

Report of West Midlands Regional Scrutiny Network Meeting

Stoke-on-Trent, 22nd June 2012

The programme was altered slightly because the guest speaker Joan Walley MP, Chair of Environmental Audit Select Committee, was late.

Andrew Lawrence from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), advised that next week Health Scrutiny in Stafford will announce £4000 available for training.

He suggested putting on a Training event after lunch on regional days at a cost of approximately £40.00 per Member. (e.g. Worcestershire County Council suggested Public Health Scrutiny, Solihull suggested Accountability in Education).

The main speaker Joan Walley (JW) apologised for her lateness explaining she returned last night from an environmental conference in Rio. She posed the question 'who is scrutiny for'? It is a vital part of the role of an elected member, there is no better way to learn the job, and enhance your role. The bringing in of more people, 'experts' to join the panel was discussed. She spoke of her own experience and explained that it is wrong to criticise previous policy.

JW advised that scrutiny committees should: choose subjects by consensus, involve members, call for evidence, and use local media. There is also a need for written Council responses. Important to hold scrutinised issues to account, and to monitor implementation of recommendations to find out whether it has happened? Members can be appointed to two committees if there is common ground. Scrutiny can make a difference in transition! There will be new issues relating to the Localism Bill and Planning that Councils need to address.

JW reported from findings from Rio: next year all businesses will have to report on greenhouse gas use – local authorities are at the cutting edge to tackle green economy. I reported on Redditch's efforts (i.e. heating the stadium, eco housing etc.)

The final session was a table top discussion on O&S working with external agencies and the role of Members.

- DO'S – Involve, Explain O&S, Communicate, Question, Develop relationships.
- DON'TS - Presume, Rude Councillors, Use Negative Comments.
- COULD DO'S - More Overview, Shared Work programmes, Pro-active ownership.

Finally feedback was received from the annual conference. An interesting definition of localism by Nick Raynsford MP Chair of CfPS, "the freedom to do what you are told to do"

Councillor Pat Witherspoon