

Annual Scrutiny Debate 2016 - 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 9th Annual Scrutiny Event held on 14 June 2016 at Bede Tower in Sunderland.

2. Background

- 2.1 The scrutiny conference was attended by 88 delegates and the breakdown of attendance was as follows:

47 Members
20 Officers
13 Partners
2 Co-opted Members
6 Scrutiny and Area Team Staff.

26 delegates returned evaluation forms to provide feedback on their experience at the debate.

3. Findings

3.1 Venue and Facilities

- 3.1.1 The conference was held, for the first time, at Bede Tower. The venue was chosen for its close proximity to the Civic Centre, car parking and providing good value for money.
- 3.1.2 92% of delegates who responded (11 excellent and 13 good out of 26 respondents) felt that the venue was either good or excellent, which is a significant improvement on previous years. The venue was rated as a well presented venue with excellent access, although it was mentioned that there was insufficient parking.

3.2 Presentations and Speakers

- 3.2.1 Welcome and closing remarks were given by Cllr Norma Wright, Chair of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee. Speeches were also received from Cllr Paul Watson, Leader of the Council, Vince Taylor, Head of Strategy & Performance, Phillip Foster, Chief Operating Officer, Sunderland Care & Support, Gillian Gibson, Director of Public Health, and Simon Marshall, Director of Education.
- 3.2.2 92% of delegates who responded (10 excellent and 14 good out of 26 respondents) regarded the speakers as either excellent or good. Delegates identified the speeches as being very focused, clear and informative, and that everyone spoke exceptionally well. The presentations provided by the Director of Public Health and the Director of Education were highlighted as being particularly enlightening for the scrutiny agenda.

3.3 Question and Answer Panel Debate

- 3.3.1 A new aspect of the debate was the question and answer session held immediately after the presentations. This provided an opportunity for the assembled delegates to question the panel on key themes raised in their presentations and explore the role for scrutiny over the coming year.
- 3.3.2 The Q and A session scored well with 38 % delegates rating the session excellent and 42% rating it as good. Only 2 delegates thought it was satisfactory. There were a number of positive comments around the session including that it was well structured and that the presentations helped to prompt the Q and A session. There were also a number of comments that can be taken forward to improve this aspect of the debate with a number of delegates commenting that there was insufficient time for the session and that questions should be concise and to the point.
- 3.3.3 This is a positive start to a very new aspect of the scrutiny debate and one that can only improve. The constructive comments made will help to develop this feature of the debate in future years.

3.4 Catering and Refreshments

- 3.4.1 The majority of respondents were satisfied with the catering provided, 73% thought it was excellent or good, although one respondent did score the catering as poor. Comments were also favourable citing a good mix of snacks and enough for everyone. There was however a comment that more water could have been available.

3.5 Organisation of the event

- 3.5.1 Most respondents felt that the event had been well organised with 85% (22 out of 24 respondents) rating it either excellent or good. The only comments related to ensuring that information about the event and the programme could be made available much earlier for attendees.

3.6 The Debate – Likes and Dislikes

- 3.6.1 With any new format it is very important to gauge the feeling of the audience and there were some comments that provided a useful insight for future planning of similar events.
- 3.6.2 In terms of what delegates liked about the new style event the following comments were recorded:
- The speakers were succinct and well-structured combining and assimilating information for members.
 - Listening to new Director of Education. Now I will sit back and see how plan works out
 - Hearing about the core strategy (Vince)
 - All of it
 - Length brief
 - New format
 - Useful to have round table discussion
 - The debate / Q&A
 - Vince Taylor's speech
 - Q&A
 - Q&A
 - Speeches
 - Good speeches but this led the event – I am sure there would be more questions – a shame when everyone available.
- 3.6.3 Similarly in terms of what could be improved upon the following comments were identified:
- A lot of information to take in but not sure how else event could have been delivered
 - Understanding how this influences the selection of scrutiny topics
 - Q&A
 - Venue
 - Maybe follow up asking for topics or areas to review / challenge
 - Explain balance between scrutiny and policy review but Cllr Smith's question to panel helped address this.
 - Another 10-15 minutes for questions may have encouraged more questions
 - Longer
 - Q&A session could have been longer

- Discussions in our own groups

3.7 Conclusions

3.7.1 Overall the majority of those who responded regarded the Annual Scrutiny Debate 2016 as excellent (27%) or good (58%).

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

- Use this venue again.
- Give partners the opportunity to inform the selection of topics in advance before or after the event but before final selection to ensure best value for all.
- Suggestion box for ideas
- Keep it fresh
- Venue
- More interactive – opportunity for in depth debate
- Look at how we can gather the views of outside bodies and get them more involved in the event
- This year was an improvement on recent years
- I feel this is the best scrutiny debate to date. The new format seemed to work well with topics for discussion not predetermined
- It is good – can't think of anything else that would improve

3.7.3 The Scrutiny Debate is a well-established event in the council diary and has served its purpose over the years, providing a suitable vehicle for deliberating key policy topics. However the introduction of a new scrutiny model provided an opportune moment to refresh the scrutiny event to reflect this change. It is often difficult to replace a tried and trusted formula but the general consensus from those in attendance and the evaluation forms are very encouraging. Although there is always room for improvement and the feedback received will help to develop the event over the coming years.

4. Recommendations

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

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