

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE**

DATE: **WEDNESDAY, 9 JULY 2014**

REPORT BY: **MEMBER ENGAGEMENT MANAGER**

SUBJECT: **FINAL REPORT FROM THE AUDITOR GENERAL
FOR WALES IMPROVEMENT STUDY: SCRUTINY IN
LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To apprise the Committee of the final report produced by the Auditor General for Wales arising out of the "Good Scrutiny? Good Question!" Improvement study of local government scrutiny in Wales.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 This issue was originally reported to the Committee at its meeting on the 24th of October 2012. As part of a national programme of Wales Audit Office improvement activity, our Overview & Scrutiny function took part in a self evaluation and a peer review process, working with Denbighshire and Wrexham Councils. The Flintshire Peer Learning Evaluation Team (PLET) undertook a peer review of Denbighshire County Council Overview & Scrutiny, whilst the Wrexham PLET visited Flintshire to undertake a similar review.

2.02 As advised by the Wales Audit Office, that the PLET should comprise both Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny Members and Officers, the Flintshire team was:-

Councillor Billy Mullin, Cabinet Member for Corporate Management
Councillor Richard Jones and Councillor Clive Carver (respectively the Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee at the inception of the project)
Councillor Dave Mackie
Robert Robins, Member Engagement Manager and
Margaret Parry-Jones, Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator (Team co-ordinator)

During the later stages of the project, Ceri Owen, Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator also became a member of the PLET.

The PLET members took part in a number of activities:-

- The completion of an extensive self assessment tool;
- A Workshop in Llandudno with representatives of the other 5 North Wales Authorities and the Wales Audit Office;

- The Flintshire PLET attended two Denbighshire Overview & Scrutiny Committees where they observed and provided feedback;
- Two Flintshire meetings (Environment and Lifelong Learning) were attended by the Wrexham PLET where the members observed and provided feedback;
- 4 members of the team attended the Regional Workshop held in Colwyn Bay on the 19th of April 2013 which gave the teams across North Wales an opportunity to feedback their findings and views, and share experiences, practice ideas and lessons learned with a view to further improving Scrutiny arrangements.

2.03 The culmination of the review was to have been the Conference in Cardiff on the 28th of November 2013 *Scrutiny in the spotlight; investing to maximise its impact*. At that Conference, Flintshire was represented by the Leader, Councillor Aaron Shotton and Councillor Dave Mackie together with Robert Robins, Margaret Parry-Jones and Ceri Owen from the Overview & Scrutiny team and Vicki Robarts the Performance Team Leader.

2.04 The intention had been that the final report would have been published to coincide with that Conference. However due to delays at the WAO, the final report was not published until the 29th of May 2014, six months afterwards. A copy of that report is available in Members Services. Copies of the WAO final report have been placed into each of the group rooms and personal copies can be provided to Members on request.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 The WAO report makes nine recommendations, as follows.

<p>Recommendation 1:</p> <p>Clarify the role of executive members and senior officers in contributing to scrutiny</p>	<p>FCC response:</p> <p>When we completed the self-evaluation, we were able to evidence that this does not require clarification. We have a protocol which covers attendance at O&S meetings and both Cabinet Members and the appropriate officers attend meeting as contributors whenever invited so to do.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2:</p> <p>Ensure that scrutiny members and specifically scrutiny chair, receive training and support to fully equip them with the skills to undertake effective scrutiny.</p>	<p>FCC response:</p> <p>We have provided regular O&S training sessions for Members, which includes Chairing skills as well as topic workshops to ensure that our Members are familiar with the details of issues under scrutiny. We also</p>

	support each Chair- they are advised at formal committee meetings by either one of the Overview & Scrutiny Facilitators or the Member Engagement Manager.
<p>Recommendation 3:</p> <p>Further develop scrutiny forward programming to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide a clear rationale for topic selection; • be more outcome focussed; • ensure that the method of scrutiny is best suited to the topic area and the outcome desired: and • align scrutiny programmes with the council's performance management, self-evaluation and improvement arrangements 	<p>FCC response:</p> <p>Our forward work planning already reflects the first three bullet points. We have recently changed how we report performance and improvement arrangements and this new approach is being monitored.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4:</p> <p>Ensure that scrutiny draws effectively on the work of audit, inspection and regulation and that its activities are complementary with the work of external review bodies</p>	<p>FCC response:</p> <p>We already use audit, inspection and regulation work as part of our approach. We have also initiated regular meetings between O&S chairs and Audit committee members.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5:</p> <p>Ensure that external review bodies take account of scrutiny work programmes and the outputs of scrutiny activity, where appropriate, in planning and delivering their work</p>	<p>FCC response:</p> <p>FCC O&S work programmes are published on our website and external regulators are welcome to discuss these with us.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6:</p> <p>Ensure that the impact of scrutiny is properly evaluated and acted upon to improve the function's effectiveness; including following up on proposed actions and</p>	<p>FCC response:</p> <p>Whilst formal evaluation of the impact of scrutiny has not been carried out (and the measurement thereof would be subjective), recommendations which have been made out of O&S</p>

examining outcomes	reviews are revisited periodically and where necessary re-examined. This is an area for development through the steering group of O&S Chairs and Vice-chairs.
Recommendation 7: Undertake regular self-evaluation of scrutiny utilising the 'outcomes and characteristics of effective local government overview and scrutiny' developed by the Wales Scrutiny Officers' Network	FCC response: The Constitution Committee has already agreed to overview & scrutiny self-evaluation, following an interim report on the study (16/10/13). At that time, the outcomes and characteristics had not been finalised. We will work with the O&S Chairs and vice chair steering group to develop the most effective O&S self-evaluation approach for Flintshire.
Recommendation 8: Implement scrutiny improvement action plans developed from the Wales Audit Office improvement study.	FCC response: An action plan has already been developed and now that the WAO have published their final report, a meeting of the steering group can be convened.
Recommendation 9: Adopt Participation Cymru's 10 Principles for Public Engagement in improving the way scrutiny engages with the public and stakeholders.	FCC response: The Principles for Public Engagement will inform the emerging FCC O&S Public Engagement Strategy which will be discussed with the steering group.

- 3.02** The WAO final report did not contain any surprises for Flintshire, as evinced from the responses which have been made to the recommendations set out in 3.01, above.
- 3.03** The most significant aspect of the WAO's approach has been through the shared learning journey, which has offered the opportunity to study at first hand how one of our peers (Denbighshire) carry out Overview & Scrutiny. Similarly, we have benefited from our colleagues from Wrexham observing at two of our meetings and then providing feedback.
- 3.04** It has also been beneficial to compare our approach to O&S with that of the other 21 Welsh councils: Flintshire has always had a commitment to Overview & Scrutiny which has been characterised by a willingness to put resources into its development. That, however, does not mean that we are

complacent and have always been keen to learn from our colleagues both in Wales and across the United Kingdom, through the work of the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) That the committee consider and comment on the WAO recommendations and the Flintshire responses to them (3.01, above);

(2) That the recommendations and responses be approved and commended to the Steering Group for implementation.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 None arising directly from this report

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 None arising directly from this report

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 None arising directly from this report

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 None arising directly from this report

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 None arising directly from this report

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 Publication of this report constitutes consultation

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 Publication of this report constitutes consultation

12.00 APPENDICES

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Wales Audit Office Report

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