



Scrutiny in Challenging Times – Workshop

Jacqui McKinlay

@jacquimck/ cfps.org.uk/ @cfpscrutiny

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The Plan...

- At your tables... some introductions and problem sharing
- CfPS input
- Back to tables for some focused time
- Share and action plan

At your tables:

- Introduce yourself, job role, etc.
- Give your scrutiny function a ranking out of ten – ten being excellent
- Share one thing you are proud of in relation to your scrutiny work
- Share one issue that needs sorting and you would benefit from collective brain power



Some national insights



A view:

“There have been some pretty derogatory comments among the evidence received saying its ineffective, passive, a pleasant little talking shop, something to keep councillors employed who haven’t got executive functions. Is that a fair assessment?”

Clive Betts, Chair of CLG Select Committee

A view:

“Wherever regeneration of social housing has been outsourced to private developers, responsiveness, transparency, oversight and scrutiny – key elements of healthy democracy – are lessened for those most directly affected”.

Post Grenfell, Guardian opinion piece

Accountability and Scrutiny – APSE/ CfPS research

- Scrutiny in local government is seen as vital but currently perceived as weak.
- The reasons for this are long-standing but not insurmountable.
- Most relate to a failure to buy into scrutiny, it not having a clear role, or the function's failure to prove impact.
- Scrutiny is engaging with policy development work on average only about 10% of time, versus the 90%.
- Scrutiny is rarely able to participate in the discussions on local government's future or influence a substantial amount of policies.
- There is a desire to improve and build on what works, as well as transform to meet new demands.

Good scrutiny means...

- Improving outcomes 28.0%
- Being an instrument of ensuring monitoring, review and accountability of local government 33.3%
- Being a platform for constructive debate, more decision legitimacy, or being an alternative voice 38.7%

The difference in expressing scrutiny's role reflects how local context impacts on how scrutiny is undertaken.

Resources:

- Lack of resources was often acknowledged, however frequently highlighted as not scrutiny's core problem.
- Perceptions of scrutiny's role, work culture, lack of creativity and desire to take risks and change the function were almost always on top of the scrutiny constraints list.
- Those councils that have tackled those sets of issues were more likely to report a positive impact on scrutiny, notwithstanding resource constraints.

In summary:

- ‘Scrutiny should be looking at issues and asking not only: “Are we doing this thing right?”, but mainly “Are we doing the right thing?”
- ‘Local authorities need to be more daring: they should try new systems, new ways of working if old ones prove to be ineffective, and ensure the best outcomes for the residents.’
- ‘If a policy is part of a major transformation for the next ten years, then this subject should be on scrutiny’s agenda.’

The top reasons scrutiny isn't having an impact

- 1 Rubber stamping cabinet papers
- 2 Ignoring public voice
- 3 Not addressing pressing issues

SCRUTINY



2 keys to scrutiny success

1. Prioritise and focus
2. Foster a positive organisational culture which values challenge



6% FEWER

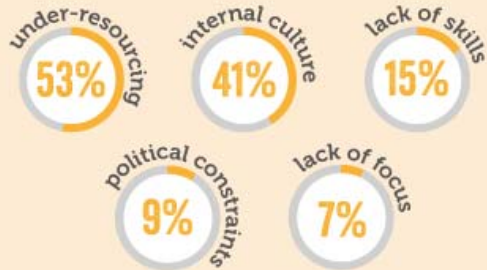
people believe scrutiny's focus is member led



74% PEOPLE

think that party politics affects scrutiny

BIGGEST constraint on successful scrutiny



LOCAL GOVERNMENT SCRUTINY IN 2017

CfPS
Centre for Public Scrutiny

This infographic is based on CfPS's annual scrutiny perceptions survey

The more positive an organisational culture the greater it values scrutiny.

However, 39% of respondents thought cabinet was broadly negative about the value of scrutiny.



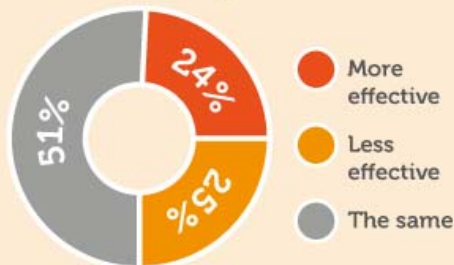
Scrutiny chairs are most positive about the impact of scrutiny



Confidence in scrutiny's ability to make an impact is



Is scrutiny more effective than a year ago?



Is the role of **SCRUTINY** understood?

76% → YES
24% → NO

TOP AREAS

where scrutiny can add value



Remembering the basics - principles of good scrutiny:

