

PUBLIC

MINUTES of a meeting of the **IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE** held at County Hall, Matlock on 1 September 2014.

P R E S E N T

Councillor C R Moesby (In the Chair)

Councillors S A Bambrick, S Freeborn (substitute), Mrs K D Lauro, B Lewis, S A Spencer and Mrs M Stockdale.

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs D Charles and K P Morgan.

11/14 **MINUTES** **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7 July 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12/14 **MINUTES OF IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETINGS** **RESOLVED** (1) to receive the Minutes of the last round of meetings of the Improvement and Scrutiny Committees; and (2) that a suggestion by Councillor Lewis to review the effectiveness of Healthwatch Derbyshire be considered by the Management Committee at its next meeting following the receipt of a review suggestion form.

13/14 **VISIT TO PARLIAMENTARY SELECT COMMITTEE**
A report was presented on the visit undertaken by Members to the Parliamentary Select Committee on 30 June 2014.

Following the visit, Members and Officers contributed to ensure that outcomes from the day could be used to improve our own scrutiny methods. These were:-

- An understanding of the issues that Scrutiny will be facing in the future, and the way in which Scrutiny needs to be directed in the next few years of change, was apparent. The tone of the day's visit was about integration, localisation and how local authorities should look outside of their own services and co-operate in some cases with cross cutting joint reviews with other public services and organisations and members of the public. Questions were aimed around "should bodies just scrutinise their own services or be more involved and outward looking".
- The more formal room setting arrangement which Select Committees adopt could have its uses, particularly when interviewing witnesses in a review. It would stamp authority on proceedings and facilitate a more interrogatory role for the Committee members.

- It was apparent that the Committee should be well briefed and have knowledge of the subject under scrutiny in order to ask the questions that will provide the answers being sought.
- Select Committee involvement into planning systems was most interesting, as was the practice of taking evidence under oath, a power that select committees use very sparingly.
- The style of questioning by the Select Committees was more brisk than our Scrutiny Committees and our approach to questioning should be more direct and forthright than at present.
- Select Committee focus is on “real life impact” of legislation. There was a clear benefit of a strong Chair – keeping questions short and on task and giving advanced notice of the order in which Members would have the opportunity to ask questions. Observation was made of Select Committee Members asking robust and persistent questions when the witness did not answer the question and it was also noted that there is a fine line between being robust and “giving a witness a grilling” when the questioner does not agree, ideologically, with the response given.
- The visit helped to “join up the dots” about the interactions and communications between different political entities and the route that emerging policies take prior to new legislation impacting on communities and the services that the Council delivered.
- The organisation of the whole Parliament machine was impressive. Everyone had to attend on time, timetabling was rigorous and people knew where they needed to be.
- It was clear from the Select Committees that a lot of work goes into preparing questions and building up knowledge of the issues being raised. A strong Chair helped, keeping questions short and to the point.
- There did seem to be scope for DCC Scrutiny to input into the work of Select Committees, if there were defined links. Select Committees tended to scrutinise agencies, NGOs, QUANGOs. Although they did also question ‘voices of the consumer’, this tended to be from interest groups who represent ‘the consumer’.
- The room layout for questioning “witnesses” worked well as it allows them to see and speak to all the Committee Members from their vantage point. Although the political parties did group together at the Select Committee, they sat collectively facing the “witness”. Identification of participants in a meeting, through the use of name plates was useful and could easily be adopted at DCC Scrutiny meetings, even when we just have “in-house” officers coming to make presentations.
- The Select Committees were fortunate in that they were not as close to their

“witnesses” as our Scrutiny Members are when looking at internal services. There is a skill to challenging officers in being reasonable and courteous – but at the same time demanding information and questioning the way they provide services. This is an area where further training for Scrutiny members may be useful.

- Evidence was often taken by Select Committees in written form, as well as by “witnesses” sitting before the Committee. Site visits and gaining first-hand experience of services were also frequently used.

RESOLVED to note the outcome of the visit and agree to the introduction of new processes in Derbyshire where appropriate to reflect lessons learned during the visit.

14/14 **PROGRESS ON REVIEWS** **RESOLVED** to note progress on the various reviews being undertaken by the Improvement and Scrutiny Committees.

15/14 **UPDATED IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY LEAFLET**
RESOLVED that the updated Improvement and Scrutiny leaflet be agreed for wide circulation.

16/14 **EAST MIDLANDS SCRUTINY NETWORK** **RESOLVED** to receive the report of the Chair on the discussions that had taken place at a recent meeting of the East Midlands Scrutiny Network and to review the continued attendance at meetings following the meeting of the Network to be held in September 2014.

17/14 **CfPS ANNUAL REVIEW** **RESOLVED** to receive the Centre for Public Scrutiny’s 2013/14 Annual Review report.