



## **DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH (SIRHOWY ROOM) ON THURSDAY 3RD OCTOBER 2013 AT 5:00PM**

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#### **PRESENT:**

Councillor C.P. Mann - Chairman  
Councillor D.T. Davies Vice-Chairman

#### **Councillors:**

P.J. Bevan, D.G. Carter, H. David, W. David, R.T. Davies, Mrs C. Forehead, Ms J.G. Jones, G. Kirby, Mrs D. Price, Mrs M.E. Sargent and J. Taylor

#### **Together with:**

D. Perkins (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager), C. Forbes Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer) and E. Sullivan (Democratic Services Officer)

#### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs G. Bevan, Mrs P. Griffiths and Mrs E. Stenner.

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

#### **3. MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 13th June 2013 minute nos. 1-7 on page nos. 1-4 be approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

#### **REPORTS OF OFFICERS**

#### **4. SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN**

The report provided details of the Wales Audit Office Scrutiny Improvement Study and sought the endorsement of the Democratic Services Committee for the resultant Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan.

The scope of the Scrutiny Improvement Study was outlined and was noted to include self-evaluation, peer-learning exchange with a partner council and the production of an action plan. The Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan as referenced in Appendix 1 of the report had been developed as a result and included actions need to implement recent legislative changes contained in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 as well as changes prompted by the WAO Report In The Public Interest.

The action plan encompassed four specific areas, Training and Development for Members and Officers, Scrutiny Development and Organisation, Performance Management and Forward Work Programmes. The key changes to current scrutiny arrangements were highlighted and included the establishment of a Scrutiny Leadership Group and the adoption of a Cabinet style layout and organisation of scrutiny meetings.

The roles and responsibilities in relation to Designated Persons were detailed and the specific organisations that fell within this remit were noted and the purview of the Member Call for Action was also explained for Members information.

Finally in terms of forward work programmes, Members were advised that these would be published to a defined schedule in order to allow consultation with stakeholders and members of the public. The six weekly forward work programme cycle was outlined and was noted to form a rolling programme that gave Members an opportunity to request reports on a quarterly basis which would be different to current practice.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their report and Members questions were welcomed.

Members expressed reservations in relation to their capacity to fulfil the requirements of the Designated Persons scrutiny role when taking their already heavy constituency and council workload into account. It was also felt that this would provide an unnecessary additional tier of bureaucracy. Members referenced the size of recent scrutiny agendas and questioned the logistics of implementing a forward work programme system, including public consultation around this kind of workload.

Officers advised that the Designated Persons was an emerging role, the scope of which was still under consultation with Welsh Government (WG) and would be the subject of a further report to this committee. The options for joint scrutiny on a Gwent wide basis were discussed but this too would require further consideration going forward.

The good practice witnessed during the peer-learning exchange programme was referenced and Members welcomed the opportunity to implement similar working practices. The developing nature of the pre-meeting was discussed at length and the extent of Senior Officer involvement at scrutiny was debated. In relation to questions and lines of enquiry Members sought clarification on the level of support that would be provided during the pre-meeting. Officers confirmed that the Scrutiny Officer would provide assistance but the questions and the lines of enquiry would come from Members themselves and in doing so would encourage greater participation in the meeting process with all Members contributing. The duration of the pre-meeting was discussed and it was agreed that a half hour slot just before the start of the meeting would not be adequate given the changes under consideration. Reference was made to the practice adopted by the Planning Committee pre-meeting, which met two days prior to the meeting date to work through the forthcoming agenda. Members agreed that this practice would be useful going forward.

Members discussed the nature and content of scrutiny reports and agreed that they would welcome the inclusion of greater historical and performance information in order to provide a more detailed overview of the subject matter. The availability of reports and the agenda order was debated at length and Members agreed that the inclusion of large numbers of information items was of little relevance to the scrutiny process and should be reviewed. Members also emphasised the importance of agenda coordination with Chairs and Vice Chairs. The number of reports to be incorporated into any given agenda was debated and it was agreed that

although a degree of flexibility would be required in order to accommodate urgent items, the size of the agenda must still be conducive to a full and frank debate within an acceptable meeting timeframe.

Officers emphasised that the proposed arrangements refined and developed current good practice whilst providing a strategic platform for positive engagement, strengthen governance, challenge and decision making going forward.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendations detailed in Section 9 of the report be approved and that Council be informed of the endorsement of the Democratic Services Committee and by a show of hands this was agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officers report the recommendations in relation to the Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan be approved and Council be informed of the endorsement of the Democratic Services Committee.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 5th March 2014 there were signed by the Chairman.

The meeting closed at 17:48pm

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CHAIRMAN