

Scrutiny Powers & Role

Question:

Do you agree that we should extend scrutiny powers in relation to LAA partners to cover the range of their activities in an area, not just those limited to specific LAA targets?

Response:

This Council supports an extension of scrutiny powers to cover all activities, especially because it would enable Scrutiny Committees to work in real partnership over any issue of strategic significance or of significance to local communities. However, resources to support scrutiny are extremely tight in this Authority, both within the scrutiny function and across the Council, including its networks to the Local Strategic Partnership. In tandem with increasing these powers, the Council would urge the Government to look at measures which would positively encourage Councils to support and promote and engage others in the work of scrutiny.

Question:

Do we need to make scrutiny powers more explicit in relation to local councils' role in scrutinising expenditure on delivery of the local public services in an area? If so what is the best way of achieving this?

Response:

Yes, although not so explicit as to rule out the potential for scrutiny in other financial areas. Guidance on what scrutiny committees can and can't do in these areas would be helpful. It would provide public clarity as well as a clear steer to local authorities and partners. The issue, however, is not simply about clarity but also about what level of influence scrutiny committees actually have in these areas.

Question:

Do you agree that we should bring all or some of the local public services as set out in this cheaper fully under local authority scrutiny regime / Are there other bodies who would benefit from scrutiny by Local Government?

Response:

This Council has just implemented new structural ways of working with and delivering scrutiny, including an arrangement with LSP partners. Naturally, there is a mixture of eagerness to get on and reluctance to change amongst those partners (whether LSP, Police or Health). Whilst, there is support for

the principle of making all in some way 'accountable' to local authority scrutiny, this Council would again be concerned whether the resources, tools and relationships were in place to deliver any such move now. Perhaps, it would be more timely to sit back, build the relationships and develop the change we are now working with and consider this wider change in the light of the success of what is trying to be achieved now. Again, many local authority resources for scrutiny, are extremely restricted and certainly, that is the case in York.

In terms of extending these arrangements in due course, this Council welcomes the underlying principles and in particular the suggestions potentially to look at employment related services and fire and rescue authorities. Albeit, it would not want any further rapid change or development in this area, to be counter-productive, purely because authorities do not have the appropriate resources or relationships in place to deliver this approach consistently now.

Question:

How far do you agree that we should extend scrutiny powers to enable committees to require attendance by officers or board members of external organisations to give evidence at scrutiny hearings, similar to the powers already in existence for health and police?

Response:

This Council supports this principle and believes scrutiny committees should be empowered to call relevant officers/members of **all** those external organisations, over which it has some jurisdiction at present, to give evidence. In other words, the same rules applied to health and police partners, should be applied to all.

Question:

What more could be done to ensure that councils adequately resource and support the local government scrutiny function to carry out its role to full effect?

Response:

This Council believes that local authorities should be required to give a public commitment to the value it places upon scrutiny. That value will be reflected in the level of resources it provides directly to the scrutiny function and the supportive culture Chief Executives and Council Leaders drive and establish within Councils. It should be open to local authorities to consider how best they are going to deliver publicly an open commitment to scrutiny, working in partnership with others, to challenge, improve and provide the most effective local public services and facilities. The Government, though, could set its expectations that local authorities will be required to put such a commitment into place.

Question:

How can council leaders ensure that scrutiny is a core function of how these organisations do business and have a full and proper role in scrutinising the full range of local public services?

Response:

This Council believes that, like Chief Executives, Council leaders should be required to demonstrate a commitment to scrutiny. Protocols could be created within Council Constitutions to set out that commitment. Leaders should be encouraged to develop a pro-active working relationship with scrutiny, positively using scrutiny to look into issues on their or their Executive's behalf.

Within the party group networks, Council Leaders and Group Leaders should be encouraged also to develop a supportive environment for those Members allocated to scrutiny. They, too, need to be afforded the time and commitment to 'do' effective scrutiny. Council Leaders could be urged to provide annual or refresher training for all scrutiny Members, with special skills training for Chairs, as a part of Member training & development programmes.

Question:

What more could be done to better connect and promote the important role of local government scrutiny to local communities, for example citizens as expert advisers to committees?

Response:

This Council believes that local authorities should be required to publicly promote its scrutiny activity, setting out openly what powers and relationships it has. City of York has arrangements in place for expert advisers from local universities/colleges. It has engaged technical experts in a particular field in the past who happen to be resident or a business user. However, to develop that more widely, much greater public understanding of what can be achieved through scrutiny and its accompanying powers and roles will be required. Perhaps there is also a relationship to be built here with Parish Councils. Increased community or citizen engagement would be a direct result of scrutiny being seen to make a real practical difference in the locality.