



From Scouting Champions Network newsletter, March 2008

INLOGOV: scrutiny and the new legislation (notes from seminars)

In recent weeks, INLOGOV has been involved in a number of workshops on scrutiny and the new legislation. These have had discussions in small groups, and the rapporteurs of some of these groups have written up their notes. Andrew Coulson at INLOGOV has edited these in the hope that they may be useful to local authorities who are preparing responses to various consultations or planning the future of their work in Overview and Scrutiny.

A. Strengthening Scrutiny as a Whole

The following points were raised:

- the importance of training for Committee Members, both specific (e.g. on topics/services within the remit of the committee) and general (e.g. on the concept of overview and scrutiny).
- Scrutiny needs to be properly funded and this funding needs to be ring-fenced;
- Scrutiny needs to be supported by dedicated officers who are able to undertake research, draft reports, etc;
- Committee Members need to be involved in agenda setting;
- Some Councils have task groups which anybody can join, not just those serving on the committee and this should be encouraged; task groups should not be subject to voting requirements but should come to a 'reasonable consensus';
- Political balance on committees does not necessarily lend itself to good scrutiny;
- The Government expects too much without proper guidance and is not necessarily clear what it expects to achieve and does not understand how its proposals will impact in

practice;

- There are potential difficulties of scrutinising services provided by organisations outside the boundaries of the authority, e.g. services provided in East Lancashire by Yorkshire based organisations.

B. The Scrutiny of Local Area Agreements

There are a number of difficulties in scrutinising Local Area Agreements:

- A lack of knowledge, especially among non-Executive councillors, about LAAs, how they work, who's involved.
- Finding the time/capacity/resource – Members already have considerable demands on their time; councils will also need to find the capacity and resource to enable Overview and Scrutiny Committees to carry out this task.
- Managing relationships – between two-tier councils and/or neighbouring councils; and between politicians, senior officials, and partners.

To overcome these, we propose:

- Joint training – involving all councillors and partners from LAA, to share best practice and learning, and to develop a shared understanding of what to expect and how scrutiny will work.
- Better support for Members – not least to prioritise activity, and to ensure that one piece of work does not duplicate another's.

Statutory guidance should be minimal.

It would be more useful:

- To publicise best practice examples based on