



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 9TH JUNE 2009 AT 5.15 PM

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Taylor - Chairman
Councillor M.E. Sargent - Vice Chairman

Councillors:

H.A. Andrews, L. Binding, Mrs. A. Blackman, D Bolter, J.B. Criddle, D.T. Davies, K. Etheridge, J.E. Fussell, Ms. L. Hughes, S. Jenkins, Mrs. V. Jenkins, G. Jones, K. Lloyd, D.V. Poole, K.V. Reynolds, A.S. Williams, T.J. Williams, J.M. Wilson

Also present:

Cabinet Members Councillors L G Whittle and C.P. Mann

Together with:

N. Barnett (Director of Corporate Services), P.G. Davy (Head of Economic Development and Tourism), P. Evans (Head of Information, Communications, Technology and Property Services), C. Jones (Head of Performance and Policy), P. Gomer (Assistant Director Community Education), P. Mears (Chief Planning Officer) D.A. Thomas (Policy Officer - Welsh Language), N. Scammell (Head of Corporate Finance), J. Jones (Scrutiny Co-ordinator) and G. George (Committee Services Manager)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following members declared a prejudicial interest in agenda item 7(1) Cymorth & Communities First Grant funding 2009/10 by virtue of the fact that they were members of community partnerships and/ or held office with them or were involved on organisations that may have benefited from this funding regime.

Councillors: H.A. Andrews, L. Binding, D Bolter, D.T. Davies, Ms. L. Hughes, Mrs. V. Jenkins, G. Jones, (GAVO employee) K. Lloyd, K.V. Reynolds, J Taylor, A.S. Williams, (Chairman of GAVO) T.J. Williams, J.M. Wilson; also Councillor J.B. Criddle (relative employed in Communities First).

They all remained in the meeting and took part in the debate.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that subject to replacing "annual" in minute 15(3) with "regular" the minutes of the last meeting held on 21st April 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THIS COMMITTEE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CALL-IN PROCEDURE

No matters had been referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

3. REPORT BY CABINET MEMBERS

The Scrutiny Committee received an oral report from Cabinet member Cllr C P Mann. He stated that the Budget Advisory Committee had held its first meeting and would be reporting to the appropriate committee in due course. The situation regarding County Supplies organisation was also being closely monitored.

4. CABINET REPORTS

The Cabinet report listed on the agenda (Planning for 2011 Census) had not been requested to be brought forward for review at the meeting.

5. LOCALSERVICE BOARDS

The committee were given a presentation by Cllr L Whittle outlining Local Service Board priorities. He referred to progress made in their implementation and the wider implementation of the Community Strategy.

6. SCRUTINY REPORTS

Consideration was given to the following Scrutiny reports.

7. CYMORTH & COMMUNITIES FIRST GRANT FUNDING 2009/10

Members had requested further information on these two grants for 2009/10 following a report to the April meeting of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee. The report gave details of Cymorth and Communities First grants. Expenditure funded from specific grants needed to comply with the grant terms and conditions that related to that specific grant. Non-compliance could lead to a claw back of grant funding and projects funded by specific grants may be short term in nature.

The committee noted the information contained in the report and that all scrutiny committees would in future receive details of grant allocations connected with the work of that particular committee.

Details of each Partnership revenue costs and brief details of Cymorth Grant Funded projects would be provided to all members of the committee.

8. THE COUNCIL'S ANNUAL WELSH LANGUAGE MONITORING AND IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2008/09

The Welsh Language Board required that all public bodies that had a Welsh Language Scheme must submit an annual report detailing progress and developments made during the previous financial year against improvement targets and noting any areas of good practice and/or problem areas.

The report detailed the progress made during 2008/09 against targets in the Council's current Welsh Language Scheme, prior to submitting the report to the Welsh Language Board by 30th June 2009.

Members noted the contents of the report and agreed to it being submitted to the Welsh Language Board.

9. UPDATE TO THE COUNCIL'S STATUTORY WELSH LANGUAGE SCHEME FOR THE PERIOD 2009 - 2012

The council's current Welsh language scheme came to an end in March 2008. After which it had been decided to undertake a full review and update of the scheme before producing a new version.

Following an extensive internal consultation a draft had been completed and discussions held with the Welsh Language Board (WLB) concerning the new version and overall approach. The new Scheme did not commit the Council to any significant increase in provision over and above what was already had in place.

The Scheme now only contained high-level commitments as required by the guidance issued under the Welsh Language Act 1993, with the operational detail that had been added over the last 10 years removed. This operational detail would be to be issued as Supplementary Guidance on specific subjects, targeted at relevant staff. This had streamlined the Scheme making it a more accessible document.

The Cabinet had considered this report on this matter earlier today and subject to any comments received from this committee had recommended to council that the draft Welsh language scheme be approved.

Members endorsed the update on the draft Welsh Language scheme.

Arising from the discussion members asked for a report on the costs of implementing Welsh language requirements as well as other equality requirements.

10. ICELANDIC BANK UPDATE

The report gave information from the Administrators, Local Government Association (LGA), the LGA's Legal Advisors Bevan and Brittan and more recently the agreed provisions in respect of the councils' investments. The Authority's investments totalling £15m in Icelandic Banks, Heritable UK and Landsbanki had been frozen on the 7th October 2008.

Early indications suggested that Councils would get most of the money back through the administration process and the LGA was fighting to ensure that the council taxpayer was a priority as and when repayments were made.

The Committee noted that whilst it was still very early on in the process of the recovery of funds in Icelandic Banks, early indications suggested that there was a potential to recover a substantial amount of the £15m, albeit that this could take an estimated 2/3 years.

11. ONLINE REGISTRATION

Members noted that at the meeting of the committee in November the new system of on-line registration had been identified as a medium risk and the appointment system was functioning irregularly. This was part of a national system that was plagued with problems. Thanks however to the work of the council's IT section the risk had now been downgraded to low.

12. INFORMATION ITEMS

Members received and noted the following information items:

- (1) Local Service Board - minutes of meeting held on 21st April 2009;
- (2) Residuary Body for Wales Accounts - completion of the audit process in respect of the above accounts, and the consequential payment over of remaining balances;
- (3) Budget 2009/10 – Corporate Services - detailed budgets for 2009/10 for the Corporate Services and Miscellaneous Finance areas of the Chief Executive's Directorate;
- (4) Budget 2009/10 – Chief Executive's directorate - detailed budgets for 2009/10 for the Performance & Policy areas of the Chief Executive's Directorate.

13. REQUESTS FOR AN ITEM TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA

- (1) Report on how forgone increases in member's allowances for 2009/2010 could be redistributed to other ends (Cllr H A Andrews);
- (2) Quarterly progress reports on how many posts have been deleted from the establishment since April 2009.

Approved as a correct record, and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 21st July 2009, they were signed by the Chairman.

The meeting closed at 7:10 pm.

CHAIRMAN