

scrutiny frontiers 2019

Experiences from the scrutiny frontline



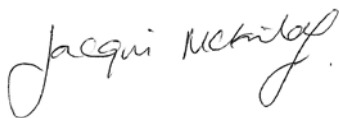
Foreword

We passionately believe that better scrutiny leads to more effective decision-making, reduced risk and ultimately, improved outcomes. Scrutiny is happening across the country in local authorities through overview and scrutiny committees focusing on public services, policies and decisions. Scrutiny has the power to do this by giving a voice to local citizens, examining how tax payers' money is spent within the council and beyond, and can improve people's lives.

This is the second edition of Scrutiny Frontiers, with the first published in 2007 and looking back, it is clear that what makes good scrutiny has not actually changed over the last 12 years. The key components of good communication, strong relationships and open dialogue remain as important as ever, alongside a mindset of constructive challenge supported by shared values of openness, transparency and a guiding aim to improve the lives of citizens and the local area.

We feel there is real value in sharing experiences of scrutiny from around the country and reflecting on the practise of others in order to learn from them and gain awareness of what is possible. With this in mind, we intend to produce further editions of Scrutiny Frontiers in future. It is clear that public engagement, access to information, strong cross party working, and essentially, an organisational culture that is supportive of and open to scrutiny are key elements that contribute to the scrutiny work shared in this publication. In challenging financial times, rigorous topic selection and prioritisation, and openness to creative approaches in order to make best use of resources are also vital components.

Effective scrutiny may look different in each individual authority but the key is that each authority is clear on the purpose of scrutiny, the methods they can use to carry out scrutiny and the positive impact it can have on the lives of citizens and their locality.



Jacqui McKinlay

Chief Executive, Centre for Public Scrutiny



Councillor Darryl Dixon

Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, Sunderland City Council

The importance of overview and scrutiny committees cannot be over emphasised in the current climate of organisational change, service developments and reconfiguration. I feel that the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee has embraced its role through a varied and detailed work programme. One of the strengths of the way we work is our continued development of relationships and consideration of the issues facing the health landscape in Sunderland and more importantly how such changes will impact on local residents.

The health services commissioned and delivered across Sunderland continue to change due in part to central government legislation, the ideals of the NHS long term view and the need to get as much value for money as possible. This is clearly reflected in the work of the committee throughout this year as we have challenged, collaborated and been involved with council health colleagues and NHS health partners.

The Committee acknowledges that health covers a wide remit and involves a number of organisations that contribute to the running of health services. In Sunderland we recognise the importance of a good level of understanding of our health partner's roles

and the development of positive relationships. To this end the committee holds an annual workshop with partners including Northumberland Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust, North East Ambulance Service, Sunderland and South Tyneside Hospitals and local GP's to improve the Committee's collective knowledge and develop relationships. These events, which are organised in a 'speed-dating' style of interaction, have been a great success from both the Member and partner perspective.

One of the key issues for us, as a committee, has been Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group's (CCG) consultation on the way urgent care services are structured and delivered across the city. Through discussions with the CCG we understood that their drivers for change were confusion in the current system, increased demand, national guidance and policies and the need to spend and use resources providing value for money. As a committee we engaged with our partners and local communities and provided a formal response to the consultation outlining a number of issues including on transport and travel, the proposed location of the urgent treatment centre, the enhanced NHS 111 service and on aspects of the consultation itself.



The final decision on urgent care services in Sunderland has now been taken by Sunderland CCG governing body at a meeting held in public. The CCG governing body acknowledged a number of the public concerns and has looked to address these in the final decisions taken. In particular that the final decision now includes an improved option for the extended access services in the Washington and Houghton areas, both outlying parts of the city where concerns had been highlighted over transport and travel. Further issues around communication, opening hours and building resources are also to be considered and worked through following opinion from the public consultation. The Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee has discussed their response at great length and we will continue to monitor progress on mobilisation and development of the urgent care service in Sunderland, mindful of the concerns raised throughout the consultation period.

The committee will continue to monitor progress through the coming year to seek assurances on the new urgent care service and ensure that some of the remaining key issues are resolved. The committee will look to the evidence from key performance data on a number of facets of the urgent care system to ensure the service is providing the expected care to local communities. I believe, in Sunderland, we have a solid and cooperative relationship with our partners that allows for a level of constructive discussions and, when required, that crucial element of challenge. I think this is where our real strength lies, in our confidence to voice the concerns of the public and look to ensure that changes in services are not to the detriment of local people.