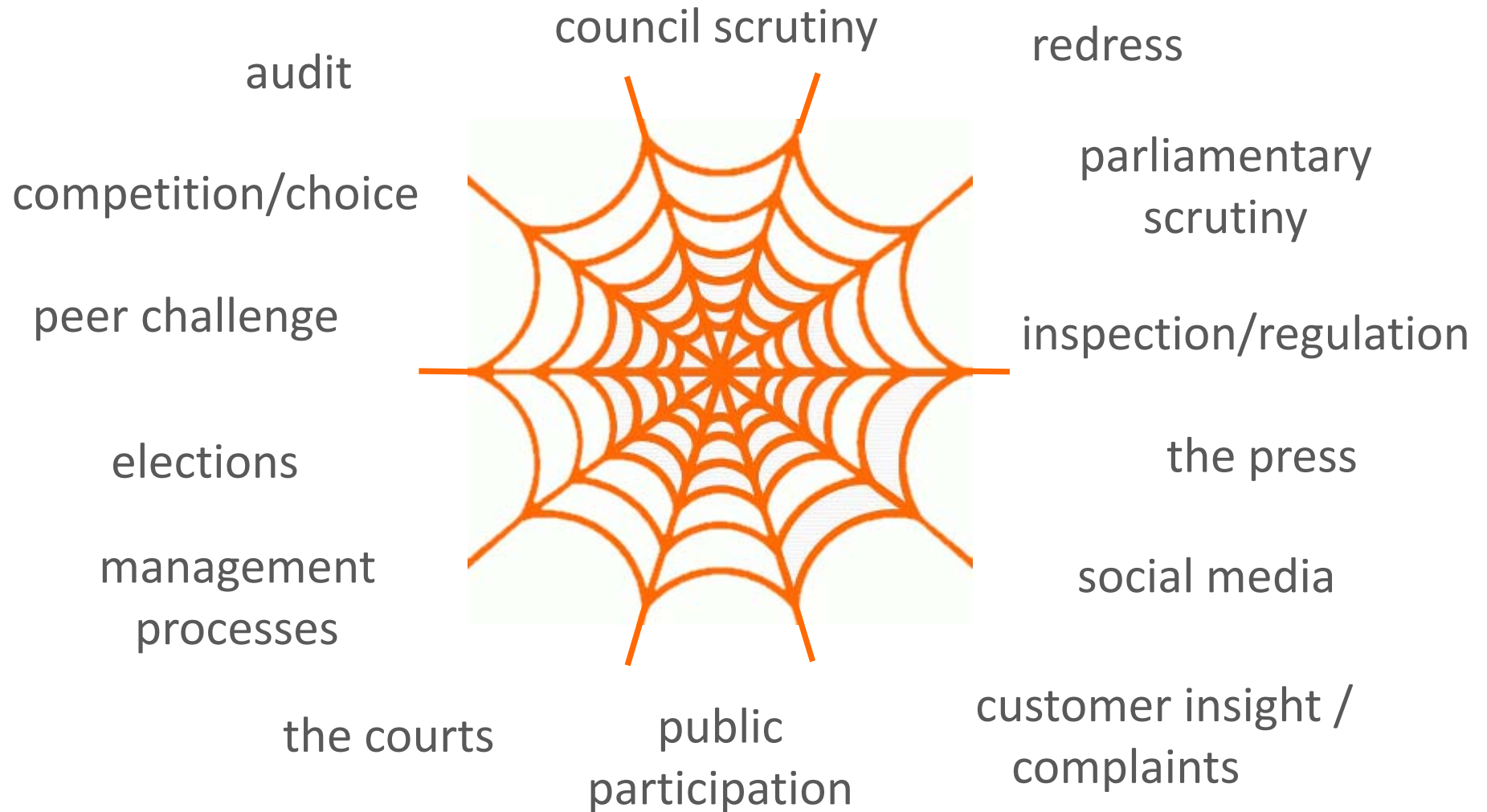
1. Constructive 'critical friend' challenge
2. Amplifies the voices and concerns of the public and other stakeholders
3. Led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
4. Drives improvement

Scrutiny's role - developing:

- fundamental to support/ oversee:
 - decision making
 - policy implementation
 - outcome measurement
- fundamental to understanding risk and developing resilience
- fundamental to running public services in the 21st century



A web of accountability

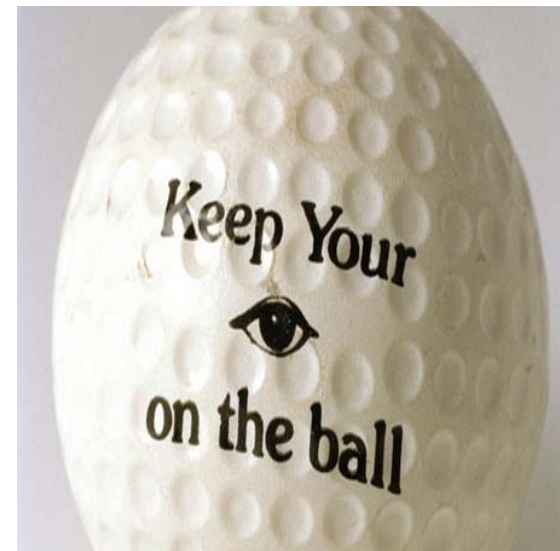


The challenge of getting voices heard



What's top of the work programme?

- Budget savings
- Social care pressures
- Health transformation
- Housing / planning
- Economic regeneration
- Skills
- Devolution / CAs
- Alternative delivery vehicles
- Education accountability
- Organisational change



Back on your tables:

- Decide which 'challenge' you should apply your collective brain power to.
- Ask a few good scrutiny questions to establish where you can help.
- Share your wisdom and move on to the next one.
- If you don't have anything to sort out – what single improvement would make your scrutiny life better?

Thank you

Jacqui McKinlay

Centre for Public Scrutiny | 77 Mansell Street | London | E1 8AN

jacqui.mckinlay@cfps.org.uk

07716 409562 @jacquimck

@cfpscrutiny www.cfps.org.uk

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