01 To provide the Committee with an update on the progress which has been made with the Wales Audit Office (WAO) Scrutiny Improvement Study.

2.00 **BACKGROUND**

2.01 The WAO Scrutiny study was initially considered by the committee at its meeting on 24th October 2012. As part of a national programme of Wales Audit Office activity to improve scrutiny, Flintshire was invited to take part in a self-evaluation and peer review process.

2.02 The self-evaluation started in September 2012 and a further exercise was conducted this summer, reflecting on the original self-evaluation in the light of both our subsequent experience and the views of the Wrexham Peer Learning Exchange Team (WPLET) which observed at two of our committee meetings, Lifelong Learning and Environment.

2.03 The guidance from WAO was that each authority's Peer Learning Exchange Team (PLET) should comprise five or six people from a range of both executive and non executive Members and officers. The composition of the Flintshire PLET, which the committee agreed last October was :

Cllr Billy Mullin, Cabinet member for Corporate Management;
Cllr Richard Jones, Chair of Corporate Resources O&SC;
Cllr Clive Carver, Vice-chair of Corporate Resources O&SC;
Cllr David Mackie (replacing Cllr Carolyn Thomas, the original nominee);
Margaret Parry-Jones, Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and project lead;
Robert Robins, Member Engagement Manager.

2.04 The PLET members took part in a number of activities: the self-evaluation and subsequent review thereof; an initial workshop in Llandudno in November; a feedback workshop in Colwyn Bay in April and observing and then providing feedback at two Denbighshire scrutiny committee meetings and attending a meeting with the Denbighshire chairs and vice-chairs group.

2.05 The Peer Learning Exchange Team from Wrexham (comprising Members and officers) and representatives of WAO observed a meeting of our Environment O&SC on 6th February and a meeting of Lifelong Learning O&SC on 14th February 2013. At the close of both meetings, the Wrexham team gave feedback on a summary of their observations to the committee around the following areas:

- What went well;
- What could be done better;
- What could be done differently;
- Any best practice which they observed.

The Flintshire PLET had carried out a similar exercise at the two Denbighshire meetings which they attended.

2.06 A meeting between our Overview & Scrutiny chairs, the WPLET members and a representative of WAO took place on 18th April 2013. The purpose of the meeting was for the WPLET to seek comments from the Chairs and Vice-chairs on how they feel that Overview & scrutiny works in Flintshire and to comment on the observations made by the WPLET following their attendance at the two Flintshire meetings.

2.07 At the July meeting of the committee, a report detailing the feedback and the Flintshire responses was submitted. A draft action plan had been developed, to utilise the learning which had been acquired at that stage. At that meeting, the draft was approved and it was also resolved that there be a further report to the committee and that the Member Engagement Manager should discuss the suggestions raised with appropriate group leaders and committee chairs. As the study is still on going, that meeting has yet to take place.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 To complete the self-assessment, each of the 30 questions in the study had to be responded to, and evidenced. One of four scores was then awarded for each question, starting from negative to positive.

These were categorised as:

- (1) Hindering,
- (2) Partly supporting;
- (3) Positively supporting and
- (4) Significantly supporting.

3.02 Flintshire completed the self assessment and was subsequently assessed (on the basis of evidence and observation) by colleagues from the Wrexham PLET. Flintshire's PLET conducted the same exercise for Denbighshire.

3.03 In appendix 2, the 30 questions, together with the FCC and Wrexham PLET (WPLET) assessments are listed. Scoring of this nature is essentially subjective: what should be noted is that there is never a great variance between the assessments and that for numbers 6, 11, 17 and 24; the WPLET assessment is actually higher than Flintshire's own.

	Hindering	Partly Supporting	Positively Supporting	Significantly Supporting
FCC self-evaluation	0	5	16	9
WLPET evaluation	0	11	11	8

3.04 As a result of the self assessment and that of the WPLET colleagues, an action plan was produced and was considered at the July meeting. The WAO published its final versions of the all Wales exercise and the analysis of Flintshire's results on the same day as the committee met. Therefore, the action plan had originally been produced before the final report was available. However, there was no change between the draft and final versions as they relate to Flintshire. An updated version of the action plan, showing progress to date is attached as appendix 1.

3.05 In terms of the self-assessment exercise, the need to produce evidence in order to justify an evaluation has been a valuable exercise. At the Wales Scrutiny Officers Network in August, officers reflected on the questions used for the Scrutiny Improvement Study and have submitted a more succinct set of characteristics to the Wales Audit Office for consideration prior to the event on the 28th of November.

3.06 There is considerable merit in carrying out an annual assessment which would be being analysed and reported back to this committee: such an approach will ensure that the Overview & Scrutiny function continues to be a beneficial element of our corporate governance and gives value for money. Either the original self evaluation questions or the 'characteristics of effective scrutiny' approach referred to in 3.05 could be used.

3.07 The final stage of the study process will now be the WAO '*Scrutiny in the Spotlight- Investing to maximise its impact*' event to be held in Cardiff on 28th November. Bearing in mind the attendees whom the WAO had suggested, the Flintshire nominations are:

Cllr Aaron Shotton, Leader of the Council;
Cllr Billy Mullin, Cabinet Member and PLET member,
Cllr Richard Jones, PLET member;
Cllr David Mackie, PLET member;
Colin Everett, Chief Executive;
Peter Evans, Democracy & Governance Manager;
Margaret Parry-Jones, O&S facilitator, PLET project lead;
Ceri Owen, O&S Facilitator;
Vicki Roberts, Performance Team Leader;
Robert Robins, Member Engagement Manager and PLET member.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) That the committee comments on the results of the self and peer assessments shown in questions 1-30 , in appendix 2;
(2) That the updated action plan as submitted in appendix 1 be considered and commented on;
(3) That the desirability of an annual self-evaluation, based on the WAO 30 questions or the 'characteristics of effective scrutiny' approach be considered.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None arising directly form this report.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

None arising directly form this report

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

None arising directly form 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

- 1 Peer Review Action Plan updated September 2013
- 2 The self-evaluation 30 questions.

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

Good scrutiny? Good Question! WAO Scrutiny Improvement Study.
Phase 5 – FCC's final self evaluation of their own overview &
scrutiny arrangements.

Contact Officer: Robert Robins
Telephone: 01352 702320
Email: Robert.robins@flintshire.gov.uk