

Local Government Scrutiny Development Fund 2008/2009

14 May 2008

Brian Gibbons, Minister for Social Justice and Local Government

I am today pleased to launch the Local Government Scrutiny Development Fund. I will be making available £100,000 to support the improvement of local scrutiny arrangements across Wales during this financial year.

Background

Since the Local Government Act 2000 came into force in April 2002, the development and success of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Authorities has been varied. Whilst there is evidence of innovative practice, robust and effective scrutiny, some Local Authorities need to invest further in their capacity for overview and scrutiny. I recognise that a number have made some progress and are keen to build on those arrangements or to explore further the powers of scrutiny across public services within the area.

However, post Beecham, in view of the establishment of Local Service Boards and the considerable array of other organisational partnerships, robust scrutiny arrangements are more important than ever. Whilst Overview and Scrutiny committees will continue to scrutinise council services, I expect them to become more outward looking, informing and challenging all of those that deliver services to their local citizens. They must also challenge their own direction, actions, effectiveness, efficiency, and the value they add.

The Scrutiny Development Fund

This Scrutiny Development Fund will provide extra support to improving public services in Wales by encouraging strengthened Overview and Scrutiny arrangements within Local Authorities and by developing wider scrutiny collaboration with key partners across the public services. It will provide initial funding towards costs associated with developing robust overview and scrutiny arrangements that are capable of informing and challenging decision and policy makers across the public sector. Better scrutiny is a precursor to driving the continual improvement in services for citizens that this Government expects.

The Fund will help projects that stimulate significant changes to the scrutiny culture within local Councils, other public sector and partner bodies, and amongst the public. We will achieve this through the introduction of new and/or externally proven ways of working as well as innovation. In order to access the Fund, projects must involve a strategic partnership approach with other Councils or other public sector organisations. Greater weight will be given in the selection process to those projects that are rooted in joint working and benefit to more than one Council.

As of today, I am inviting all Local Authorities to work with their partners to submit bids to us to undertake projects that will

- Support the sustainable development of Overview and Scrutiny in local government to enable a step change in improving the scrutiny culture;
- Deliver improved Overview and Scrutiny of services and issues across the public sector in line with the Welsh Assembly Government's "Making the Connections" agenda and its Policy Statement 'A Shared Responsibility' in particular in relation to the introduction to Local Service Boards;
- Promote a citizen centred approach to overview and scrutiny;

- Address key barriers currently preventing improvements being made to the scrutiny of services across the public sector;
- Encourage collaboration between bodies;
- Secure the commitment of Leaders, Chief Executive's and partners to improving Overview and Scrutiny;
- Provide a clear case of additionality for funding;
- Produce sustainable benefits that can be replicated and applied more widely across Wales
- Encourage dissemination of lessons learnt and best practice

Citizen centred governance

Overview, Scrutiny and accountability arrangements are key to ensuring excellent citizen centred governance arrangements resulting in and well run, efficient, effective and joined up public services. To do this, overview, scrutiny and accountability arrangements themselves need to be citizen centred and well run. They should always

- Put the citizen first;
- Ensure that everybody knows who does what and;
- Embody public service values;
- Engage with others;
- Foster innovative delivery;
- Learn and promote learning; and
- Achieve and ensure value for money

Conclusion

I am committed to promoting and supporting the collaborative model of public service delivery. For that to work effectively, we must be sure that there are sufficient mechanisms to effectively scrutinise and challenge the direction, delivery and quality of those services. Together with the range of other initiatives that the Government is undertaking in this area, the Scrutiny Development fund will play an important new role in this vital area.