

Improving your Overview and Scrutiny Skills

Using the West Midlands Scrutiny Network as a vehicle for elected members to develop their overview and scrutiny skills.

Introduction

At the last meeting of the regional scrutiny network on 8th March I gave a short presentation about my role as the newly appointed Regional Advocate for the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CFPS). My role is to build strong links between CFPS and Local authorities in the West Midlands, working both directly with Local Authorities and through your network. My objectives will be to ensure that CFPS support is in tune with your needs and to help you build a Training and Development programme that matches your priorities. During the discussion of my paper I was asked to propose a programme of training and development in scrutiny skills that could be delivered by CFPS to coincide with planned meetings of the Network. This paper sets out a suggested approach with costs for discussion at the next network meeting on 22nd June.

Tailoring support to your needs

CFPS exists to promote transparent, inclusive and accountable public services by supporting individuals, organisations and communities with a range of development support that we design to fit the needs and circumstances of clients. Based on many years experience of working with elected members the Centre is continuously assessing how needs are changing and adapting its support accordingly. This has enabled us to compile a prospectus of development programmes that is designed to meet most current needs but in all cases the programmes are interpreted and refined in discussion with the client who then receives a bespoke service.

The prospectus contains a range of different approaches including:

- Development sessions
- Action Learning Sets
- Mentoring
- Coaching (new - not yet in the prospectus)
- Support to help build relationships and
- Self-assessment tools such as “Accountability Works for You”.

The first two of these are particularly suitable for groups of members from different Local Authorities as they provide a great opportunity for innovative ideas to emerge when people share their different experiences. Action Learning Sets are ideal for small groups as a means of exploring difficult issues in depth in a safe environment but Development sessions would be ideal for groups of around twenty members to work and learn together in an afternoon following a morning network meeting.

More information is available in the prospectus on the CFPS web site www.cfps.org.uk

Development sessions

Development sessions use a learning style that involves lots of interaction between the facilitator and the delegates. They can be offered on many topics including the following:

- Introduction to Scrutiny
- Introduction to Health Scrutiny
- Introduction to Crime and Disorder Scrutiny
- Future challenges for scrutiny and local accountability
- Tackling Health Inequalities
- Understanding the Health Reforms
- How overview and scrutiny can help you
- Questioning skills
- Chairing Skills
- Negotiating skills and working in partnership
- Performance management
- Scrutinising budgets and finance
- Understanding value for money
- How to manage and run a scrutiny investigation.
- Appreciative enquiry (new – not yet in the prospectus)

Each session would be offered at a standard rate of £800 (Inclusive of VAT and expenses) for a half-day workshop for 20 people. The charge per delegate would be £40. Each session would be delivered by a member of the CFPS team of expert advisors who would consult delegates in advance and adapt the session to their needs.

Deciding on a programme

Members of the network are asked to:

- 1) Support the proposal in principle to hold development sessions in the afternoons following the next three quarterly network meetings.
- 2) Discuss the list of topics above (and any others that they wish to propose) and identify a short list of their preferred topics for the three events.

Andrew Lawrence (CFPS Regional Advocate) June 2012