

**Annual Scrutiny Conference 2011 - Evaluation of Feedback from Delegates**

**Report of the Chief Executive**

**1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The report summarises the feedback of Members, officers and partners who attended the 4th Annual Scrutiny Conference of 19 May 2011, 5.00-9.00pm at the Crowtree Leisure Centre in Sunderland.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 The scrutiny conference was attended by 91 delegates and the breakdown of attendance was as follows:

45 Members  
21 Officers  
11 Partners  
2 Co-opted Members  
12 Scrutiny and Area Team Staff (table anchors).

32 delegates returned evaluation forms to provide feedback on their conference experience.

**3. Findings**

**3.1 Venue and Facilities**

- 3.1.1 The conference was held in the main hall at Crowtree Leisure Centre. The venue was chosen as it was felt in the current economic climate an internal venue could provide the best value for money.

- 3.1.2 72% of delegates felt that the venue was either good or excellent, which is slightly less than the previous year's figure (when the event was held at the Marriott Hotel). A small number of attendees raised the issue that the lighting in the room was too bright. Background noise was raised as another issue with some delegates having difficulty hearing the speeches and also views and opinions round the Scrutiny Café tables.

- 3.1.3 Other comments provided by delegates included the largeness of the room which was felt to result in a loss of atmosphere, the lack of parking

nearby and the poor accessibility to the room (although it was acknowledged that efforts had been made to assist delegates).

## **3.2 Presentations and Speakers**

3.2.1 Welcome and closing remarks were given by Cllr David Tate, Chair of Management Scrutiny Committee. Speeches were also received from Cllr Harry Trueman, Deputy Leader and Canon Stephen Taylor, Chair of Sunderland Partnership.

3.2.2 97% of delegates regarded the speakers as either excellent or good. Some delegates commented that the presentations were informative and motivating although did not specify which presentation or speech in particular.

## **3.3 Scrutiny DVD**

3.3.1 In keeping with last year's good practice a short DVD was produced demonstrating the key areas of investigation carried out by each of the Scrutiny Committees during 2010/11. The focus of the DVD was the involvement of partners and how they have contributed to the evidence gathering process to deliver better outcomes for the city.

3.3.2 The DVD was highly regarded by delegates with 33% scoring it as excellent and 58% scoring it as good. Only 3 delegates thought it was average or poor. This shows great improvement on the opinions of the previous year's DVD which was considered mainly good to average.

3.3.3 One delegate commented that the DVD did not capture the purpose of the Sustainable Communities policy review very well, which suggests that perhaps more partners could have been included to give a more accurate portrayal.

## **3.4 Scrutiny Cafés**

3.4.1 In response to the excellent feedback from last year's conference it was agreed to continue the use of Scrutiny Cafés rather than breakout sessions. Scrutiny Cafés are based on a model where delegates are encouraged to write their ideas on the tablecloth. The Scrutiny Cafés gave Members, officers and partners the opportunity to share ideas at more than one table, which was considered useful for those who serve on more than one committee.

3.4.2 The majority of respondents regarded the Scrutiny Café sessions as excellent or good. It was felt that writing on the tablecloths was a fun way to share ideas and the issues from the previous year of ink transfers to

clothing and skin were addressed. Delegates found the Scrutiny Cafés to be a great way of capturing a range of ideas and opinions from a variety of stakeholders, however it was noted some tables were better represented than others.

3.4.3 In response to feedback from last year's conference, the Scrutiny Café sessions were extended to give delegates longer to debate and share ideas. However it was felt this was too long and that perhaps 45 minutes per Scrutiny Café session would be a more appropriate length.

3.4.4 Some delegates said they were pleased to be able to contribute to other Scrutiny Café discussions, not just the Scrutiny Committee they represent.

### **3.5 Partner Information Stands**

3.5.1 To complement the theme of the conference on partnership working, partners were invited to bring along information stands to demonstrate to delegates some of their key priorities for the year ahead. Partners in attendance were Sunderland Partnership, Gentoo, Sunderland LINK, Libra, Job Centre Plus, City of Sunderland College, Safer Sunderland Partnership and Sunderland Community Network. Sunderland City Council also displayed stands on the Compact and its involvement with the voluntary and community sector.

3.5.2 There were mixed reviews about the partner stands. Some delegates found them very informative and that more time would have been useful in order for them to visit each one. Whilst others said they did not visit the stands or even notice them. Overall, the majority of respondents felt the partner stands were good.

### **3.6 Catering and Refreshments**

3.6.1 A hot buffet meal was provided on arrival accompanied by tea, coffee and juice. Water was provided on the Scrutiny Café tables and tea and coffee was also available throughout the conference.

3.6.2 The majority of respondents were satisfied with the catering provided, 41% thought it was good and 31% regarded it as average. It was acknowledged however that the service was excellent. There was mixed opinions on the variation of food served, but it was understood that it is difficult to cater to everyone's tastes.

### **3.7 Organisation prior to the event**

3.7.1 Invitations were sent to delegates in January and followed up with a full programme and directions to the venue in early May. A pre-meeting had

been organised at 3.45pm for officers assisting with conference duties and 4.15pm for Members who had been asked to facilitate a Scrutiny Café session. For those who were unable to attend a briefing session an electronic briefing paper was sent to them in advance.

3.7.2 Information about the Scrutiny Conference had also been communicated to new members as part of their inductions.

3.7.3 37% of respondents regarded the preparation prior to the event as excellent and 38% felt it was good. This was an improvement on the previous year's figure. A small minority (8 delegates) felt the advance organisation was average or poor, but did not give reasons why.

3.7.4 One new member felt that more information in advance would have been helpful to them due to being unfamiliar with the Scrutiny process.

### **3.8 Conclusions**

3.8.1 Overall the majority of those who responded regarded the Annual Scrutiny Conference 2011 as excellent (23%) or good (71%).

Most of all delegates enjoyed the Scrutiny Cafés and the opportunity to discuss issues and network with other stakeholders. Partner representation was highly regarded as it gave the opportunity to share knowledge about issues affecting the city. The openness of the discussions was considered helpful by delegates.

The DVD was also considered as a highlight of the conference and was considered a good motivator before breaking out into Scrutiny Café sessions.

3.8.2 The following aspects were given as suggested areas of improvement:

- Better lighting to be provided
- More efforts to reduce background noise
- Less time at each Scrutiny Café table
- More information in advance for new Members
- Ensure a more varied representation of stakeholders at each Scrutiny Café table (some too officer heavy, some not enough partner representation)
- Only one round table per Scrutiny Committee

3.8.3 Overall, 94% of respondents commented that they felt the conference was either excellent or good which indicates the high success of the Annual Scrutiny Conference 2010/11.

#### **4. Looking Forward**

4.1 An event such as the Scrutiny Conference takes a lot of planning and organisation to ensure the event delivers on its intended aims. To this end the planning begins almost immediately for the 2012 event. It is proposed, with Members agreement, to hold the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Scrutiny Conference on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

4.2 The Scrutiny Conference, as members will be aware, has been held at various times during the day with an evening slot being the preferred choice for the most recent events. Members may wish to consider the timing of the event and look at again holding this in the evening or moving the event to a morning or afternoon slot.

4.3 The venue is a crucial aspect of such a conference as it sets the tone and creates the atmosphere for the activities to be undertaken. With this in mind it is also proposed that Members give consideration to the National Glass Centre as the venue for next years event.

#### **5. Recommendations**

5.1 That Members note the contents of the report and provide any further feedback in relation to the conference.

5.2 That Members consider the date, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2012, timing and venue for next years Scrutiny Annual Conference.

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