

Scrutiny Review Workshop Breakout Room Notes

29 September 2021

Room 1

Cllrs Atkins, Bowen, Flunder, Gledhill, Hall, Herdman
Andrew Stokes, Sarah Porru Sally Hampton

- Due to the major changes with Health and Social Care some members were reluctant for the Health & Community Panels to be merged. Much consideration also needed to be given to environmental/climate change items. There could be occasions when it would be more effective for the 2 Panels to join on certain subjects.
- There should be a degree of flexibility as to when scrutiny panels met, meetings should be shorter, focus on more topical strategic issues and meet more frequently. Presentations should not be overlong.
- Duplication may occur if matters were dealt with by the County's Health & Care Committee and the SMDC Health Panel. It was highlighted that the Health Panel should focus on matters which were specific to the Moorlands.
- There were suggestions for the Health Panel to consider Primary Care and matters occurring outside of the County.
- Some members were of the opinion that they needed to feel they had more ownership of the improvement to policies
- More recommendations needed to be made by scrutiny panels and fewer reports should be received for noting.
- Pre-meetings were welcomed to assist with a questioning strategy and to ensure members were better prepared.
- There was agreement that more questions were required from members of the ruling group and an analysis of member participation at meetings was requested. A suggestion was made for Chairs to encourage more questions during meetings.
- The level of public involvement in meetings should be increased and the Council should publicise the work carried out by the scrutiny panels.

Room 2

Cllrs Hart, Hawkins, Holmes, Hoptroff, Jackson
Tanya Cooper, Pat Trafford

- Poor response to questionnaire – more needed.
- Agenda items arrive too late and often too big.
- SMDC not informing the public what we're doing e.g. Climate Change. As a result – rarely any feedback.
- Many members left in the cold. Scrutiny seems to be on a decision, not an idea.
- Recent Call-ins were badly put together.
- Questions need to be put directly to Portfolio Holders in advance to give chance to prepare an answer.

- Lack of involvement from Conservative members of Panels – silenced by the Leader.
- Huge agendas – too much too late. Needs bite-size chunks.
- Some members don't read in advance. Not the case at Resources.
- Resources – more able to pick out a relevant section to concentrate on.
- Need a 'progress' column in the WP, should be earlier in the agenda.
- Need more Panels with fewer members & smaller spheres of influence.
- Panels should be equal balance politically.
- Need less Panels – 3 ideal.
- Pre-meetings - won't work if cross-party. Labour already do their own.
- Pre-meetings - good where external guests are attending so that questions can be co-ordinated. Not needed if no guests.

Room 3

Cllrs Jones, Page, Plant, Price, Riley,
Neil Rodgers, Jacqui McKinlay

- Sceptical/ dismissive that members skills are considered when choosing committee chairs.
- Keen to see a members' skills audit take place so the leader know what's about each members' experience and skills and what they can bring to different roles and committees.
- Concern about the accessibility of meetings and opportunities due to the timings of meeting for those people working or with caring responsibilities.
- Concerned about the lack of challenge from the ruling group members in committee meetings. The opposition do lots of preparation and some others are not reading the papers.
- Would like to see less presentations and for information items at the meetings.
- A view that there is not enough business to keep all the committees busy and this leads to them being cancelled at the last minute.
- Some cabinet members do not take scrutiny seriously, if they are there, they do take accountability for items.
- Talk of needing more information to members more widely, rather than using scrutiny as a way to keep them informed and leading to more information sharing than scrutiny. This would help scrutiny meetings to be more focused.

Room 4

Cllrs Coleman, Ralphs, Roberts, Shaw, Sheldon, Swindlehurst, Taylor
Mark Trillo, Kate Grigg

- Discussion about the value of a pre-meet: some members had reservations around a potential doubling-up of work, but the need to keep it short and focussed on objectives and lines of inquiry rather than scripting or rehearsing was emphasised.

- Some members keen to use the pre-meet to bring their own professional/life experience into the process as well as co-ordinating that with other members, and take a lead on topics they are knowledgeable about.
- All members very keen to see more pre-decision scrutiny, and scrutiny getting involved at an earlier stage in decision-making.
- Administration members wanting to ensure that challenge was seen as positive.
- POLITICS: (formed the bulk of our discussion) all members a bit sceptical about scrutiny improvement as politics was seen as such a barrier. Leader very aware that politics cannot be removed from the situation and saw it as an issue in implementing any changes with scrutiny.
- Culture perceived by all as very us vs. them and a recognition that unless it is properly dealt with and members change the way in which they work then it will continue to hinder the process.
- The size of committees highlighted as an issue, and the fact that all members are rarely in attendance – many mentioned reviewing it to consider quality rather than quantity.