



Lewes District Council

Communications Plan

Scrutiny

Lewes District Council

Version1 : November 2013

Contact: Rachel Allan, Scrutiny and Committee Officer
Email: Rachel.allan@lewes.gov.uk
Telephone: 01273 471600

Context

Scrutiny is now moving into another era with community-led scrutiny of local decisions, where the public's involvement in challenging local authorities and public service providers on public service improvement and delivery is actively sought by Councillors. It is important to ensure that Lewes District Council had a clear communications plan.

Resources

The main resource is officer time, but through embracing social media the resource implication in this plan is low. However, scrutiny now has an allotted budget, part of which could be utilised to further communicate scrutiny.

Community Engagement

Community Engagement is key to Lewes District Council, as highlighted by the work undertaken by The Democratic Society which set out its [Principles of Participation](#).

It is the responsibility of the Scrutiny Officer and all Councillors on the Scrutiny Committee to act as advocates for Scrutiny, and promote it as an important mechanism of the Council to residents and organisations within the District,

Further work will be undertaken on an annual basis to engage with residents and organisations to ensure that suggestions by organisations and members of the public are included as part of the annual work plan. This will take place through:

- Meetings with Town and Parish Councils
- Promotion through the press and social media
- Meeting with other stakeholders and organisations

Work will also be undertaken with young people. There is increasing research by the Centre for Public Scrutiny that young people are a key stakeholder in scrutiny work, and work will be undertaken to plan how Scrutiny at the Council could engage with that group.

At a recent scrutiny review, participants were asked how they found out about the event. Word of mouth and email were the most popular, with few reading about the coverage in the local paper. Therefore, more face to face meetings will encourage more participation in the scrutiny process.

Scrutiny at the Council also have the power to co-opt representatives of organisations, or members of the public to any Committee or Panel. This should be considered and planned ahead of time.

Publicity

As Scrutiny is an excellent opportunity to engage with the public and external agencies, clear, timely and appropriate communication is needed in order to:

- (1) Ensure that councillors and officers are aware of and understand Scrutiny.
- (2) Promote the value added by Scrutiny and provide information on Scrutiny outcomes.
- (3) Promote the work of Scrutiny at Lewes District Council locally, regionally and nationally.

Scrutiny already has statutory provisions in place to publicise meetings, through the website and public notices in parts of the District. However, it is important to utilise new methods to engage.

A key way to do this, is to use the topic area to sell scrutiny, rather than scrutiny itself. It is important to understand that residents are unlikely to understand what a Scrutiny Committee is, but they do care about housing in their local area. This worked well with the Scrutiny Review into the voluntary sector which engaged with many groups and individuals.

Press releases will be released after every Scrutiny review, and other important events in the Scrutiny calendar. However, as demonstrated that publicity in the local media does not work, press releases will never be the sole method of communication. Depending on the topic, individual organisations will be targeted and invited to take part, as well as engagement through social media.

A series of roadshows in public areas (such as shopping centres) to promote Scrutiny will be run by the Scrutiny and Committee Officer and any members of the Scrutiny Committee at appropriate times.

Measuring Success

Lewes District Council also has a series of measures in place to monitor the success of scrutiny work at Lewes District Council.

Measure	10/11	11/12	12/13
Members of the public attend Scrutiny Committee	2	0	0
Mentions of Scrutiny (local/national press)	0	3	7
Members of the public/stakeholders attend Scrutiny Panels/events	1	18	75
Instances of scrutiny reporting to, or being reported at or in regional, national forums or publications	0	1	1
% of suggested review topics put forward by Councillors or members of public	55%	90%	90%
Website hits to Scrutiny page on website (unique users)	3	78	93
% Recommendations from Scrutiny Committee agreed by Cabinet	n/a	80%	100%

The figures demonstrate that there has been a large increase in members of the public and stakeholders engaging with scrutiny reviews.

A further area of improvement is the reporting of Scrutiny at the Council in regional, national forums or publications. This can be undertaken through networking, and liaison with the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

A measure could be added to monitor the use of social media, for instance how many retweets a tweet mentioning scrutiny gets. It is easy to calculate how many individuals that would have reached.

A clear way to engage more people in scrutiny is to demonstrate its success, more publicity needs to be undertaken in order to show the value of scrutiny and the difference it makes in the District.

Next Steps

The following actions could be taken forward as recommendations:

1. Every Scrutiny Review has a specific Communications Plan drafted at its first meeting.
2. A new measure added to measure the impact of social media
3. Meetings set up with organisations in Spring 2014 for suggestions for the Work Programme.
4. More co-optees are included at Committee meetings and Panels
5. Wider publication of Scrutiny Committees are adopted
6. A clear plan to be established to promote the value of recent Scrutiny in the District.