

## Local Authorities with Overview and Scrutiny Recognition

“In the context of the changing political and financial landscape, the case for effective public scrutiny remains as strong as ever and the role of the critical friend has never been more vital than in these critical times. Whether scrutineers are helping to tackle the recession, influencing priorities and resource allocation or trying to improve front-line services scrutiny can be a powerful vehicle for change.”

Tim Gilling- Executive Director for Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS)

### **CfPS Awards (2012)**

#### Gloucestershire County Council: Impact through Scrutiny

The Environment Agency (EA) published its proposed strategy for managing flood risk on the Severn Estuary which caused a huge concern among communities bordering the estuary in 2011. The scrutiny process by Gloucestershire County Council brought stakeholders together to present their views and allowed non-executives to have a fresh independent look at the issue. Usually a task-limited group would have been set up but with so many interested groups the Council created a one day scrutiny commission to respond to local concerns. The work involved town, parish and district councils, the EA, and a range of external bodies. The County Council demonstrated a strong engagement with the public advising communities on what measures to undertake as well as assessing long term impacts of EA's proposals.

#### Brighton and Hove City Council: Innovation

Bright and Hove City Council cooled down an overheated issue of gypsy and traveller sites through significant engagement with both the public and the media about the portrayal of travellers and traveller issues. The Traveller Scrutiny Panel was led by an independent academic expert and enhanced cross-party cooperation. The Council focused on national practice and provided a stronger evidence base for actions. The Council provided immediate service improvements to the controversial issue whilst it developed a long term and permanent plan of a new traveller site.

#### London Borough of Redbridge: Involving Communities (EFDC Recommended)

The Borough Council carried out a joined up approach to end of life care undertaking consultancy with hospices, hospitals and end of life carers. The Council ensured education and training on end of life care is provided to care home staff which is now being implemented across other NHS bodies who are working with Redbridge Borough Council. The Council organised an end of life care event which brought a number of stakeholders together to discuss and share ideas between government authorities, the public, media and private sector.

#### Cardiff Council: Raising the Profile

Cardiff Council increased the profile for scrutiny in particular to members of the general public by holding a major inquiry into Cardiff's night-time economy. A market plan using internet and social media, an online questionnaire, radio debates, direct marketing and close press liaison resulted in almost 300 public responses. The scrutiny project increased emphasis in policy quality and raised the profile of scrutiny.

### Bassetlaw District Council : Transforming Services

The District Council's review to investigate plans for future service delivery created a more pro-active 'marketing' approach of hospital services and ensured more clarity in communication between the local authority and the public. For example, the Council followed a media storm about the future of services at the hospital, and led to particularly positive outcomes on communication from the Trust, and on the future consultation arrangements by Clinical Commissioning Groups. Councillors were also keen to explore the facts about plans, and to carry out the review in a timely way. Generally, a commitment to far more effective communication and dialogue with the local community over current, and future plans for service changes.

### City of Bradford Council: Working Together

Bradford Council demonstrated a strong sense of partnership and cooperation with external organisations such as the Healthy Weight and the Healthy Living Board. The partnership explored and tackled issues relating to poverty, health and inequalities by providing additional training for local people, conducting formal joint meetings between external bodies to maintain momentum on delivering promises and rolled out education programmes within local schools.

### **CfPS Awards (2011)**

#### Brighton and Hove City Council: Innovation

The Council's Scrutiny Panel reviewed the degree of preparedness for extreme weather which can be associated with climate change. The Council developed strong relationships with the City's two universities with academics frequently giving advice. Steps were taken even further by inviting an academic to be an independent Chair of the Panel. Scrutiny in Brighton and Hove has had a direct influence on local authority strategies with better partnership on energy issues.

#### City and County of Swansea: Team of the Year

The Child and Family Services Overview and Scrutiny Board was set up by the Council to respond to serious failing in child and family services. The team has provided a high level of critical friend challenge leading to service improvements and changes in the way scrutiny is done across the Council. The Board developed effective cross party working, and removed the 'intervention' order which improved services for families and children.

#### Knowsley MBC Benefits Administration: Value for Money

The review by Knowsley MBC Benefits Administration showed non-executives influencing the use of resource, generating significant savings and improving services for customers. The review assessed the way in which current application/assessment process for benefits could be streamlined. The Benefits Administration set up a single integrated team between three service areas and has also simplified the bureaucracy involved in form filling for local people.

## **CfPS Awards (2010)**

### **Hertfordshire County Council: Overall Impact Award**

Hertfordshire County Council have streamlined their Overview and Scrutiny Committees down to two in order to respond to the cut in resources. The Council has adopted innovative ways of doing scrutiny for example holding 1 or 2 whole day meetings to gather evidence and produce short reports based on clear objectives and robust and achievable recommendations. Budget scrutiny has changed from a formal meeting to a 'scrutiny cafe' approach which has involved more people and proven to be more effective to ensure fluid communication between the Council and the public.

