



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH (SIRHOWY ROOM) ON THURSDAY 8TH NOVEMBER 2012 AT 5:00PM

PRESENT:

Councillor C.P. Mann - Chairman
Councillor Mrs M.E. Sargent Vice-Chairman

Councillors:

D.G. Carter, H.W. David, W. David, D.T. Davies, R.T. Davies, Mrs E. Forehead,
Ms J.G. Jones and G. Kirby

Together with:

J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer),
G. Williams (Principal Solicitor, Deputy Monitoring Officer) and E. Sullivan (Committee
Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs G. Bevan, P.J. Bevan, Mrs P. Griffiths,
S. Jenkins, Mrs D. Price and J. Taylor.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the beginning or during the course of the
meeting.

3. MINUTES - 6TH SEPTEMBER 2012

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Democratic Services Committee held on the
6th September 2012, be approved as correct records and signed as a correct record.

4. MATTER ARISING

ICT Members Portal Demonstration - Members were advised that the rollout of Members'
replacement home IT equipment and the launch of the Portal had been delayed due to the
additional time needed by BT to install an improved central broadband connection to the
Tredomen Data Centre.

It was noted that Members opting for Ipads would connect wirelessly and therefore should not be subject to the same delays. Officers agreed to feedback to IT Services and confirm if an earlier rollout of Ipads was possible.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

5. WALES AUDIT OFFICE SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT STUDY

The report outlined the planned Wales Audit Office Scrutiny Improvement Study, its methodology and timetable.

Carried out in six phases the improvement study would involve self-evaluation and peer-learning exchanges, as well as using the key characteristics of effective overview and scrutiny as a basis to benchmark the effectiveness of scrutiny in each local authority.

Phase 1 was outlined for Members information and Officers confirmed that many local authorities had expressed their concerns with regard to the timing of the study. Member's attention was drawn to the project brief as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report and Officers apologised for the tight timescales involved and the lateness with which the report was made available.

During Phase 2 (Initial Self Evaluation) each local authority was issued with an electronic self-evaluation questionnaire, used to gather evidence and evaluate current scrutiny arrangements and whether they support effective scrutiny. The 27 questions posed would identify areas of good or innovative practice as well as areas of further development. The draft responses to the self-evaluation questions as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report were noted and Members were advised that they would provide a baseline for the study going forward and would be shared with other Councils during the later phases.

Officers confirmed that a Learning Exchange Team of 5 Members must be established for Phase 3 and nominations were sought from Members of the Democratic Services Committee.

Regional half-day workshops would be held in November 2012 as part of Phase 3 and the Learning Exchange Teams and Lead Officers from each Council would be invited to attend. The Lead Officer would present their initial self-evaluation findings, giving other Council's the opportunity to understand each other's scrutiny arrangements and identify areas for improvement and opportunities to work together.

Phase 4 was designated to peer learning and exchange fieldwork, here the Learning Exchange Teams would work with partner Councils to share learning and support. The timetable for the fieldwork was outlined and Officers confirmed that this would require a substantial commitment of time by those Members on the Team.

Phase 5 was designated to a second round of regional workshops to feedback the findings, views and share the learning experience from Phase 4. These would be held during April 2013 and facilitated by the Wales Audit Office. After this each Council would be asked to complete a final self-evaluation questionnaire by the 30th April 2013 and the WAO would provide each Council with a final self-evaluation and summary.

Finally in Phase 6 a national summary report would be prepared to provide feedback to individual Councils followed by a National Scrutiny Conference during the autumn of 2013.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her report and full discussion ensued.

Nominations for the Learning Exchange Team were received and Councillors W. David, H. David, C. Mann, Mrs C. Forehead, G. Kirby, Mrs M. Sargent and D.T. Davies volunteered to take part. The Scrutiny Research Officer agreed to forward further details as soon as they became available.

Members welcomed the opportunity to visit other authorities in order to observe different approaches to scrutiny and share good practice. Officers requested that those Members taking part in the Learning Exchange Team familiarise themselves with Appendix 2 before the first round of workshops.

Clarification was sought with regard to establishing a more formal agenda consultation mechanism for Scrutiny Chairs' to aid meeting preparation, as it was felt that a half hour pre-meeting was not sufficient. Members also felt the scrutiny process would benefit from inviting external contributors to speak to Officer's reports, on a similar basis to that followed by select committees. Officers confirmed that it was within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee Chair to invite such external representation as deemed appropriate to the report being presented, but asked that Members be mindful of the capacity of any scrutiny committee and be clear on where best to invest the committee's time.

Agenda composition was discussed at length and Members agreed that they would like to see a more concentrated agenda that would allow a greater depth of discussion on the major issues coming forward. The role and responsibilities of the Chair with regard to encouraging debate and nurturing confidence in committee members so they felt able to actively contribute to proceedings was discussed. Officers confirmed that further training for Scrutiny Chairs' was being developed as part of the Member Development Programme. The implementation of the Local Government Measure would provide an ideal opportunity for Members and Officers to sit down and look at the priorities for scrutiny, including the attendance of external people.

Scrutiny reports were discussed and Members sought and were given clarification with regard to the procedures for Cabinet Member consultation on reports coming forward. It was also noted that there had been instances when Members requests for reports were taking longer to come forward than expected.

Discussion returned to the learning exchange programme and Officers agreed to organise a visit to Cardiff City Council, which would provide the biggest contrast to Caerphilly's way of working. Members also felt that it would be useful to attend each other's scrutiny committee meetings in order to identify and share areas of good practice occurring internally.

Members sought clarification with regard to further training for Scrutiny Chairs and the Scrutiny Research Officer confirmed that dates for the forthcoming WLGA Network Meetings - National Exchange of Practice had been circulated and requested that Members feedback their preference as soon as possible.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 27th March 2013 there were signed by the Chairman

The meeting closed at 18:02pm

CHAIRMAN