



Association of
Democratic Services
Officers

North East and Yorkshire & Humberside Regional Network Meeting

Friday 14 December 2018

West Offices, Station Rise, York Y01 6GA

AGENDA

0930	Registration and refreshments on arrival	Use #ADSO_NEYH to join the discussion
1000	Welcome and introductions	James McLaughlin, ADSO Regional Representative
1005	Life after Democratic Services as an NHS Trust Secretary	Matthew Kane Associate Director - Corporate Affairs & Trust Secretary, Sheffield Children's Hospital
1050	ADSO National Developments <i>An update on national ADSO developments, including:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>ADSO Board Update</i>• <i>Feedback on ADSO Conference</i>• <i>Membership Services and Renewals</i>	John Austin ADSO Chair
1105	Training and Development in the Region <i>To discuss what training and development opportunities Members would wish to see in the region</i>	James McLaughlin ADSO Regional Representative
1120	Break	
1130	Workshop - Discussion Paper – Overview and Scrutiny (see attached)	Group Discussion

1225	<p>Workshop – Sharing Best Practice Across the Region</p> <p><i>A group discussion to identify and share best practice ideas for Democratic Services.</i></p>	Group Discussion
1305	<p>Future Meeting Arrangements</p> <p><i>To agree the following proposed dates:-</i></p> <p><i>Friday 1 February 2019</i></p> <p><i>Friday 14 June 2019</i></p> <p><i>Friday 27 September 2019</i></p> <p><i>Friday 13 December 2019</i></p>	<p>James McLaughlin</p> <p>ADSO Regional Representative</p>
1315	<p>Close of Meeting</p> <p><i>Lunch will be provided for Members at the end of the meeting</i></p>	

Workshop - Discussion paper on Overview and Scrutiny

Background

The [Government response](#) to the [Commons Select Committee inquiry](#) on the effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees gave a commitment to produce updated guidance for local authorities by the end of 2018.

This updated guidance will be statutory, so while councils will need to have regard to it they will also be free to depart from it where they have good reason to do so. Indeed, one of the core principles underpinning the Government's approach to Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) is that, as a democratically-elected body, each council is best-placed to know which scrutiny arrangements will suit its own individual circumstances.

We do, though, want the guidance to be of genuine, practical use to *all* authorities. We are of course aware that, where O&S is concerned, the performance of councils across the country varies considerably, but we would like the guidance to be informative even for those who consider they already have effective arrangements in place.

As such, the guidance should feature what the sector considers to be best practice.

Topics for discussion

- (5) **Culture** – there appears to be a great deal of consensus among practitioners about the fundamental importance to effective O&S of establishing the right culture in a council, and that O&S should be a corporate priority. Given its key role, the guidance will need to set out clearly how the corporate culture can support the O&S function and what this looks like in practice.

Key questions to consider before the workshop include:

- *What are the defining characteristics of a council with the 'right' culture?*
- *What are the best ways to establish the strategic profile and priority of O&S?*
- *What are the best ways to manage disagreements between the executive and O&S committees?*

(2) **Access to information** – the Select Committee report highlighted the difficulties some O&S committees have in accessing the information they need to do their jobs effectively.

Key questions to consider before the workshop include:

- *Given scrutiny's role (and understanding that scrutiny's role may be different from council to council) what kind of information do members need to be able to access and use?*
- *What type of information are O&S committees unable to access and why?*
- *In your experience, how prevalent is this issue?*
- *What reasons are given for withholding requested information?*
- *How can councils ensure O&S committees have access to appropriate information?*

- *What solutions to these challenges can be identified that do not require legislation?*
- *What should the guidance say about accessing information?*

(3) **Scrutiny involving “external” bodies** – a strong view of the Select Committee was that O&S committees should be able to fully monitor and scrutinise all the services provided to residents, and that in many cases they could not as they were unable to scrutinise the bodies who deliver those services.

Key questions to consider before the workshop include:

- *Is it helpful to make a distinction between “internal” and “external” scrutiny, where increasingly services are delivered across organisational boundaries, and considering recent developments in commissioning, commercialisation etc?*
- *Why do some external bodies refuse to appear before O&S committees?*
- *How can O&S committees get external bodies to accept their requests to appear before them or otherwise supply information?*
- *Does legislation give enough power to O&S committees to scrutinise external bodies?*
- *What should the guidance say about scrutiny of external bodies?*

(4) **O&S committees’ role in examining and challenging local risks to financial sustainability** – in July, the Public Accounts and Constitutional Affairs Committee published its [report on local government financial sustainability](#). One of its recommendations (#6) was for Government to review the way in which scrutiny functions operate in examining and challenging local risks to financial sustainability.

Key questions to consider before the workshop include:

- *What role do O&S committees currently play with regard to the financial sustainability of the council?*
- *What would distinguish the O&S Committee role in examining financial sustainability from the role of a council’s Audit Committee?*
- *What should the guidance say, if anything, about O&S committees’ roles regarding financial sustainability?*

(5) **How to establish the impact of elected chairs on scrutiny committees’ effectiveness** – in the response to the Select Committee report, the Government agreed to explore how best to establish the impact of elected chairs, making clear that it was not convinced that running a pilot exercise was necessary.

Key questions to consider before the workshop include:

- *Does the election (rather than the appointment) of the Chair have a material impact on the effectiveness of an O&S committee? If so, in what ways?*
- *Generally speaking, do councils need convincing of the benefits of electing a Chair?*
- *What resistance might there be to electing a Chair?*

Workshop Discussion Paper – Sharing Good Practice

ADSO is our professional network and vehicle for sharing good practice across the sector and the country. The Members' Forum on the website tends to be used for queries and the ADSO Awards celebrate the achievements of Democratic Services teams.

Regional Network Meetings provide an excellent opportunity to share good practice, which can then translate into nominations for ADSO Awards. This discussion paper sets out some approaches that we might wish to adopt to share good practice.

Some benefits of sharing good practice:-

1. Nurtures a learning culture
2. Identifies and fills knowledge gaps
3. Generates creative and innovative ideas
4. Enables better decision making
5. Boosts efficiency and competence
6. Constructs a supportive community
7. Provides ADSO Members with an internal knowledge base
8. Reduces the loss of know-how
9. Cuts down costs and time

Some key questions for consideration:-

- *How do you reflect on practice in your own authority?*
- *How is good practice recognised in your authority?*
- *How do we identify good practice outside of our authorities?*
- *What conversations are already happening to share good practice locally or regionally?*
- *How can our regional network meetings support the sharing and recognition of good practice?*
- *What more can ADSO do to identify and share good practice in the sector?*