

Members Regional Scrutiny Network Event

Held 29 September 2010

As part of the event, Members participated in a number of workshops on the following topics:

The Future Role of Scrutiny

Members recognised that following the Comprehensive Spending Review and the changes to legislation governing how the public sector operates, those involved in local accountability would need to know and understand what the changes were likely to mean for them. They agreed the challenge ahead would be to understand and adapt to:

- The government's plans for accountability at national and local level, and how the localism, transparency and decentralisation agenda will affect this;
- What the abolition of the Audit Commission and other inspection regimes will mean for local accountability and scrutiny;
- How can locally based scrutineers work can together regionally/sub regionally to meet the challenges ahead.

Local Enterprise Partnerships

Following the disestablishment of the Joint Regional Board in July 2010 (set up to oversee regional economic and spatial development) and the announcement that the RDA (Yorkshire Forward) would cease to function by 2012, Members received information on the Coalition Government's introduction of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). These strategic public/private partnerships based on economic geographies (e.g. City Regions), will oversee economic development. Members considered the dual role of the City Region/functional sub region partnerships/LEP – i.e. joint working & decision making between the private & public sectors and discussed concerns around the following:

- the potential for getting it wrong in terms of boundaries, representation & governance;
- the lack of consultation due to short timescale for submissions;
- the 'core' cities in each city region/functional sub region leading/dominating the LEP;
- Scrutiny's role in reviewing their 'local' LEP to ensure it meets the needs of the local economy & community;
- The selection of political representation on the LEP

Having reached a consensus on the issues, Members agreed to send a delegation to attend the LGYH Executive meeting on 21st October 2010 to discuss with the LGYH Executive the Network's concerns.

The Health Service

Members received information on the White Paper 'Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS', detailing how power will be devolved from Whitehall to patients and professionals, with the objective of freeing professionals to focus on improving health outcomes so that these are amongst the best in the world. As a result of the changes, the NHS will be streamlined with fewer layers of bureaucracy and the Strategic Health Authorities and Primary Care Trusts will be phased out by 2012. Members heard how under the new plans, patients will be able to choose which GP practice they register with, regardless of where they live, and choose between consultant-led teams. Also, GP Consortia will be given freedom and responsibility for commissioning care for their local communities with more joined up services, supported by a new role for Local Authorities to support integration across health and social care.

The key proposal in the White Paper is for local authorities to establish a statutory partnership, the 'Health and Wellbeing Board' which would have four main functions:

- To assess local need and lead on Joint Strategic Needs Assessments
- To promote integration and partnership across the NHS, social care and public health
- To support joint commissioning and pooled budget arrangements
- To undertake a scrutiny role in relation to major service re-design.

Climate Change

Members received information on the *Climate Change Act 2008* which set out the legal framework for adaptation policy in the UK and established an Adaptation Sub-Committee (ASC) of the Committee on Climate Change. The Act tasks the ASC with providing independent, expert advice to the UK Government and devolved administrations on the preparations for climate change and progress in implementing the National Adaptation Programme. In order to improve preparation and ensure that decisions made today do not close off options and make it harder to adapt in the future, the ASC identified the following five priority areas for immediate action:

- land use planning

- providing national infrastructure
- managing natural resources
- designing and renovating buildings
- emergency planning

Members noted that adaptation will more often than not, comprise local responses to locally specific climate risks and opportunities, and that Local Authorities (LAs) will be essential to delivery. Along with public sector agencies, regulators, businesses and relevant professional bodies, LAs will need to invest in capacity building to improve planning, decision making, implementation and monitoring in relation to the issues.

Policing, Community Safety & Accountability

Members were informed of the government's plans for police reform some of which became part of the 'Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill'. The proposals put forward were based on three key principles:

- Transferring power back to the people through the introduction of directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners
- Transferring power away from national government through reducing bureaucracy
- Shifting the focus of government through the creation of a new crime agency.