

June 2005

scrutiny champions' network

In this edition:

- Northamptonshire: meeting most need
- Swindon: south west scrutiny network
- Birmingham - the role of members and of full council
- Thurrock and Shropshire—new guides to scrutiny
- CfPS: Parent Governor Induction Pack
- Latest Library Entries
- Scrutiny Map, 2nd Edition



June 2005

As many of you will already be aware, CfPS is holding a first “development day” for scrutiny officers on the 24th June, following immediately after our annual conference the day before. We have had a great response to the event, which is now sold-out, and have plans in place to take forward the Centre’s work in support of the scrutiny officer role in the future.

During the morning plenary at this event there will be an opportunity to discuss the “story so far” as regards scrutiny officers and to hear thoughts on future support from representatives of the ODPM. If you would like to discuss any issues in advance of the day, particularly if you are unable to attend, we have opened a discussion topic regarding these issues in our online forums and would be very interested to hear your thoughts. Visit us at www.cfps.org.uk/champions

On a more practical level, we continue to offer a free service where scrutiny officer positions can be advertised for free on our website. A number of authorities that have used this facility in the past have indicated to us that candidates have applied as a result of reading the CfPS website, so if you would like to advertise a new scrutiny position, please send details to: info@cfps.org.uk

CfPS, June 2005

The scrutiny champions network aims to develop a powerful and persuasive voice on behalf of scrutiny practitioners throughout the country.

If you would like to contribute an article, or have an idea for inclusion in a future edition of this bulletin, please forward to: info@cfps.org.uk

News in brief

CfPS annual conference 2005

This year’s annual conference is titled “Citizens, Scrutiny and Public Governance” and will focus on the role of non-executives in enhancing public accountability and improving public services.

The conference takes place on 23rd June 2005 in London and a full review of the event will feature in the next bulletin.

Policy papers

CfPS is publishing a series of policy papers over the coming months. The first, published in May 2005 was on the subject of effective public scrutiny in multi-level governance and was co-authored by Dr Jane Martin of CfPS and Dan Corry, formerly of the New Local Government Network.

A second paper is due to be published in July under the title “External scrutiny: the voice in the crowded room”, written by Mark Sandford of the Constitution Unit at University College London.

All CfPS publications can be found at: www.cfps.org.uk/publications

Shared Intelligence: redefining scrutiny

A group of overview scrutiny managers have jointly published “Redefining Scrutiny” in which they counter scrutiny’s critics arguing instead that it is a significant catalyst for change.

Their report uses examples from their own experiences in the eight London boroughs where they work. In it they show that five years since being established, overview and scrutiny is being used by councils to improve the health of local democracy and modernise council culture.

A copy of the full report is available from: www.cfps.org.uk/publications

Northamptonshire: meeting most need

Northamptonshire County Council's Overview Committee commissioned a methodology to provide a robust picture of deprivation within the County.

This complemented the Council's move towards a stronger locality planning and impact approach to service delivery, through the ability to

- Determine priorities for action and intervention
- Make decisions on targeting particular geographical areas or particular types of deprivation
- Take advantage of government policy opportunities quickly through having settled systems for identifying need
- Assess over time the impact of intervention on targeted areas
- Determine how council services should be delivered in priority areas

Unlike most national indices, the NOMADS (Northamptonshire Methodology for Assessing Deprivation & Sustainability) methodology has been developed to offer a high degree of flexibility in that data sets can be drawn from a range of sources and from different spatial frameworks.

The methodology has been developed, drawing on detailed discussions with partners and officers and members of the county council, to generate a list of deprivation indicators and data sets to go with them. It has been designed to provide a Northamptonshire perspective on national deprivation. By using data recorded at no larger a scale than the administrative ward, and relating those data to a county rather than national average, it is possible to highlight both the spatial variations in deprivations within the county and

those pockets of higher deprivation relative to others.

