

**ACE: LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY CHAIRS:**

**C f PS: Centre for Public Scrutiny**  
**Westmoreland Hotel, Orton, Penrith, Cumbria**  
**Monday 27<sup>th</sup> October – Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2008**  
**Overview & Scrutiny Chairs & Vice Chairs single module of the IDeA,s**  
**Leadership Academy.**

REPORT BY Councillor Paul Whalley.

Colleagues

I am aware that you do receive many reports so I will try to keep this report on the above course that myself & Cllr Robin Pitt attended, detailed but sticking to the main points of this 2 day course we attended along with other District Councillors from the 6 Districts that make up Cumbria including County Councillors also.

The programme was in depth and started by introducing us to the 4 main principles of effective Scrutiny.

- 1 Critical Friend Challenge to Executive policy-makers and decision- makers.
- 2 Enables the voice & concerns of the public & its communities.
- 3 Carried out by Independent minded governors who lead & own the Scrutiny role.
- 4 Drives Improvement in public services.

This was followed by Leading & owning the Scrutiny Agenda. Temperaments framework: Understanding personal leadership styles & preferences.

This included Scoping, laying down ground rules of questioning when scrutinising a call in. The outcomes of the call in and finished report, and whether there is a need for a follow up review of the item scrutinised to trace the effectiveness of the call in.

Action learning brought the first morning to a conclusion. This enabled those present to break into 4 groups to discuss personal leadership challenges & draw on facilitated peer learning. Points raised were, some of those involved in scrutiny always take the party line, lack of expertise, weak Chairs of Scrutiny, those who never ask Questions at Scrutiny, those who hog the floor at Scrutiny, partners not being brought in.

The afternoon session started with Hot Topic 1, of which during the training there were a total of 4 of these lasting 20 minutes each. Hot Topics can be anything raised from the attendees. An example of one of these was those Councillors who do not read their Agendas/Papers. Examples from among the Councillors there attempted to show how this may be overcome without use of the big stick.

The main item of the first day afternoon was to show how to enable the voice of the public in Scrutiny. This included Scenarios on planning Scrutiny call in, agreeing aims of a review, witnesses and evidence hearings.

After a further Hot Topic this was followed by a further Action learning session, there were 3 in total during the course and as before we broke into groups to explore a particular situation that an attendee was currently experiencing and how other members of the group could advise/question the person on the particular problem

within their Authority. It is worth remembering that what was discussed at these sessions was agreed stayed within the group.

The final item on day one was a Master Class. Influencing and having an impact beyond the local authority's boundaries. Including shopping around to other Authorities, maximising the Capital reports, Use of I.T.

Finish of day one was dinner at 7-30pm and believe me Colleagues it had been a long day with much covered on that first day but all of it very much aimed at the point of the course.

Day 2 started at 9am with Hot Topic 3 followed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final Action Learning session.

The main session of the morning was Political relationships and Skills. This centred on Chairing Scrutiny meetings in a Political Environment, planning control of meetings and how this could be the most contentious parts of setting up a meeting.

The role play that followed centred on Critical Friend Challenge. We were broken down into 3 groups who covered 3 different scenarios. 1 on homelessness, 1 on the building of a new hospital, 1 on crime & disorder partnership. In all 3 cases the aim was to turn political statements into effective questioning of Executive members, officers, and external partners. This turned out to be a very practical way of putting together an actual case that would be familiar to all members who have been involved in a call in either internally or externally.

The final afternoon session followed on from the above, but concentrated on the monitoring and follows up the recommendations from the cases we had covered.

The final session was a reflection on what we had covered during the 2 day course. Networking as always proved to be invaluable, the consensus was that the course was well put together and had shown how different Authorities put together Scrutiny/Scrutiny call ins. It has to be said that all Authorities were in agreement on the invaluable assistance we get from Scrutiny officers, and colleagues most Authorities in Cumbria have just the 1 officer which again we agreed should be looked at even if we just went for an assistant to our current officer. The risk of burn out was we agreed a possibility with the ever increasing role of Scrutiny.

The final comment came from the newest and youngest Councillor there who commented that he found it refreshing that during the 2 days we were able to work together despite the differing political affiliations, I couldn't argue with that. I will point out it was generally acknowledged that how we set up a call in within Copeland Council with scoping, agreed questions sent out in advance, was accepted as a sound way of doing a call in.

Finally, my thanks to our democratic member services for arranging these courses for us to go on and their help in general. Oh and yes the stay at Tebay I can recommend, it provided an ideal setting in which to give total concentration for this course, hopefully it can be used again for its accessibility.