

**DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

1 SEPTEMBER 2014

**IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY VISIT TO PARLIAMENTARY SELECT
COMMITTEES – JUNE 2014**

1. Purpose of the Report

To inform the Management Committee of the outcomes of the visit to Westminster on 30 June 2014 by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs.

2. Information

On 30 June 2014 the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Council's four Improvement and Scrutiny Committees, accompanied by the I & S Officers, visited Westminster to observe Select Committees, their roles and activities. The day afforded the opportunity to sit in on two select Committee sessions and also to meet with a Select Committee Chair and Support Staff.

The full itinerary for the day is appended to this report.

Members should note that, in meeting the Select Committee support officers, a mutual desire to explore potential joint working areas – between Parliamentary Select Committees and local Scrutiny Committees was discussed. Members from the DCC I & S Committees expressed a willingness to participate or contribute to future Select Committee business, where appropriate.

Following the visit, Members and Officers from DCC Improvement and Scrutiny contributed to this report to ensure that outcomes from the day could be used to improve our own scrutiny methods. These are listed below;

- 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. We saw at first hand the 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 delivers.
- The organisation of the whole parliament machine was impressive. Everyone has to attend on time, timetabling is rigorous and people know where they need to be.

- It is 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 helps, keeping questions short and to the point.
- There does seem to be scope for DCC Scrutiny to input into the work of Select Committees, if there are defined links. Select Committees tend to scrutinise agencies, NGO's, QUANGO's. Although they do also question 'voices of the consumer', this tends to be from interest groups who represent 'the consumer'.
- The room layout for questioning "witnesses" does work 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 do sit collectively facing the "witness". This approach was adopted by the DCC I & S Health Committee when it was dedicated to Heanor Hospital and the Health representatives were easily able to identify who were the Committee Members and who were the other "witnesses" Identification of participants in a meeting, through the use of name plates is 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 are fortunate in that they are 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 is 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 are also frequently used..

3. Considerations

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: financial, legal, prevention of crime and disorder, equality of opportunity, human rights, personnel, environmental, health, property and transport.

4. Key Decision – No

5. Call-in

Is it required that call-in be waived in respect of the decisions proposed in the report? – No

6. Background Papers

None

7. RECOMMENDATION

That the Improvement & Scrutiny Management Committee note the outcomes of the visit to Westminster.

**CLIVE MOESBY
CHAIR OF IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL VISIT

30th June 2014 Agenda

SCHEDULE

11am - Arrival at Portcullis House to go through security and be met by Clare Mullin Outreach Officer for the Midlands.

Up to **Room S** for arranged meetings:

11:30am - Introduction to Select Committees with Clare Mullin and Sarah Coe - Second Clerk of the Communities and Local Government Committee. Joined by Glenn McKee Clerk of the Communities and Local Government Committee to discuss links with Local Authority scrutiny

12:30pm - Lunch with an opportunity to walk over to the Palace during this lunch break

1:30pm - Meeting Clive Betts MP Chair of CLG Committee **Room S**, Portcullis House

2:30pm - Watch business in House of Lords

3:15pm - Public Accounts Committee Subject: Assurance to Parliament on funding for local authorities. Witness: Sir Bob Kerslake, Permanent Secretary, Department for Communities and Local Government - **Room 15**, Palace of Westminster

4:40pm - Meeting with local MPS **Room U** Portcullis House

5.00pm - Watch business in House of Commons

5:30pm - Depart