

## **Centre for Public Scrutiny – Annual Report 2014-15**

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### **Introduction**

1. The purpose of this report is to update the LGA Leadership Board on the work of the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) during 2014/15.
2. CfPS is commissioned by the LGA to support sector-led improvement through improving local authority scrutiny and governance arrangements. The LGA provided funding of £171k for 2014/15 and details of the work delivered can be found below. A copy of the CfPS Annual Report 2014/15 can also be found at Appendix A.

### **Recommendation**

3. The Leadership Board is asked to note the update and provide feedback to inform the future work of CfPS work in promoting and supporting excellent scrutiny and governance in local government.

### **Background**

4. CfPS was founded in 2003 by the LGA, CIPFA and the LGiU with the aim of being a national centre of excellence to support local government in delivering its scrutiny obligations. Since then it has established itself as the leading national expert on scrutiny across the wider public sector and how this fits within a broader governance framework.
  5. Our close partnership with the LGA over the last 12 years has led to our being a driving force on local governance issues and the go-to organisation when assistance is required by any council on complex governance issues or intervention is required following service or other failings.
  6. CfPS' reach into the wider public sector through the work we do with health, regulators, housing, police, government, schools and the third sector puts us in a unique position to bind together the whole system. It allows us to identify and share best practise and be truly outcome-focused. The work we carry out through separate funding streams also benefits councils, for example on health and care system improvement.
  7. From an organisational perspective, CfPS has undergone changes in 2014/15. At the start of the year it reorganised to refocus its work around local accountability, health and social care, and children and young people. The LGA funding is principally directed to the local accountability programme but some work is funded in other areas. There have also been changes in leadership as
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Lord Bob Kerslake took on the role of Chair when Nick Raynsford MP stood down and Jacqui McKinlay became Executive Director following the departure of Jessica Crowe. Trustees are confident that these changes put CfPS in an excellent position to build on its track record to date but also adapt quickly to meet the changing demand from local government and the wider public sector.

8. In relation to governance and working relations, Cllr Tony Jackson sits as an LGA-nominated Trustee on the CfPS Board of Trustees and his input is greatly valued. On the CfPS 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 regular meetings with Dennis Skinner, Head of Leadership & Productivity. CfPS also provides updates as required to the Improvement and Innovation Board. 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.

## **2014/15 Programme Update**

### **Local accountability programme**

#### Direct support to local government

9. The LGA funding this year delivered the following:
- Comprehensive support has been delivered to ten councils as a result of commissions from LGA Principal Advisors. Each council was allocated 3 days support which ranged from advice and guidance on governance change to assisting with a rewrite of a council constitution. We have received universally positive responses from PAs and councils on the quality of these interventions and their improved ability to contribute to good decision-making and governance.
  - Provided support to 55 local authorities in 2014/15 through our helpdesk function – ranging from providing answers to basic questions about legislation and scrutiny practice, through providing advice on political difficulties and access to information, to seeking to mediate in a disagreement between a scrutiny committee and the owners of an agricultural waste plant.
  - Participated in two corporate peer challenges (Rushmoor and Lichfield) where the council had specifically asked for expert assistance on governance.
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- Provided expert advice to LGA officer and councillor colleagues on a range of governance issues – particularly governance change.
  - Provided bespoke training and development assistance to 24 councils with overall satisfaction figures of over 85% (judged by both quantitative survey feedback and qualitative feedback from clients). Some of this work is charged at cost to the councils and the funding is fed back into supporting our mission to promote and support excellent scrutiny and governance. We also provided regional support to a further 48 councils as part of jointly-funded training and development programmes in London and the north east.
  - Delivered a successful Annual Conference and awards ceremony, with 54 organisations represented by 99 delegates attending. 90% of delegates rated the conference as useful or very useful.
  - Continued to lead the debate on governance and devolution, producing a more detailed paper on our idea for local Public Accounts Committees.

### Programme outcomes

10. We gauge the impact of our work through a number of means – principally by asking questions of practitioners as part of our Annual Survey of overview and scrutiny in local government. We received a response from 80% of councils in England and Wales, with respondents being asked questions about CfPS' performance and impact. Feedback included:

- Over 72% of respondents advised CfPS' work had a positive impact on their work in the last year
- 37% of respondents considered that our Practice Guides had had an impact on their day-to-day work, with our note on lessons for scrutiny from Rotherham and Mid-Staffs having had an impact for 36%. This suggests that we have secured a direct impact from these two publications alone of 100 councils each.