### **Warrington Borough Council: Added Value Award**

Warrington Borough Council's scrutiny added value to an often forgotten public service, the cemetery. Warrington embarked on an ambitious project to raise standards and enable the bereaved to bury their loved ones with dignity and respect. The Council regularly met with citizens to listen to their comments and views on such a sensitive subject. The Council managed to secure over £1million from a variation of sources including savings from Members to develop a new cemetery site for the local people.

### **London Borough of Enfield: Community Influence Award**

The London Borough of Enfield has worked tirelessly to develop a more positive relationship with its young people and has secured strong links between the young people of Enfield and the scrutiny process. The London Borough of Enfield realised the need to understand issues from the perspective of both service providers and young people to develop a more engaging strategy. The review helped to break down preconceptions on all sides.

### **Cheshire West and Chester Council: Innovation Award**

Cheshire West and Chester are adopting a fun way of doing scrutiny working informally with young people, councillors and officers to enhance the lives and future prospects of children in care of the Council. For example, a series of fun activities included trips to the zoo, and informal hearings and questions between young people and executive members. The children are still working hard with the Council and regularly are involved in the scrutiny process to create a positive attitude.

### **London Borough of Hounslow: Joint Working Award**

A scrutiny review into Speech and Language Commissioning by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel has evolved into an area wide commissioning pathfinder scheme. The piece of work shows that scrutiny is capable of providing redress to citizens for their concerns and can lead to changes in the way services are delivered and decisions made. The London Borough of Hounslow has worked hard with NHS providers, schools, academics, parents and children with special needs. The London Borough of Hounslow embodied the meaning of scrutiny as transparent and accountable.

### **Birmingham City Council: Raising the Profile**

Scrutiny at Birmingham City Council has had an immediate and high-profile impact in helping the Council tackle deep-rooted problems of social care. The Council undertook a major scale of press coverage which was described by judges as “absolutely striking”. For example, interviews were conducted with Sky News, Channel 4 and the Press Association as well as articles in every national newspaper. The Council undertook the role of a truly independent critical friend.

### **CfPS Awards (2009)**

#### **Birmingham City Council: Community Engagement through Scrutiny Award**

Birmingham City Council review of Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) emphasised the importance of local community and young persons involvement in overview and scrutiny. The central involvement of young people in the planning and delivery of this piece of work was a key factor that made significant contribution to the project. Consequently, the project brought the community, young people and the Council together enabling a strong dialogue and debate on SRE.

#### **Gloucestershire County Council: Chair Award**

Chairman Cllr Gravells of the Heath Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Great Western Ambulance Joint Health Scrutiny Committee has an inclusive approach to scrutiny which has delivered a strong sense of accountability in sensitive and sometimes controversial scenarios. Chairman Cllr Gravells is respected for his diplomacy and commitment to principles of good scrutiny and for fostering effective partnerships between the Council and external bodies. Chairman Cllr Gravells also increased transparency of overview and scrutiny by maintaining a good relationship with the media.

#### **Harrow London Borough Council: Finance Scrutiny Award**

The joint piece of work undertaken with members from Harrow’s voluntary and Community Sector forum carried out a review of the Council’s relationship with the voluntary sector. It aimed to link work undertaken on financial issues with a wider study of engagement with the sector across the board. The work demonstrated a sense of realism, and used resources efficiently to provide the best value for money. The partnership element of this piece of work which involved discussion of what were delicate issues around funding were a particular strength.

#### **Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils: Team of the Year Award**

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils worked together to develop strong and efficient Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Both Councils worked hard to create a joint scrutiny team that sought to deliver and focus on the CfPS principles through team meetings to share best practice principles, joint training sessions, working on joint reviews across both authorities and a number of ‘Big Ideas’ days. Both Councils demonstrated a strong approach to member development and commitment from members shown by high attendance rates as well as dedication to maximise resources available by working together.

#### **South Cambridgeshire District Council: Best use of Scrutiny Resources Award**

South Cambridgeshire District Council illustrates how a small district council, on a limited budget and support from only one scrutiny officer can influence strategic

development in their area. The Council provided an opportunity for the public and local residents to become directly involved in the review process. There was also good evidence of partnerships with the parish councils and residents association as well as good practice in setting up a cross-party task and finish group. The Council displayed a strong evidence through recommendations that have shaped and changed policy and practice.

### **Scrutiny within London**

#### **Camden London Borough Council**

The Council constitutes of a Joint Chairs Scrutiny Committee which is comprised of five scrutiny committees, with the Chair being appointed by the Committee. The Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council will attend each meeting of the Committee to discuss issues arising from the Leader's Annual Statement to the Council. Camden London Borough Council regularly reviews and scrutinises the impact of the Council's own services as well as its existing partnerships.

Source: Centre for Public Scrutiny: <http://www.cfps.org.uk/>