Northamptonshire's County Council has been monitoring the methodology, from the commissioning stage through to four pilot schemes, regularly receiving reports on its progress. The pilot schemes examined how to

locate non-users of the council's Trading Standards service; contributed to the production of an area profile for Kettering Borough Council, and examined links between educational achievement and social disadvantage.

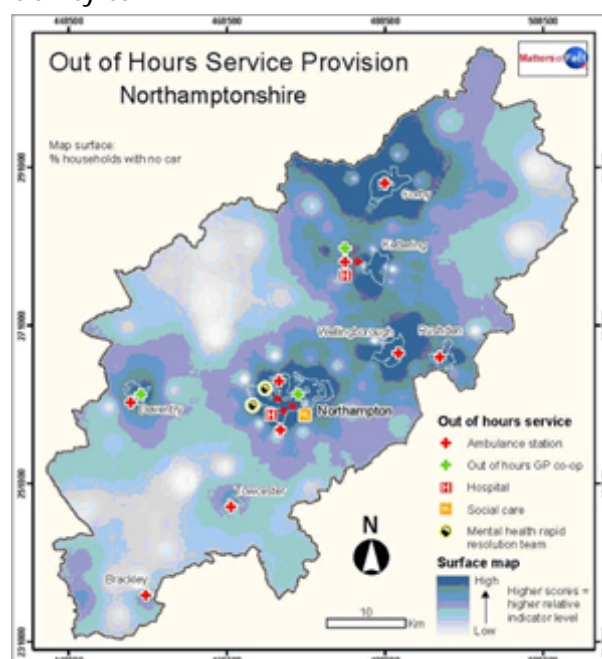
The remaining pilot scheme is using maps previously produced for a Health Scrutiny project illustrating areas of deprivation compared to sites of health service provision

(pictured). By adding bus stops, it has been possible to see how the Local Transport Plan should be

altered to accommodate access to health service provision.

The neighbourhood renewal project has shown that the methodology cannot provide a definitive map of deprivation in the county. What is being offered is a flexible tool which can be used to inform officers and members of spatial variations in well-being in the county and how these might be better understood.

The culmination of the Overview Committee's work on the Determining Deprivation methodology is that Cabinet has approved the methodology as a tool for the Council's strategic and budget planning for future years.



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Swindon: south west overview and scrutiny network

On the 16th May Officers from across the South West attended the inaugural meeting of the South West Overview and Scrutiny Network at Swindon Borough Council, the meeting proved to be highly successful and led to the endorsement of a fully established Overview and Scrutiny Network for the region.

The purpose of the Network is to exchange information and best practice, develop new approaches to Overview and Scrutiny issues, develop joint working arrangements where possible especially training events and to provide organisations with an opportunity to reach scrutineers across the region via the network.

At the event representatives from 30 different Local Authorities ranging from Deputy Chief Executives to Scrutiny Officers to Policy and Performance Officers discussed developing and making the most of the Overview and Scrutiny function with Dr Jane Martin - Executive Director of the Centre for Public Scrutiny, Stephen Fletcher - Regional Associate of the Improvement and Development Agency and Howard Boots- Head of Scrutiny at Tameside Metropolitan Council and co-founder of the North West Overview and Scrutiny Network. The event was Chaired by Gavin Jones, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Cultural Change of Swindon Borough Council who described the event as "an incredibly useful opportunity to see how different Local Authorities were grappling with how to make Overview and Scrutiny effective and how best to support elected Members."

Considering the short lead time for the event it was exceptionally well attended, a majority of those authorities in the South West who were unable to send a representative on the day have registered their interest at being involved with the Network in the future. Jodie Townsend, Overview and Scrutiny Officer at Swindon Borough Council and co-founder of the network stated "we felt it was important that scrutineers in the region came together to solve common problems that we are all facing through Overview and Scrutiny and to develop innovative approaches to taking the



Picture of Stephen Fletcher, Gavin Jones (Deputy Chief Executive, Swindon Borough Council), Dr Jane Martin, Howard Boots, Stephen Taylor (Director of Law and Corporate Governance, Swindon Borough Council), Claire Yeates (Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Swindon Borough Council), David Bowater (South West LGA) at the event

process forward, the network will allow us to do this whilst providing a combined stronger scrutiny voice for the region." The network came about when Swindon Borough Council approached the South West LGA with the idea.

