Report of the Chair

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 16 March 2015

REPORT BACK – RECENT SCRUTINY EVENTS

Purpose	This report presents the feedback from recent scrutiny events for discussion.
Content	The report covers the following events: a) Visit to National Assembly for Wales – Public Engagement (12 February) b) Western Bay Regional Scrutiny Seminar (23 February)
Councillors are being asked to	• Review and discuss the key points
Lead Councillor(s)	Councillor Mary Jones, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee
Lead Officer & Report Author	Dave Mckenna, Scrutiny Manager Tel: 01792 636090 E-mail: dave.mckenna@swansea.gov.uk

1. Introduction

1.1 Over the course of the year scrutiny councillors and officers will be involved in development and improvement events in order to support and deliver effective scrutiny. This will included training opportunities and opportunities to attend scrutiny events at a regional and national level, such as those organised by the Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association and Centre for Public Scrutiny.

1.2 It is important that feedback is provided to the committee and shared with a wider audience to ensure learning from such events can be disseminated.

2. Recent Events

2.1 Visit to National Assembly for Wales – Public Engagement

2.1.1 Following informal discussion as previous networking events developed an opportunity to visit the National Assembly for Wales for a practice exchange to look at how they do public engagement in their respective scrutiny role.

2.1.2 The visit was held on 12 February 2015 and facilitated by Kevin Davies, the Assembly's Outreach and Liaison Manager.

2.1.3   Along with members of the scrutiny team, the following scrutiny councillors took part:

- Mary Jones
- Paxton Hood-Williams

2.1.4   Learning Points – recently posted on the swanseascrutiny blog (www.swanseascrutiny.co.uk) is a summary of some of the things we learnt from the good practice session to help improve public engagement – reproduced at *Appendix 1*.

2.1.5   The committee's views are invited on the ideas gained from the visit.

2.2   **Western Bay Regional Scrutiny Seminar**

2.2.1   The seminar was organised by Sara Harvey, Regional Programme Director for the Western Bay Health & Social Care Programme. The key objective was to bring Members to a minimum level of understanding about the Western Bay Programme and to start to consider what additional information and next steps are required concerning scrutiny of Western Bay.

2.2.2   The seminar was held on the morning of 23 February 2015 in The Princess Royal Theatre, Port Talbot. It was chaired by Naomi Alleyne, Director of Social Services and Housing, WLGA. The session featured a summary of the Programme's undertakings, followed by presentations specifically on the Community Services and Adoption projects, as well as a brief overview of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act to set the context for the regional working.

2.2.3   The event involved councillors and officers from Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend. The following scrutiny councillors from Swansea attended:

- Mary Jones
- Paxton Hood-Williams

(The Cabinet Member for Services for Adults and Vulnerable People, Councillor Jane Harris, also attended)

2.2.4   Key messages:

- Acknowledgement that the programme has been under development to date but is now in an implementation phase;
- Governance has only recently been confirmed by leaders / portfolio holders; and
- Acknowledgement that scrutiny has been via individual Local Authorities to date.

2.2.5 A report back from the organisers is awaited which will inform further discussion on scrutiny of the Western Bay and practical issues for the committee to consider.

3.   Legal Implications

3.1   There are no specific legal implications raised by this report.

4.   Financial Implications

4.1   There are no specific financial implications raised by this report.

Background Papers: None

Date: 4 March 2015

Legal Officer: Wendy Parkin
Finance Officer: Paul Cridland

8 things we learnt from the Welsh Assembly about public engagement

This post is a summary of some of the things we learnt from a good practice session with the Welsh Assembly. We hope it will be of value to other scrutineers looking at how to improve public engagement.

About the session
All of us in the Scrutiny Team along with Councillors Mary Jones and Paxton Hood-Williams went to Cardiff for the day to hear about how the Assembly engages the public in its work. Dyfrig Williams from Good Practice Wales also took part and brought his video camera to capture some of the highlights.

