

WIRRAL COUNCIL

SCRUTINY PROGRAMME BOARD - 20th SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LAW, HR AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

GOOD SCRUTINY AWARDS – CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides details of the annual Good Scrutiny Awards which have been recently presented by the Centre for Public Scrutiny. The winners of the awards provide good examples of best practice in scrutiny and demonstrate the merits that have been achieved by scrutiny in some other authorities.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Centre for Public Scrutiny organises an annual 'Good Scrutiny Awards' scheme. Entries are open to any public sector organisations who are engaged in scrutiny. The awards, in its 3rd year, showcase the work of non-executives actively engaged in scrutiny and accountability across the public sector. This year, a record 95 entries were received. The winners of the awards were announced at the Centre for Public Scrutiny Annual Conference, held in June.

The entries demonstrated how scrutiny has enabled some of the most vulnerable groups to get their voices heard, showed innovative ways to save money and improve services, and exerted influence through imaginative use of the media and the scrutiny process.

- 1.2 The categories in the awards are explained in section 2 along with the winners of each award. Further detail for each winner is available in Appendices 1a to 1j. Although the awards are national, it is worth noting that five of this year's winners (out of ten categories) were geographical neighbours of Wirral:
- Warrington Borough Council
 - Cheshire West and Cheshire Council
 - Liverpool Guild of Students
 - Merseyside Police Authority
 - Liverpool Charity and Voluntary Services (LINK host)

2. Categories and Award winners

2.1 Overall Impact Award – Hertfordshire County Council

With only two officers supporting scrutiny, and in response to concerns about scrutiny's effectiveness and impact, Hertfordshire County Council changed their scrutiny structure and processes. A leaner, more focused way of working, with fewer committees, shorter reports, more robust recommendations, plus innovations such as a scrutiny café for their budget scrutiny process, have made scrutiny more effective and valued by a range of stakeholders. (For further detail, see Appendix 1a).

2.2 Accountable organisation of the year – Liverpool Guild of Students

Taking new steps to ensure increased accountability to its members, the Guild created a scrutiny function in 2009/10. The Board of Trustees wanted to ensure that they were helping the student community in the best ways possible by placing students at the heart of their planning and decision-making process. The Student Council has looked elsewhere to see what works in other settings and has recruited independent people from outside the university to help them develop their scrutiny function. (For further detail, see Appendix 1b).

2.3 Added Value – Warrington Borough Council

On receiving numerous complaints by the public regarding the town's largest cemetery, Warrington embarked on an ambitious project to raise standards and enable the bereaved to bury their loved ones with dignity and respect. By meeting with the citizens of Warrington who visited the cemetery and identifying realistic measures to deliver improvements, scrutiny has achieved success not only with significant long-term savings but also with addressing an issue of real local concern. (For further detail, see Appendix 1c).

2.4 Community Influence – London Borough of Enfield

In response to a spate of violent incidents resulting in the death of 5 young people in the borough, Full Council approved the establishment of a Scrutiny Commission to undertake a review into life opportunities for young people. Members worked with partners and listened to the views of young people in a variety of different contexts. From this they were able to build up a comprehensive picture of how to improve the quality of life for young people in the area. (For further detail, see Appendix 1d).

2.5 Innovation - Cheshire West and Chester Council

The Every Child Matters Select Panel in the new authority of Cheshire West and Chester carried out a review of how to enhance the lives and future prospects of children in the care of the council. Involving young people in such scrutiny reviews is not new – but the way that the scrutiny team went out of their way to engage young people in care and how they did so made this review different. (For further detail, see Appendix 1e).

2.6 Joint Working -

2.6.1 London Borough of Hounslow

A scrutiny review into Speech and Language Commissioning by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel has evolved into an area-wide commissioning pathfinder scheme of the same name proving that good scrutiny can make a difference. By bringing together the local authority, the PCT, the new NHS provider, schools and academics with parents and young people with special education needs (SEN), scrutiny has been able to start a movement within the local area that has attracted substantial funds and delivered tangible benefits for young people with SEN and their parents/carers. (For further detail, see Appendix 1f).

2.6.2 Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council undertook a review into child poverty as part of a project supporting the development of Save the Children's Child Poverty Solutions Website and Toolkit aimed at local authorities and partner agencies. The review brought together all 5 scrutiny committees and involved working closely with the Executive and local partners. Young people were able to feed into the review which sought to represent their experiences of poverty in the area. (For further detail, see Appendix 1g).

- 2.7 Practitioner of the year – Diane Clark, Merseyside Police Authority
Diane Clark is chair of the Police Authority’s Performance Scrutiny and Review Committee – an independent member who has taken the initiative to expand the scope of the committee beyond the traditional focus on police performance statistics to look at more fundamental issues of crime and disorder. (For further detail, see Appendix 1h).
- 2.8 Raising the profile – Birmingham City Council
Following a critical Annual Performance Assessment of children’s social services, Birmingham’s executive asked scrutiny to carry out an inquiry. The resulting report, entitled “Who Cares?”, was hard-hitting and received unprecedented local and national media coverage. The report’s recommendations were unanimously agreed cross-party and fully accepted by the executive. Scrutiny had an immediate and high-profile impact and is helping Birmingham tackle its deep-rooted and serious problems in children’s social care. (For further detail, see Appendix 1i).
- 2.9 Team of the Year – Liverpool Charity and Voluntary Services (LINK host)
The biggest LINK in the country has had a remarkable rise to prominence culminating in external recognition for its achievements. Facilitated by the Liverpool Charity and Voluntary Services, Liverpool LINK has prospered under governance structures which encourage and support the involvement of local people whilst ensuring that individual views do not become dominant. (For further detail, see Appendix 1j).

3 Financial implications

None

4 Staffing implications

None

5 Equal Opportunities implications

None

6 Community Safety implications

None

7 Local Agenda 21 implications

None

8 Planning implications

None

9 Anti-poverty implications

None

10 Human Rights implications

None

11 Social Inclusion implications

None

12 Local Member Support implications

None

13 Background Papers
None

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the report be noted.