The next meeting of the Network will take place on November 14th at Dorset County Council, if you would like any further information on the Network then please contact Jodie Townsend at Swindon Borough Council.

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CfPS: Scrutiny Map, 2nd Edition

'The Scrutiny Map', a second edition of a 2003 publication of the same name, charts the range and reach of scrutiny bodies across the public sector, outlining current mechanisms for scrutiny and potential future developments at all tiers of government (local, regional, devolved and central) and within selected policy areas (criminal justice, education, health and social care, housing and regeneration, public utilities and transport.)

According to Dr Tony Wright MP, Chair of CfPS, who will launch the publication at the Centre's annual conference on 23rd June, appropriate public scrutiny is the key to regaining public trust and improving public services:

"Scrutiny creates a dialogue between the public and politicians, ensures proper accountability of powerful executives and secures quality public services designed with users and citizens in mind. Public trust in government and the public services will only be recovered through effective public scrutiny."

The publication categorises bodies according to the nature of their work:

- *Specialist scrutiny bodies*: typically 'professional' scrutineers in organisations that have a clearly defined remit with statutory functions and powers to evaluate and inspect public sector performance in a particular area. Examples include inspectorates like Ofsted and the Audit Commission.
- *Lay scrutiny bodies*: which may comprise elected representatives (for example on local government overview & scrutiny committees) or volunteers appointed to represent the wider community (such as rail passenger committees), in order to represent the broader public interest in keeping an executive body or policy area under review.
- *Hybrid bodies*: which combine a scrutiny role with executive or other functions, such as school governing bodies, police authorities or public sector Ombudsmen



The publication highlights recent developments in the public scrutiny landscape, including:

- moves towards increased scrutiny at the local level, as well as initiatives designed to encourage greater public involvement in scrutiny: i.e. via foundation trust boards of governors, courts boards and patient and public involvement forums
- trends towards greater flexibility and coordination of inspection mechanisms in order to reduce burdens on service providers and 'join up' mechanisms within and across policy areas

The Scrutiny Map is available to purchase from Thursday 23rd June 2005, priced £25. To order visit www.cfps.org.uk/publications or call EC Group on 020 8867 3298.



Birmingham: the role of members and the role of full council

From the introduction...

The Local Government Act 2000 radically changed the nature of local government by introducing the system of a powerful executive, of no more than 10 elected members, having its own statutory remit and taking the majority of decisions. Whereas the full council meeting was previously the ultimate decision maker, this is no longer the case and full council now has relatively few decision making powers. Birmingham City Council was an early adopter of some of the measures in the Act and has been operating full executive arrangements since December 2001.

Over the last two years, research evidence has emerged which shows that across the country non-executive councillors feel relatively disengaged from the new system. Similarly, many authorities have reported a struggle to find a role for the full Council. Locally, there is

a perception that not all Members feel properly informed about decisions and matters affecting their ward and important developments in the city as a whole. This has been highlighted in several Overview and Scrutiny reports, along with its complement – that Members often hold important information about needs, conditions and service performance in their wards which it is felt is not always used constructively by the officer body. More generally, the skills and experience of backbench Members may not be being utilised to the benefit of the City Council.

For both national and local reasons, this appeared to be an appropriate time, therefore, to look into the current arrangements. We wished to assess how well these are supporting the roles of elected Members, particularly in effective representation of constituents' views.

The two key questions we set out to answer were:

- Do elected Members consider that there are ways in which, both individually and collectively in a meeting of the full City Council, they could play a more effective role in Birmingham's local democracy?
- What improvements in the flow of

information would be of particular benefit to Members?