The day was an informal conversation with different people coming in and out. Despite being from different tiers of government we found that we had much in common. In practical terms we were able to share tips on things like question and answer sessions with cabinet members and the way that in-depth inquiries are run.

Overall it was a fantastic learning opportunity for us and we are really grateful to Kevin Davies and his colleagues for organising the day and for giving up their time so generously. It was also great to see Peter Black AM and Mike Hedges AM who were both able to pop in and contribute to the session. Here then are some of the learning points from the day – I hope you find them useful. We will certainly be reflecting on them to improve our practice.

1. Never stop looking for new ways of doing engagement
Sessions like this remind us that engagement is something that you never stop learning about. Simply in terms of new things to use we learnt about:
- Text only webchats using google hangouts
- Making Videos using ipads
- Facebook adverts to promote scrutiny inquiries

2. Scrutiny inquiries are conversations not formal research projects
As much as we would like to be academically rigorous in our scrutiny work we need to recognise that scrutiny inquiries are different to formal research. Scrutiny takes place in a political environment, evidence is translated by officers who are bound to have an element of bias in what they do and the politicians involved want to be present when evidence is being collected. If evidence is collected on behalf of the politicians and then reported back it can never be as real to them no matter how detailed the feedback.
Face to face is the most powerful evidence.
Inquiries are in fact a series of smaller conversations that get drawn together at the end. Again, balancing what has come out of these smaller conversations is a judgement made by the scrutineers who negotiate the end result as a group.

3. Scrutiny inquiries add value by going beyond the traditional sources

We saw how Assembly scrutiny inquiries allowed the committee members to talk to people they wouldn't normally talk to. Indeed, this was the essence of what public engagement meant. Scrutineers were able to expand their knowledge and prepare better questions by having conversations outside of the normal Assembly bubble.

Having these conversations means working in different ways. We heard about committee members meeting people in enterprise zones, in community settings for poverty work and holding informal sessions that were reported back anonymously. Some sessions were 'off the record' and provided valuable insight that might not otherwise have been gained.

4. Public engagement has to be led by the committee members

We heard that public engagement is a new culture for the Assembly committees and how reaching out beyond the Assembly bubble had gone from being the exception to being the mainstream.

Committee members were learning by doing. By trying new things they had become more open to new approaches. Confidence in doing things differently also meant that inquiries were more flexible.

5. Think about the who before you think about the how

We liked that Assembly scrutiny inquiries always started with two questions along these lines:

Who do you need to talk to?
How are you going to talk to them?

Like us the Assembly is thinking about how they can place the 'user' at the centre of what they do and design public engagement activity around user needs. We swapped noted on things like user stories and user journey mapping.

We heard about how video was being used to share feedback from scrutiny work and we discussed the use of short shareable summaries of reports.

6. Public engagement requires corporate teamwork

We heard about how the Assembly sets up an integrated team for each inquiry. This team, which supports the planning and delivery of public engagement, includes someone from communications and legal as well as from the committee section.

This integrated working is certainly something we can learn from in order to provide more rounded and comprehensive support.

7. Prepare in advance so that scrutiny can hit the ground running

We were impressed with the preparation that was done before inquiries so that committee's could hit the ground running. This included talking to 'in the know' organisations about who the committee might engage with and how they might be involved.

There was also offline groundwork done to inform the online work. Preparing people to be involved in webchats for example.

We also picked up a tip about publishing in advance those questions gathered from the public for cabinet member question sessions. This helped both the committee and the cabinet member to prepare.

8. Feedback is a continuous loop

This is one area of public engagement that we know is important but don't always managed to get right. It was interesting, therefore, to hear about:

- o The use of video and storify to provide feedback
- o Breaking down lengthy final reports to feedback in manageable chunks
- o Including people's quotes in reports and showing them they are there
- o 'Story telling' the inquiry from the perspective of the people affected
- o Giving the media stories about events and people – not processes

So, a thoroughly productive day and a great example of how getting out and seeing how others work can support learning and development.