Practitioners said of us, and of our support:

- "CfPS as a national champion for scrutiny and independent resource for scrutineers is invaluable"
  - "We have received a lot of support from CfPS in a number of ways with both officers and members. Recommendations have been given to us which we are progressing. Their input has been invaluable."
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- “The annual conference was very useful and the reviews library is a good resource. In general though it is very helpful to have a body reinforcing the principles of effective public scrutiny.”
  - “We use a few of your key papers as a reference for good practise. Your libraries online are a tremendously important resource - especially the library of other authorities' reviews. We have used or attended various meetings and bits of training which have your badge on them either because you attended, spoke, funded or organised it”.
  - “You provide a lobbying hub - we expect you to speak up for Scrutiny at a national level.”

11. In addition to this broad scrutiny and governance support, CfPS also delivered the following projects as part of the funding:

#### Transformation and commissioning

- In a unique project, CfPS provided targeted support to nine areas as they developed ways to plan the governance of major transformation and service change projects. Our support was aimed at helping councils to understand how the role of non-executive councillors, in particular, could be made integral to this. From this work, we published “The change game” in June 2015, summarising the lessons learned from this support. Our findings centred on the use by councillors of accurate information and the building of positive working relationships. We were able to disseminate a wider range of practice tips for councils seeking to address transformation as well. CfPS received positive feedback from the council’s involved, the LGA and national press coverage following the launch of the report, and the work’s outcomes are being fed into 2015/16 activity.

#### Domestic violence

- We produced two pieces of LGA-funded work on domestic violence:
  - A policy briefing for scrutiny practitioners, setting out the fundamentals and introducing some of the concepts for those interested in undertaking scrutiny reviews on the issue;
  - A “10 questions” guide, providing more practical support on the kinds of questions that scrutiny practitioners might want to ask about domestic violence.
- We also contributed to an LGA publication on FGM.

### **Further LGA commissioned work in 2014/15**

12. In addition to the main LGA contract, CfPS were also commissioned by the LGA to deliver:

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- a. Safeguarding publications – advice and guidance on the role of scrutiny of safeguarding and looked after children. These are proving to be particularly popular with councils.
  - b. Role of Councillors in school improvement – a publication supporting councillors in building better relations with their local schools to support school improvement and community capacity.
  - c. Health and social care integration inquiry days and publication – the contribution of council scrutiny to whole system approaches to integration.

### **2015-16 LGA Programme outline**

13. There are three elements to the local accountability programme is 2015/16:

#### **Project 1: Devolution**

Working alongside the LGA, targeted support will be delivered to four or five areas undertaking negotiations with Government over devolution deals, to explore with them how good governance can be built into devolved working arrangements from the outset. We will share the progress of this work throughout the year, and a final report. We will also seek to influence Government by suggesting amendments to the Devolution Bill, and working with national policymakers to ensure that the role of governance is more prominent in Government's thinking on this issue.

#### **Project 2: major service change**

Provide support to ten councils, identified by the LGA, to enhance how they involve non-executive councillors through the process of major service change. The experiences of this support will feed into three short publications– one on return on investment, one on risk and resilience, and a final one setting out a “state of the nation” on governance, change and devolution.

#### **Project 3: local government support**

In addition to our helpdesk offer, more of our support will be focused on existing local support networks. We will also be launching a new website which will make our offer clearer and more easily accessible for councillors and officers. We are running a small set of training and development events to test the market for a broader national training offer for officers and members. The annual conference will be held in November 2016 with a broader governance and scrutiny theme.

We will be replacing the Annual Survey, with an ongoing approach to recording information about councils, their scrutiny work and the challenges they face. This approach will also allow us to be

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more proactive in targeting our support. We are evaluating the best way for CfPS to celebrate good scrutiny practice in the future by taking a different approach to the Good Scrutiny Awards.

Through organising roundtables and partnering with organisations such as SOLACE and CIPFA we will promote the importance of good scrutiny and governance amongst senior local government leaders, officers and partners.

### **Recommendation and next steps**

14. CfPS is pleased to submit this update and believes it demonstrates the vital contribution the organisation makes whilst also providing excellent value for money.
15. The Leadership Board is asked to note the update and provide feedback to inform the work of CfPS work in promoting and supporting excellent scrutiny and governance in local government.

Jacqui McKinlay  
Executive Director, CfPS

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