We looked at national research and guidance on both the role of full council meetings, including innovative practice elsewhere, and on support services for Members. The latter includes the full range of support including accommodation, information and communications technology, allowances and training. Many authorities, it appears, are struggling to find a role for the full council meeting. Some authorities have experimented with trying to involve the public directly in the meeting; others have attempted to foster discussion and deliberation rather than debate. As far as Members' roles are concerned, the research evidence is clear that, of all the groups involved in local government, non-executive councillors are the most dissatisfied with the new arrangements.

Specific inquiries were made about practice in the other Core Cities. There are some interesting differences between them; some have a successful public question time at full council, whilst another has abandoned that. The most striking practice concerned the provision of a wide range of ward-based information to Members.

This all provided benchmarks against which we could look at our own practice in Birmingham City Council. We considered the business of the full Council meeting over the last five years, paying particular attention to debates and decisions on the Policy Framework – the setting of which is potentially a major power remaining to the full Council.

We considered it to be very important that all Members had an opportunity to put forward constructive suggestions for improvement, and commissioned MORI to undertake a short exercise in which twenty-two Members took part. MORI found a degree of disengagement among some councillors because of the nature of the non-executive role under the present arrangements, and a need to empower Members to undertake their role as effectively as possible.

It is important to respond to these and to other issues raised by Members through MORI. Whilst our



report cannot be a full response, we have given particular weight to this evidence.

We are quite clear about our fundamental conclusion. It is imperative that the executive arrangements within Birmingham City Council are rebalanced so that there is some e-empowerment of ordinary Members. What flexibility there is within the 2000 Act must be employed so that an efficient and effective Executive of 10 can more constructively co-exist with a proactive, properly representative body of 120.

The recommendations in our report represent a first step. We start with a set of recommendations for initial changes to the full Council meeting. Members of the City Council should have more opportunity to bring the attention of the Council to topical issues of importance to them. The Council should also become a forum in which postholders – including Cabinet Members, Regulatory Chairpersons, the Chair of the Co-ordinating O&S Committee, and Lead Members on Joint Authorities – account for their past actions and discuss forthcoming issues. We also wish to see the City Council setting a somewhat greater and tighter Policy Framework within which the Executive takes its decisions. To facilitate these changes, we have suggested that a programme of Council meetings be set as far as possible at the start of the municipal year, and that the maximum length of each meeting be extended slightly.

In the course of the review the issue of support to District and Ward work – in particular to the new District Committees – emerged as a real matter of concern to Members. The District and Ward roles of Members are extremely important. It is clear Council policy that they are supported and strengthened. Through the forthcoming review required by the Council Plan 2005+ there is an immediate opportunity to set out clear standards for support and how best to provide that. It is essential that this opportunity be taken.

We consider that the O&S Committees should support the full City Council in the task of enhancing the accountability of Cabinet Members.

We therefore recommend that Cabinet Members attend the relevant O&S Committee to give a similar report to that for Council, only at six month's distance from the Council report. We are also suggesting somewhat enhancing the call in process.

On the whole the package of support provided to Members is good compared to the norm. We are suggesting some extra flexibility to allow individual requirements to be better met. The programme of induction training has been well received by Members, but there is a need for a more co-ordinated subsequent development programme. The major area for improvement is to provide easier access to ward and district-specific information.

We intend to continue our work to look at other aspects of the constitutional arrangements and see what more can be done to empower non-executive Members. In the meantime we are recommending these changes now, so that, if the Council agrees, they can be implemented at the start of the new municipal year.

A copy of the full report is available from:
<http://tinyurl.com/87mtz>

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CfPS: parent governor representative induction pack

The Centre for Public Scrutiny & The Department for Education & Skills have produced an induction pack to help new PGRs understand their role and the practical issues associated with being a volunteer 'citizen governor'.

The pack emphasises relationship building, especially through the innovative introduction of local authority mentors to help develop a shared understanding of the PGR role and how to be an effective representative.

