

Telford and Wrekin Scrutiny Management Board Response to LGA Consultation on Sector Led Improvement

Sector-led improvement is the approach to improvement put in place by local authorities (including Fire and Rescue Authorities) and the Local Government Association (LGA) following the abolition of the previous national performance framework. It is based on the fundamental principles that councils are responsible for their own performance and are accountable for it locally (not nationally), and that the role of the LGA is to support the sector.

The LGA held a consultation 'Taking Stock – Where Next with Sector Led Improvement' from January until 13th March. A draft response to the consultation was circulated to Scrutiny Management Board Members for comment and the final comments agreed by the Chair of Scrutiny Management Board for submission by the deadline.

Q1 Given the current and future challenges facing the sector, are the principles on which the sector-led improvement is based still the right ones?

Yes, they are generally relevant, but I suggest some changes

Q2 If you answered no or suggested changes, what would you suggest as an alternatives/ additions?

A greater recognition of the role of local government scrutiny both as part of the democratic accountability and a mechanism to improve services.

Q3 How should the increasing role that council's play in working with other parts of the public sector on a place based approach be reflected in the sector led improvement?

Statutory arrangements already exist for scrutiny of NHS commissioners and providers, CDRP and flood water management authorities. In Telford and Wrekin Scrutiny Committees have developed very positive relationships with organisations not covered by scrutiny legislation including Registered Social Landlords, Police, schools, FE colleges, Probation, CPS and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board Chair. It would be beneficial to build on these relationships and promote the benefits of these and other organisations participating in Local Government Scrutiny.

Q4 Is there more that all councils should do to strengthen local accountability in the areas? If so what?

It would be beneficial to build on the initial research carried out by the Centre for Public Scrutiny on the political leadership and support arrangements that promote good Scrutiny.

Q5. Do council's or the LGA need to do any more to ensure that local people and others have the comparative performance data they need to hold council's to account? if so what?

Q6. Is there anything more that needs to be done to help councillors exercise effective scrutiny?

National recognition of the role of local government scrutiny as an important part of local accountability arrangements - recognition of this role at a national level will raise the profile locally.

Ensuring there are opportunities for Scrutiny Councillors to network and share good practice regionally and nationally. (The West Midlands has very active Health Scrutiny Chair's Forum and a separate West Midlands Scrutiny Network. However, the future of the West Midlands Scrutiny Network is at risk due to reduced resources across authorities to support scrutiny.)

In responses to Q 7 and Q8 below - all peer challenge reports and the action plans should be presented to public scrutiny committees.

Q7. Do you have any views on the core components of a corporate peer challenge?

It would be beneficial to include Scrutiny Members / officers in the corporate peer challenge process.

Also - in addition to assessing the effectiveness of the Scrutiny Function within the local authority it would also be helpful to have specific criteria against which the Executive demonstrates its willingness to enable independent scrutiny and its constructive approach to engaging with and responding to scrutiny.

In response to Q8 below – Yes but there also needs to be ongoing monitoring of the action plan by a Scrutiny Committee.

Q8. Should all authorities be expected to have a corporate peer review challenge on a regular basis, say every 4 years?

Yes

Q 9. Should all corporate peer challenge reports be published?

Yes

Q 10. Should all authorities be expected to produce an action plan following a peer challenge?

Yes

Q.11 Are there other things we should do to limit the Governments potential appetite for inspection?

12. What changes would you like to see from the LGA's improvement offer?

Recognition of the role of Local Government Scrutiny as part of the service improvement and democratic accountability framework.

Q13. Is there a continued need for the inspection of services that protect and care for children and young people?

Q14. If you answered yes, should that inspection be carried out by Ofsted?

Q15 Is there a continued need for the inspection of council's school improvement services?

Q16. If you answered yes, should that inspection be carried out by Ofsted?

Q17. Should separate inspections of agencies contributing to the protection and care of children, such as councils, health and the police, be replaced by a single inspection of services across all agencies?

Q18. If a new multi-agency inspection for the protection and care of children is developed, should this be delivered through Ofsted, another existing inspectorate or a new inspectorate?

Q19. Do council's need further support, such as bespoke models of peer review for child sexual exploitation or school improvement, to meet the challenges faced in children's services? If so what?

It is important to recognise the work that scrutiny committees are already doing on these issues. Scrutiny in Telford and Wrekin is currently carrying out an extensive review into multi-agency

working against CSE many organisations that are not required to participate in scrutiny have agreed to take part in this review including the police, probation, LSCB, CPS, Schools and FE colleges. Sharing existing good practice in the work of scrutiny of these issues is important.

20. Do you have any comments about the arrangements and support put in place to help councils and their partners implement changes across adults and health programmes?

Upper tier local authorities have the power to scrutinise both health and adult care services and to make arrangements for joint scrutiny with other local authorities. Telford and Wrekin Council has a Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee that focuses on issues with the local authority area and also a long standing joint HOSC with Shropshire Council. These scrutiny arrangements are a key element in the local accountability framework for health and social care.