



SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON THURSDAY 28TH MARCH 2019 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Pritchard – Chair
Councillor G. Kirby – Vice Chair

Councillors:

Mrs C. Andrews, D.T. Davies and C. P. Mann.

Together with:

C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services) M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer)
and R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Binding, D Havard and Mrs M.E. Sargent

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3. MINUTES –

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Scrutiny Leadership Group meeting held on the 11th October 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. SCRUTINY REVIEW 2018/19

UPDATE

Cllr D.T. Davies, Chair of Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee advised Members of an email sent on his behalf, by the Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services, to the Wales Audit Office in response to findings in their "Review of Scrutiny: Fit for the Future" report. Cllr Davies outlined that he was unhappy with a number of statements made regarding the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee and was keen to respond to these statements and seek clarification. Cllr Davies advised that this aim had been achieved to his satisfaction following a response received from the WAO.

The Chair thanked Cllr Davies for his update and was happy to endorse the points he had raised with the WAO.

Consideration was given to the following presentation made by the Interim Head of Democratic Services

The Interim Head of Democratic Services explained that the review was based on the findings of a Self-Evaluation Questionnaire, Scrutiny Workshops with Members and Senior Officers and the recommendations of the WAO's "Fit for the Future" review. It was outlined that the WAO identified the need to improve the provision of training for Members, improve understanding of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, clarify the role of Cabinet Members within the scrutiny process and set clear priorities and actions for improvement of the scrutiny function. Members were advised that the WAO's Six Steps to Better Scrutiny give a national picture of how Scrutiny should be operating. The Six steps for Members were identified as: (i) Know your role, (ii) Know your powers and what's possible in scrutiny, (iii) Know what you are trying to achieve, (iv) Plan your scrutiny work to achieve your aims, (v) Design support arrangements to achieve your aims and (vi) Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of scrutiny activity and make changes based on feedback.

Members were informed that 63 responses had been received as a result of the Self-Evaluation Questionnaire exercise on the Scrutiny function at Caerphilly County Borough Council. 31 Members responded, 31 Officers and 1 respondent did not indicate either way. Out of 59 Scrutiny Committee Members, responses were received from 27.

It was observed by SLG Members that one response from nine Cabinet Members would appear disappointing and considered that some Cabinet Members may have felt it was inappropriate for them to engage with a review of the Scrutiny process.

The benefits or otherwise of respondents being anonymous was also briefly discussed by Members. On the proposition of Scrutiny operating non-politically one Member at the meeting suggested that this was necessary as part of the Constitution. The Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer clarified that Scrutiny Members should declare in meetings if they were being Whipped on a particular issue. This was covered under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. The Leader of the Plaid Cymru group and a Labour Whip were present at the meeting and both confirmed that they did not whip Members on Scrutiny business. One Member was surprised that 2% of respondents Strongly Disagreed and 25% Disagreed with the proposition that "Scrutiny operates non-politically." But it was explained that it was relatively a small number of people holding this view. In summing-up this section of the presentation the Interim Head of Democratic Services concluded that the results were broadly similar to the findings in 2016 and that improvements had been identified by the recent evaluation in certain areas. Therefore, it was observed that the findings of the Self-Evaluation Questionnaire were generally positive.

The Interim Head of Democratic Services then outlined some of the feedback resulting from the Questionnaire and Workshops process. Members were advised that respondents believed that the workload for the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee was heavily balanced with housing matters. Feedback suggested that post 2020 when investment had brought all council owned homes up to Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS), the Council should set up a new scrutiny committee for Housing and disband the Caerphilly Homes Task Group and allow tenants to be co-opted to the new committee. Scrutiny Leadership Group Members were advised that since 2017 of the 43 main agenda items brought to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, 24 related to housing matters. Members were also advised that feedback suggested that the titles for Scrutiny Committees should be revised. For example, with the Health, Social Care and Well-being Scrutiny Committee the majority of agenda items relate to social services. The Interim Head of Democratic Services advised Members that this Committee had only received health issues on only 4 occasions since 2017. One Member pointed out that in England there was a statutory duty for Local Authorities to scrutinise Health

Boards, but that this was not the case in Wales. The Interim Head of Democratic Services advised Members that currently a large number of Information Reports were going to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee.

Members were then presented with 4 options on the future structure of CCBC Scrutiny Committees. In all options the link to the former Community Strategy titles for Education for Life and Health Social Care & Wellbeing would be removed.

Option 1 kept the current structure but gave the Social Care (Services) Committee responsibility for Housing.

Option 2 reduced the number of Scrutiny Committees to three and aligned their responsibilities to each of the Corporate Directorates – Corporate and Education, Social Services and Housing, and Communities.

Option 3 increases the number of Committees to five, creating a new Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee.

Option 4 also increased the number of Scrutiny Committees to five and created a new Housing Scrutiny Committee. This model retains the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee. However the Interim Head of Democratic Services advised Members that this would leave this scrutiny committee with a heavier workload than the other committees.

The Partnerships Scrutiny Committee (Public Services Board) remains with the Policy and Resources Committee with all options apart from Option 2. If this option was chosen then the Partnerships Committee would need to be attached to one of the three suggested committees.

Members of the Scrutiny Leadership Group discussed the implications of restructuring the Scrutiny Committees. One Member suggested that Option 2 risked overloading committees and highlighted the proposed Corporate and Education Scrutiny Committee in particular. Another Member pointed out that if Council voted to increase the number of Scrutiny Committees, it would mean having to reduce the number of Members sitting on a Committee.

The Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer agreed with this point and also suggested that perhaps the frequency of meetings may need to be reduced as increasing the number of Committees requires more staff resource. The Chair raised concerns about the necessary scrutiny experience of new Members needed if the number of Committees is increased. The importance of increasing training for Members was briefly discussed by the group. Two Members of the SLG stated that they were both minded to favour Option 3. But generally it was agreed by Members that further consultation was required with respective political groups before the Scrutiny Review report is presented to Council on 16th April 2019.

The Group were advised that the issue of attendance at meetings and pre-meetings had been identified through scrutiny review feedback. Better attendance at Scrutiny meetings was identified. The Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer suggested that improvements in this area could be achieved through discussion within political groups. One of the Committee Chairs stated the importance for all Members to send apologies for their absence from meetings. It was suggested that Members who had not sent apologies should be noted as absent in the minutes of the meeting.

It was also suggested that Members leaving meetings early should also be noted in the official minutes. The Interim Head of Democratic Services stated that this would only be possible if it was announced before they leave the meeting. Committee clerks would not necessarily know if a Member leaving a meeting will be returning or not.

The regularity of Scrutiny Meetings was also raised as a result of scrutiny review feedback. Some respondents believed that a 6 week gap between meetings was too long. Following discussion it was generally agreed that increasing the frequency of meetings was problematic due to Member commitments and staffing pressures. There was agreement that the existing cycle of meetings was effective and that if Special Meetings were required they could be added if the agenda item put forward necessitated an additional meeting. It was also noted that an increase in the number of Scrutiny Committees would also have a bearing on whether or not it would be possible to increase the frequency of meetings.

Feedback had raised the issue of reports submitted to Scrutiny Committees and suggested they were too long and required a good summary. The Interim Head of Democratic Services reminded the Scrutiny Leadership Group that a new report format with summary and recommendation at the front had recently been introduced. It was suggested that this new format be given time to bed-in. One Committee Chair suggested that succinct bullet points are preferable to a lengthy report.

Feedback on Scrutiny Work Programmes and Engagement formed the next part of the presentation to Members. The Interim Head of Democratic Services outlined how some feedback had suggested that Scrutiny does not operate on a strategic level to scrutinise Council policies and services. It was suggested that agendas are officer driven and concentrates on pre-decision scrutiny rather than shaping policy. The Interim Head of Democratic Services outlined that all scrutiny committees discuss work programmes at every meeting and also hold an annual workshop. It is a matter for Members to decide what items are added to work programmes, and suggested to the group that further training on developing work programmes could be provided.

The workshops also suggested that Scrutiny should use social media and news platforms to publicise the work programmes. It also highlighted the need for deeper dive single topic meetings. The Interim Head of Democratic Services meetings could be webcast and new ways to publicise work programmes and highlight scrutiny activity could be considered. It was suggested that the newly appointed Scrutiny Officer would be able to help increase engagement because of his media and communications background.

The group discussed issues such as additional workload implications of deep dive topic meetings and it was suggested that creating space on the meeting agendas would allow witnesses to be included within forward work programmes for meetings. It was also suggested that site visits were an option for greater study of a topic outside of the Committee meeting format. It was generally agreed that deep dive Task Group work allowed for a better understanding of a particular issue amongst Members but noted that it was resource heavy. However, ultimately it would provide further evidence of meeting WAO requirements contained in the 'Fit for Future' report. It was suggested that agenda items for Policy Development would allow Members to hear from witnesses on single issues and introduce an element of task and finish type work within Committee meetings.

The Group were informed about feedback suggesting that training should be more scrutiny and service focussed. It was suggested that more E-Learning was also needed and that recorded versions of training should be accessible via the Members' Portal. Some feedback suggested more peer observations and the introduction of a buddy scheme. The Interim Head of Democratic Services outlined that in terms of training, there would be a re-run of questioning skills for Members, E-learning opportunities, the WLGA were being consulted regarding a bespoke training video, Forward Work Programmes would be included in Scrutiny training and good practice guides would be made available for Members. Consideration would also be given to peer observations or directing Members to webcasts by other Authorities. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Workshop Commissioners office has produced a training framework for elected members which will form the basis for WFG training workshop for all scrutiny members.

Feedback on the role of Cabinet Members at Scrutiny suggested that the Cabinet Member statement did not add value and takes up meeting time which could have been devoted to the main agenda items. It was suggested that Cabinet Members should instead take the lead in terms of responding to Committee questions senior officers providing support for legislative and technical clarification. Members thought that Cabinet Member involvement during a recent Call-In process was particularly effective where they were able to justify policy decisions to scrutiny.

The final feedback information came under the heading, Future Challenges. The importance of Members being aware of legislative changes and increasing their knowledge in areas such as Social Care was expressed by some respondents.

The Interim Head of Democratic Services concluded the Scrutiny Review presentation by suggesting the following recommendations:

- Remove link in committee names to the former community strategy
- Consider changes to committee structure and numbers
- Consider the frequency of Scrutiny meetings
- Consider the number of Members per Committee
- Chairs to be consulted on reports to Scrutiny Committees
- Cabinet Members Statements be removed from the Scrutiny agenda
- Consider reviewing ways of improving public engagement via platforms such as webcasting and social media
- Scrutiny training be reviewed and updated
- Agenda to include space for policy development which would allow deep dive analysis of single issues at Committee meetings

The Chair thanked the Interim Head of Democratic Services for the presentation and hard work that had gone into conducting the review.

The meeting closed at 18.20 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the next appropriate meeting they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR