

Notes
North East Scrutiny Officers' Network
Thursday 30 May 2024

Attendance:

Durham CC	Stephen Gwilym
Durham CC	Rachel Parker
Gateshead Council	Emma Fagan
Hartlepool Council	Joan Stevens
Hartlepool Council	Gemma Jones
Newcastle City Council	Jessica Hall
Newcastle City Council	Kate McLoughlin
North East Combined Mayoral Authority	Michael Robson
North East Combined Mayoral Authority	Gavin Armstrong
Northumberland CC	Sean Nicholson
Redcar & Cleveland Council	Alison Pearson
Redcar & Cleveland Council	Adam Lynch-Brown
South Tyneside Council	Jonathan Lunness
Stockton-on-Tees Council	Judy Trainer
Stockton-on-Tees Council	Gary Woods
Stockton-on-Tees Council	Michelle Gunn
Sunderland City Council	Nigel Cummings

Apologies

CfGS	Ed Hammond
Gateshead Council	Grace Anderson
Middlesbrough Council	Susan Lightwing
North Tyneside Council	Sonia Stewart
North Tyneside Council	Yvonne Harrison
Northumberland CC	Lynsey Denyer
South Tyneside Council	Emma Purvis

1. Meeting Schedule / Frequency of Meetings / Potential Agenda Items for Each Meeting

It was agreed that the timings of future meetings should remain 10am and be held quarterly on MS Teams. Newcastle offered to host the December meeting in person at their Civic Centre.

Action – December 2024 officer meeting to take place in person at Newcastle Civic Centre.

Items for the next agenda were identified, including how to engage members and examples of memorandums of understanding for working with health partners.

Action – A discursive item on a theme to be added as a standing item

Action – Memorandums of Understanding and Health Scrutiny Arrangements to be added to the next meeting agenda

Action – any further agenda items to be emailed to the Chair

2. North East Regional Scrutiny Members/Officers' Network (MS Teams)

Scrutiny processes for/collaborating with Combined Authorities and Development Corporations was identified as an item for the next agenda. Examples of models and best practice was requested from CfGS.

Other items identified for the agenda included feedback from scrutiny reviews and how the scrutiny function was conducted across the region, including areas for improvements.

Action – Suggested dates for future meetings would be circulated

Action – Combined Authority Scrutiny and Development Corporations to be added to the next joint meeting; Scrutiny Review Feedback and Scrutiny Structures be added as future agenda items

There had been a call out for nominations for Chair and Vice-Chair of the network, and one nomination had been received for the position of Chair. No nominations had been received for the Vice-Chair position and this would be recirculated.

Action – Judy Trainer will recirculate request for nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Members/Officers' Network.

3. Local Authority Updates

The only LA that had agreed its 2024/25 work programme at this stage was Stockton-on-Tees, who had committed to carrying out in-depth reviews to support the Council's transformation programme. The reviews chosen were those where it was felt scrutiny could add the most value. Other LAs were in the process of developing their work programmes as outlined below:

- Due to officer capacity, Durham's focus would be pre-policy development/approval before reports were presented at Cabinet. This included holding meetings and workshops to consider policies, and the Cabinet reports included a "you said/we did" section outlining the feedback from scrutiny and resulting actions.
- Northumberland and Redcar & Cleveland also carried out pre-decision scrutiny for Cabinet reports.
- Gateshead noted that their committee agendas currently focused on performance reporting and did not allow for meaningful discussion. They were changing the focus to evidence gathering so that scrutiny input could be demonstrated and had started to take Members on the journey towards that.
- Hartlepool were making room for the closer partnership-working between North Tees and Hartlepool Hospitals Trust and South Tees Hospitals Trust in their programme and wondered whether health partners would be reporting to individual LAs or to a joint body.
- Northumberland would not be starting any in-depth reviews for 2024/25 due to the local election in May 2025. Their work programme was not scheduled too far in advance so that they could be reactive to issues as they arose.

- Redcar & Cleveland were trying to introduce other aspects of scrutiny into their work programme and focus on using the time in meetings effectively. They had a long list of possible topics for the next programme including volunteer strategy, flood strategy, and waste management. They would be liaising with Cabinet Members and Directors to agree the programme.
- Sunderland was liaising with ICB colleagues when agreeing the health scrutiny programme. Quality of Water was one of the suggested topics.
- South Tyneside had a change of membership and, therefore, relooking at the scrutiny framework.
- Newcastle had a change in Chairs of their committees, and their meetings included a lot of showcase and information items. They would be engaging with Cabinet members this year to agree the work programme. They only conducted one task & finish review at a time and encouraging Members to think of the work they can be doing outside of meetings. They have planned a development session for all members.

Action – the spreadsheet outlining scrutiny work taking place across the region be recirculated in the Autumn for completion.

4. Update on the Establishment of NECA'S Scrutiny Arrangements

Michael Robson gave a presentation regarding the governance and scrutiny structures of NECA. This included

- Chair of scrutiny must be from a different political party than the mayor
- The authority could pay Overview & Scrutiny Committee members an allowance
- They would be two members of each local authority appointed to the Committee, along with two subs
- Planning to meet four times a year
- Committees work programme would be focused on longer term regional investment and growth and looking at a financial return on investments
- A Cabinet-Scrutiny Protocol would be formulated

Stephen Gwilym said he would welcome a conversation with NECA on the strategic element of their scrutiny work and how this would develop to avoid a disconnect.

The Tees Valley Combined Authority was discussed, and it was acknowledged that there is limited dialogue between LAs and TVCA.

5. Health Scrutiny Update

The mapping exercise across the Tees Valley Health Scrutiny Committees was highlighted, which was useful to identify items for individual Health Committees as well as if information and reports were being presented at the right Committee - individual LAs or joint committee. It was noted that, in Tees Valley, there was a Tees Valley Joint Committee and a South Tees Joint Committee, and it was questioned whether both were now needed.

Action – Gary Woods to circulate the mapping exercise

Discussion took place regarding relationships between scrutiny and the NHS/ICB and it was noted that a Memorandum of Understanding between all LAs and the ICB would be useful.

Discussion also took place regarding issues with engaging the CQC that several LAs were experiencing. Stephen Gwilym noted that during the onsite inspection of Durham Social Care, the inspectors spoke to their Scrutiny Chair and there was a commitment to present the report and improvement plan to the Committee. However, for other inspections they approach the organisation being inspected direct rather than the CQC.

6. CfGS Update

The update from CfGS was noted.

Potential topics for the two scrutiny surgeries were discussed and the following suggestions were put forward:

- Health Scrutiny, including development of protocols with ICSs and other health partners
- Combined Authority Scrutiny, including relationships between CAs and LAs

If the health session was not possible the following was alternative was identified:

- Promoting Scrutiny internally and externally, how to add value and work with stakeholders

Action – topic suggestions would be put forward to CfGS.

7. Any Other Business

There was no other business discussed

8. Date and Time of Future Meetings

Action – Suggested dates for July meeting would be circulated