

Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission Public & Community Engagement and Involvement

1. Introduction

Public and community involvement is a key component of an effective overview and scrutiny function. The inclusion and representation of the community in the scrutiny process helps ensure that:

- Issues which are scrutinised reflect the views of the community and are important to local people;
- Local decision makers are seen to be held to account in the provision of public services;
- Local people have the opportunity to participate in local decision making and scrutiny to help to improve local services.

In this context, the scrutiny function plays an important role in promoting democratic involvement and enhancing the democratic accountability of public services.

2. How are the public currently involved in scrutiny?

The views of the community are in part represented through the membership of the Commission which is made up of 21 members who include local councillors, parent governors, faith group representatives and young people themselves. The community is able to be directly involved in scrutiny through a number of ways:

Public Meetings All scrutiny meetings are held in public which allows members of the community to attend and to see how local decision takers are held accountable for services provided. At the discretion of the chair, members of the public may also ask questions.

Conusltees Scrutiny consults the community to inform specific aspects of its work for example, service users are consulted as part of service reviews (e.g. focus groups) and community groups are consulted annually in the development thel work programme.

These engagement processes work in a very specific way which can limit the potential for the wider community to be involved and for a broader range of views to be represented in the scrutiny function. To Commission recognises that a more enhanced community engagement role can lead to improved scrutiny intelligence, in particular:

- What issues and services are important to local people?
- What services are available to local people and how effective are they?
- How different communities use and experience local services.

3. What are the challenges for public engagement with scrutiny?

There are a number of challenges to extending the engagement and involvement function of the Commission:

Representation There are many hundreds of local community and voluntary groups, so how can the Commission represent the diverse and complex community that exists locally?

Overview & Scrutiny

Meaningful involvement

How can local communities be involved which is meaningful and not tokenistic? How will those involved feel that they have positively contributed to change?

Expectations

Scrutiny is only advisory to the Executive, and can therefore only influence and not make decisions. Scrutiny involves a wide range of stakeholders, of which the community is one.

Sustainability

Engagement mechanisms should be sustainable and commensurate to the nature and scope of the scrutiny function.

4. Proposed developments to community engagement and involvement

The Chair and Vice Chair of the Commission held a roundtable discussion with Hackney Community & Voluntary Sector and other other community group representatives to identify ways in which community engagement with the scrutiny function could be improved. Following this meeting it was agreed to develop community engagement with the Commission through the following initiatives:

Site Visits	An opportunity for the Commission to meet front-line services and talk to staff and service users. As such, these can be an important intelligence gathering tool to assess effectiveness of local service or service gaps. It is proposed that site visits would be twofold: (i) To those services / organisations which can assist in the scrutiny of items in the work programme (ii) To those of a general reconnaissance and
Newsletter	A mechanism for the Commission to engage with the community, to communicate upcoming meetings and how representatives can be involved. The initiative would need to be supported by closer liaison with HCVS and the development of a local contact database to support digital distribution.
Social Media	Details of scrutiny meetings are promoted on Twitter by the Council ahead of each meeting to allow local residents to view upcoming agenda and watch the meeting live. HCVS and members of the Commission should connect with this through their own on-line communities to extend awareness and reach.
Commissioned Services	Improved links to those third party organisations which are commissioned by the Council to provide services for the local community.