The induction pack includes:

Understanding Your Role:

including background information on the scrutiny function, an outline of expected interaction between PGRs and the local authority, suggestions for further support to PGRs

The Effective PGR:

from Principles to Practice: provides advice on the four principles of effective scrutiny, how to apply them in a scrutiny committee environment and what skills and support are required. Includes practical examples of effective scrutiny of educational matters, drawn from the CfPS library of scrutiny reviews

Key Contacts:

a list of organisations involved in decision-making and scrutiny within education, from the Advisory Centre for Education to OFSTED, and a facility for PGRs to record key contacts within their own authority

Year Planner:

a journal facility for PGRs to record scrutiny committee activities

Induction Review and Annual Review checklists:

provided to ensure a PGR has received thorough induction and guidance from a local authority mentor and their continued development and support is considered regularly

The Centre for Public Scrutiny's Executive Director, Dr Jane Martin, commented:

"PGRs have an important and interesting role in effectively representing the parent voice in discussion and debate on local educational



matters. The complexity of the task should not be underestimated, especially as PGRs are busy people carrying out this role in a voluntary capacity and may be new to a local government or committee environment.

"The induction pack will be a useful practical resource and help PGRs develop constructive working relationships with committee colleagues and other local authority representatives with responsibility for educational matters. This is an important step towards joining up all areas of education provision and ensuring education services are designed with local service users in mind."

The induction pack was distributed to all PGRs in England directly in June 2005. An accompanying pack providing the same information with additional guidance notes for mentors has been sent to each local authority.

Scrutiny Guides: two new examples

Two new guides to overview and scrutiny have been added recently to the “scrutiny map” area of the CfPS website.

Shropshire County Council has produced four separate guides to for new members elected in 2005. These are:

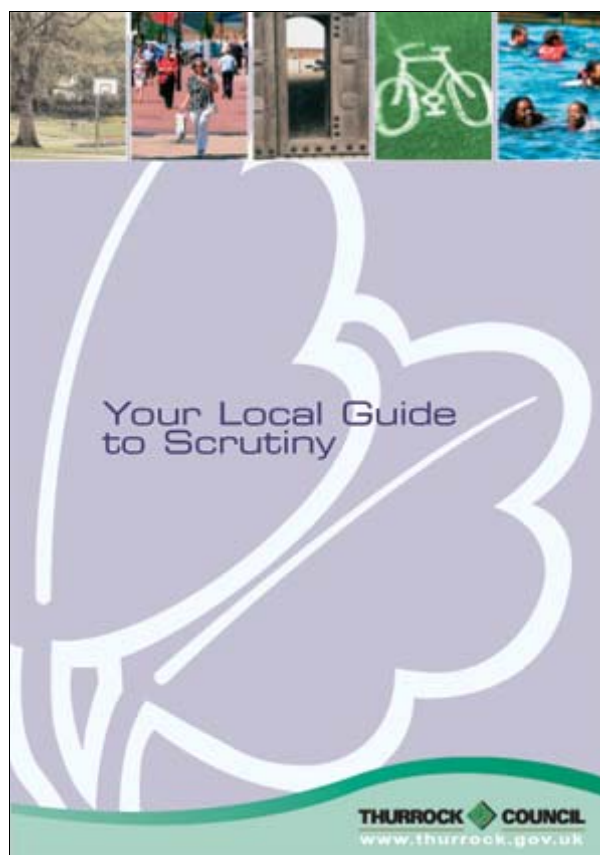
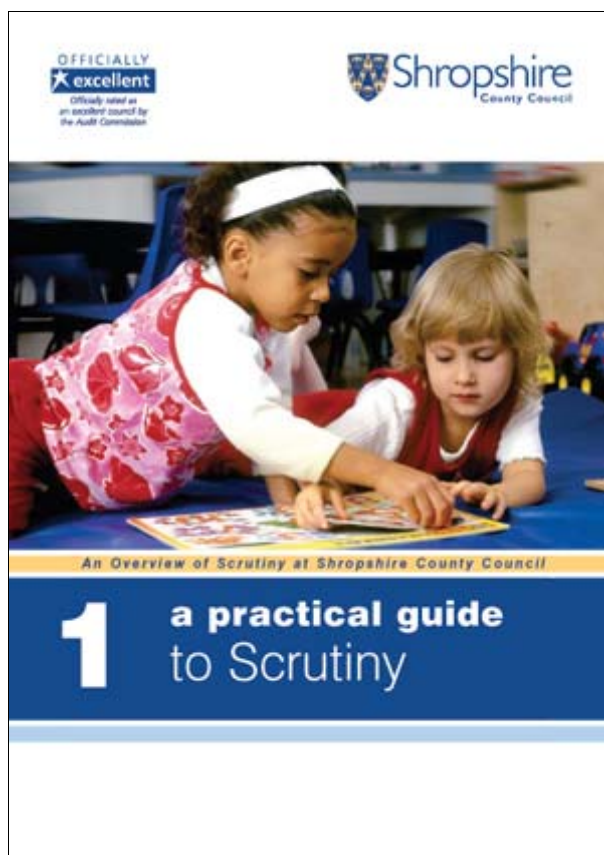
- **Guide 1**— an overview of scrutiny at Shropshire County Council
- **Guide 2**— setting the work programme
- **Guide 3**— setting the terms of reference of scrutiny reviews and undertaking scrutiny work
- **Guide 4**— making and monitoring recommendations