Councillor Alison Kelly

Chair of Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee,
London Borough of Camden Council



As Chair of the Adult Social Care and Health scrutiny Committee in Camden I know that overview and scrutiny plays an important role in improving outcomes for our residents, especially in terms of health inequalities. More broadly a strong scrutiny function makes sure services meet resident needs, explores issues which impact the wellbeing of the borough and supports the Council by providing recommendations based on evidence and resident insight. Last year we launched our new vision for the borough, Camden 2025 and Our Camden Plan, and we are focused on ensuring scrutiny supports the delivery of the bold ambitions these documents set out.

We know that to deliver on our borough vision we will need to work closely with our communities and in Camden we have a strong history of using our scrutiny function to do this. For example, in 2015 I was Chair of a scrutiny panel which explored the health and wellbeing of our Bangladeshi community, putting them at the heart of our activities. Before we began, we recognised that working with one of our health partners would provide valuable insight, so we invited Shelly Khan from Healthwatch Camden (pictured) to be on the panel which worked really well.



The most important part of the panel's work was getting out and speaking to our local community so that we could learn from them and their experiences rather than relying solely on desk-based research. To hear from as many people as possible, we went to where people lived, worked and socialised rather than expecting them to come to us. Our approach involved holding local community

interviews, focus groups and key stakeholder interviews.

This approach helped us to meet with 286 people including pupils, students, teachers, support staff, Imams, board members, community leaders by going to schools, community centres, health centres, mosques and community festivals and events. The process was largely Member led and as Chair I played a lead role in arranging the meetings with our community and writing up their evidence to feed into our end report. Officers were able to assist in the setting up of some of the community meetings and Public Health colleagues provided us with a pictogram of health outcomes for the Bangladeshi community which was a great way to start our meetings. It was also really helpful to have the support of Healthwatch who not only held some of the community meetings but were also a great help when the report was being drafted.

We also engaged with young women and men under and over the age of 18 years, older residents and pensioners. This approach meant that we could use their insights to inform our recommendations and a positive by-product was that we were able to strengthen the council's relationship with our Bangladeshi community.

Having such a strong focus on listening to our communities meant that we were able to get a real sense of the issues they faced and their suggestions for improvement. Members on the panel and officers involved even remarked that they learnt a great deal about the hidden strength and resilience of our borough's Bangladeshi communities through having these conversations. The panel also had a longer lasting impact on residents as a number of programmes and projects have sprung from the networking that occurred at the meetings of the panel. A number of Council officers have also been able to use the resulting Bangladeshi health and wellbeing group to test programme or project ideas which has proved to be a really useful resource.

Building on the success of this panel, Camden's scrutiny, performance management culture and partnership approach has impacted the inclusivity and accessibility of Camden's leisure centres in line with the Cabinet Member for Supporting Culture and Communities' vision for a service that reaches out to underrepresented communities. By supporting officers with regular direct dialogue with our leisure centre operator there has been the beginnings of a change in the service ethos centred on making it easier for disadvantaged citizens to understand the leisure centre offer and how it can meet their needs for healthier living. The operator has bought into the vision, resulting in targeted service improvements over the past 12 months, including:

- More customer friendly and accessible marketing and communication material and activity, making it easy for citizens to understand and access the service
- New digital and printed key service information, e.g. concession membership options and prices made simple
- Introduction of first-time user webpages
- Staff training in supporting and helping customers with choosing the right membership based on their needs, especially 'first timers'

There is much more to be done to make our leisure centres fully inclusive, but the scrutiny process has put us on the right track.

2019 will be an exciting year for scrutiny in Camden as we will be focusing on extending the level of public engagement, we have so that we can work with our communities to align scrutiny with the ambitious aims set out in our borough vision, Camden 2025. Alongside this priority we know that at a time of financial challenge and uncertainty for local government the need for a strong and effective scrutiny function is vitally important. As such, over the coming year we will be actively working to ensure that Camden's scrutiny is even more strategic, outcomes focused and fosters a collaborative approach across our organisation, amongst Committees and beyond.

