

CfPS Annual Report to LGA 2013-14



Introduction

The LGA-CfPS Partnership Agreement requires an annual report to the LGA Leadership Board to provide accountability for the funding which LGA gives to CfPS (£190k in 2013-14) in order to support sector-led improvement through improving local authority scrutiny and governance arrangements. CfPS's Annual Review 2013-14 – a copy of which is attached to this covering report – sets out the overall picture of our activities during 2013-14, including a summary of our financial position. This brief report provides more detail on the specific activities in 2013-14 arising from the partnership with the LGA and on our planned work programme for 2014-15, which has been discussed and agreed with LGA representatives.

2013-14 support for sector-led improvement

Scrutiny: We support well-used and valued on-line networks for scrutiny officers and members, giving access to regular updates, briefings and peer support through our on-line forum (168 new members in 2013-14 and over 26,000 individual visits), and provide a highly-rated helpdesk service for detailed bespoke advice, used by 48 local authorities in 2013-14.

125 organisations represented by 273 delegates attended our Annual Conference and Good Scrutiny Awards 2013, for which Cllr Peter Fleming, Chair of LGA Improvement and Innovation Board, was a judge. 90% delegates rated the conference useful or very useful, with 80% saying it was value for money.

Other LGA programmes have also commissioned us to do specific pieces of work, including the only national evaluation of the first year of operation of Police and Crime Panels, targeted support to a number of PCPs that were struggling, and a well-received national workshop and report on case studies of how scrutiny can support school improvement and link councils' continuing statutory education duties to wider aspirations for children and young people.

Governance: We worked with LGA to develop a 'thinking toolkit' to help local authorities think through the issues involved in changing governance, described by one local authority as an "excellent and realistic approach to changing governance arrangements, uncomplicated by any

ideological leaning”. A dozen councils were referred to us by LGA for free support to help them improve member scrutiny and governance, described by one authority as “transformative”.

Induction & Training: We provided bespoke training, governance reviews and leadership development for 58 organisations to help them improve governance and scrutiny practice and develop skills in holding decision-makers to account. Two regions – the North-West and London – commissioned us to run regional training and development programmes for their scrutiny networks and we organised 34 national and regional networking and learning events for local authorities. (Some of these were funded through other programmes such as our DOH-funded health scrutiny support programme and our Welsh Government-funded programme in Wales).

‘Rewiring’: We continued to support the case made in ‘Rewiring Public Services’ for greater devolution, including developing our innovative local Public Accounts Committee concept which has been adopted by the Local Government Innovation Taskforce of the Labour Party and is being piloted in the Tri-Borough authorities. We produced a detailed piece of research, “Growth through good governance”, which explored the broad context for sub-regional economic development (LEPs and combined authorities) and offered practical advice on ways to enhance effective governance, ideas developed from “Rewiring Public Services”.

2014-15 support for sector-led improvement

The Annual Review sets out our overall plans for the future. Our **Local Accountability** programme contains the work to which the LGA’s agreed funding of £170k in 2014-15 contributes, and which seeks to deliver stronger local, democratic, place-based governance, including more effective commissioning and oversight of finances and risks. There are three key elements within this programme:

Sector-led improvement and transformation – we will be working with 5 local areas to help them improve how they use governance and scrutiny to deliver effective transformation and service-improvement, and demonstrate how good governance contributes to improvement, using our established ‘return on investment’ through scrutiny methodology.

Commissioning – we will be working with the Commissioning Academy and LGA to support 5 local areas to help them improve how they use governance and scrutiny to provide assurance, transparency and involvement of local people in their commissioning processes, and contribute to national guidance on effective commissioning in this area.

Local Government Support – this is our universal offer to all local authorities and part of maintaining a national centre of expertise in overview and scrutiny for local government to access, and will include:

- Practice Guides – a suite of 14 short, practical guides to best practice in the basics of overview and scrutiny (13 already produced);
- Helpdesk advice, on-line networks, updates and discussion forum (which we intend to augment through use of the Knowledge Hub to facilitate the sharing of learning between Scrutiny Development Areas on transformation and commissioning (see above));
- Proactive free support to authorities referred to us by LGA as part of sector-led improvement and support for a number of Corporate Peer Challenges during the year where scrutiny / governance is identified as an issue;
- Annual Conference, Good Scrutiny Awards and Parliamentary Seminars to promote and share good practice and new thinking, and an officer exchange programme between local authority scrutiny units and staff in the House of Commons, to take place in spring/summer 2015;
- Enhanced support for regional overview and scrutiny networks (officers and members), including facilitating regional training and development funds, as we are currently doing in London and the North East, and as we did last year in the North West;
- Annual Survey of Overview and Scrutiny, which will help evaluate the impact of this support as well as provide a picture of the health of scrutiny practice across the country.

In addition we will work with other programme areas within LGA as requested on a commissioned basis. So far this includes:

Domestic violence and female genital mutilation – production of a policy briefing and a “10 questions” guide, and contribution to an LGA-produced guide to assist scrutiny practitioners in investigating these issues more effectively, identified as a priority within LGA’s Community Safety programme;

Quality Map – a brief guide to the roles and responsibilities of Local Healthwatch, Health OSCs, Quality Surveillance Groups and HWBs;

Education – follow-up to last year’s project on scrutiny and school improvement, focusing on how ward councillors can get more involved in schools improvement in their patch;

Health & Social Care integration – support for a national health scrutiny initiative examining progress in integration at local level.

Councillors and Complaints – a joint publication for all councillors agreed as part of the LGA response to the Clwyd-Hart report on dealing with complaints.

Councillor skills – delivering a two-day Leadership Essentials in Scrutiny residential course for LGA Leadership team at Warwick University in October – already fully booked with a waiting list and potential to run a further session if demand continues.

Governance and process

Cllr Tony Jackson sits as an LGA-nominated Trustee on the CfPS Board of Trustees and his input is greatly valued, and on our Advisory Board we have four places for members nominated by the LGA political groups and one officer place held by Dennis Skinner. The Executive Director of CfPS has monthly meetings with Dennis Skinner, Head of Leadership & Productivity, and quarterly meetings with Michael Coughlin, LGA Executive Director. CfPS also provides updates as required to the Improvement and Innovation Board. During 2013-14 practical links with LGA Principal Advisers have improved and are now strong, with regular contact, mutual sharing of information and more referrals of authorities needing CfPS support.

We are grateful for LGA's continued support and contribution to CfPS's work, and hope this short report and the Annual Review demonstrate that we are able to achieve a great deal for local government with a relatively small amount of funding and a small team of 3.6 staff (plus a further 5 funded from other sources).

Jessica Crowe

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