A combined copy of all four guides is available from our website at <http://tinyurl.com/dkngc>

Thurrock Council, a unitary authority, has updated it's previous toolkit for 2005. This revised edition gives practical advice on:

- how overview and scrutiny operates
- what call-in is
- what cannot be called-in
- making a request for a scrutiny review
- making a submission to a scrutiny panel

A copy of the toolkit, including the sample request forms, is available to download from our website at <http://tinyurl.com/b6xhz>



There are now 10 handbooks available in total and we would welcome any more additions. If you would like to get in touch with use regarding your guide to scrutiny, please email info@cfps.org.uk



Library of scrutiny reviews: new entries

Decision making process London Borough of Haringey

An examination of the way in which elected Members make decisions and how those decisions are informed and carried through.

Recommendations included: enhancement of the forward plan; a decision tracking system to update on the implementation of executive decisions; and improvements to committee agendas and minutes of meetings.

Use of consultants Worcestershire County Council

The Specific Issues Scrutiny Panel investigated the use of consultants, examining how and why they are used and how much is spent engaging them.

Members found that policies and practices relating to the decision to use consultants varied significantly and recommended that a Council-wide policy be developed to rectify the situation.

Who's afraid of crime Durham County Council

This project examined why levels of fear are so high and what can be done to reduce fear. Evidence was taken from the Police, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, the Courts, the Home Office and many other agencies involved in tackling crime.

The report also considers the contrasts between rural and urban areas of County Durham.

The role of the chair of the council Bolsover District Council

The Group saw its objectives as

- evaluating the role and functions of the Chair in light of the new governance
- auditing functions attended during the civic year,
- evaluating the significance and value of the Civic Dinner and the Civic Service and
- consider any implication of the Equality Policy.

Budget process London Borough of Camden

The budget scrutiny panel looked at how Camden Council currently sets its budgets, how flexible its current budget setting and planning framework is and what alternatives exist.

The panel made recommendations to help ensure that budget setting can be more policy-led, as well identifying ways to make residents and businesses more involved in the budget setting process.

The impact of housing conditions on health Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

This review sought to inform the development of Stockport's Housing Strategy so that it tackles public health issues in a systematic way.

The review presented an opportunity to ask what the current public health concerns are in relation to housing, how they are manifested in Stockport, what measures are in place to deal with them and what more could be done in future.

You can view over 1,000 other entries in the library at www.cfps.org.uk/reviews