

CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT PANEL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, TREDOMEN ON THURSDAY, 17TH MARCH 2005 AT 5P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor K.V. Reynolds – Chairman

Councillors:

Mrs E.M. Aldworth, Mrs C. Forehead, D.M. Gray, K. James, A.S. Williams and T.J. Williams

Together with:

T. Peppin (Head of Policy and Central Services), T. Hooper (Policy & Research Manager), J. Jones (Scrutiny Co-ordinator) and S. Allen (Scrutiny Research Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ms E.E. Forehead and Miss A. Morgan.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES 10TH FEBRUARY 2005 AND MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes were moved and approved as accurate. Mr Jones stated that all outstanding actions had been completed:

- **ACTION – Mr G George to circulate Committee timetable up to August 2006 to members prior to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Management Panel**
Scrutiny Support Unit to liaise with Mr George regarding the distribution of the Committee timetable.
- **ACTION – Mr Medicott and Mr Jones to examine definition of 'significant decisions'**
This has been completed.
- **ACTION – Mr Medicott to simplify the wording of paragraph 9.3(b)**
This has been completed. Cllr T. Williams informed the Panel that he had been consulted with by Mr Medicott on the revised wording of the Delegated Powers and Call-in report and was satisfied.
- **ACTION – Mr Jones to present the final draft report on the implementation of proposed changes to scrutiny at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Management Panel**
This has been completed and is at agenda item 3.
- **ACTION – Scrutiny Support Unit to present the views and suggestions of the Scrutiny Management Panel to Corporate Management Team**
The views of the Scrutiny Management Panel on budget monitoring at Scrutiny Committees will accompany a presentation on the implementation and effect of the changes to scrutiny at a forthcoming meeting of Corporate Management Team.

- **ACTION – Miss Allen to present a full update on the status of Task and Finish Group Recommendations to date to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Management Panel**

This has been completed and is at agenda item 6.

3. PROPOSALS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF REVISED ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE OPERATION OF SCRUTINY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Mr Jones stated that although the Scrutiny Management Panel had considered this report previously, it had now been altered as a result of consultation with all members and senior officers. Mr Jones informed the Group that not all consultation replies had been incorporated into this report as several would have fundamentally altered the proposed changes, which were suggested by members during Audit Commission focus groups.

Mr Jones outlined the report, highlighting the two main changes as follows:

Thematic Realignment of Scrutiny Committees

In order to deal with the problem of cross cutting issues and the overlap between directorates in the four themes of the Community Strategy, several directorate objectives and community plan objectives and beacons have been moved among the Scrutiny Committees proposed terms of reference. It is envisaged that this will prevent the duplication of staff attendance at multiple Scrutiny Committee meetings.

Mr Jones informed the group that Messrs Peppin and Hooper had been consulted and agreed that although the proposed Scrutiny Committee terms of reference may require the attendance of the four Strategic Co-ordinators at multiple Scrutiny Committee meetings this is preferable to hordes of staff attending multiple meetings. Additionally, the proposed terms of reference will cause minimum disruption to the existing Scrutiny Committee system.

Role of Cabinet Members in Scrutiny

The proscribed period of time for which Cabinet members may speak at the start of each Scrutiny Committee meeting is now up to a maximum of ten minutes, not for five minutes as previously proposed.

Cllr Reynolds queried the need for a set time for which Cabinet members should speak and receive questions from Scrutiny Committee members. The Panel agreed that this should be at the discretion of the chair and be set according to the amount of business raised by the Cabinet member.

- **ACTION – Mr Jones to remove the time limit on Cabinet members oral reports and question and answer sessions at Scrutiny Committee meetings from the report**

Mr Jones informed the group that pending the approval of full council on 17th May 2005, the proposed changes would come into effect from July 2005.

Mr Jones then invited questions and comments from members of the Scrutiny Management Panel on the remainder of the report. Cllr Reynolds guided discussion on a page-by-page basis.

Timetabling Scrutiny Committee Meetings

Cllr Reynolds queried the need to timetable the length of time to be allocated to specific items of business on the Scrutiny Committee agenda, stating that this should be flexible and at the discretion of the chair. Cllr Mrs C. Forehead agreed, stating that

time allocation cannot be decided before the meeting as it is impossible to forecast which items will be important to members and stimulate discussion.

Mr Jones informed the group that this provision had been included as it was suggested by members at the Audit Commission focus groups. The Scrutiny Management Panel agreed that this provision should be removed, but the two-hour guide length for Scrutiny Committee meetings should remain.

- **ACTION – Mr Jones to remove the proposal to publish time allocations on agenda items for Scrutiny Committee meetings from the report**

Decision-Making and Consultation

Cllr James asked for clarification on the procedure by which Scrutiny Committee members could call a 'for information' item forward for discussion at the meeting. Miss Allen stated that it was envisaged that the same rules as currently applied to Cabinet reports would apply, i.e. a member would be required to make a request for the report to be discussed to Committee Services by 10am on the day before the Scrutiny Committee meeting. Members noted that the introduction of 'for information' items on Scrutiny Committee agendas would render the Information Bulletin redundant.

The Panel agreed that the Scrutiny Committee agenda should clearly state this time limit on calling for an item to be discussed at the meeting.

- **ACTION – Mr Jones to clarify the procedure for calling forward 'for information' items for discussion at Scrutiny Committee meetings**

Supporting and Valuing Co-opted Members

Cllr James noted that in light of comments made previously by the Scrutiny Management Panel, clarification on the procedure for dealing with exempt items in meetings involving co-opted members had now been provided.

Format and Size of Meetings

Cllr James asked for clarification on 'cabinet' style meetings, citing large numbers of attendees as a problem at many Scrutiny Committee meetings. Mr Jones informed the group that in Scrutiny Committee meetings where attendees could not sit around one table, officers would be required to decant to a side table and join the main table only to present reports and answer questions.

Task and Finish Groups

Cllr Reynolds queried whether full Council could make amendments to the recommendations of Task and Finish Groups. Mr Jones stated that the relevant Scrutiny Committee endorses the Task and Finish Group's report as a whole, but Cabinet and Full Council may selectively endorse specific recommendations. He added that while it was not in the spirit of scrutiny for members who weren't part of Task and Finish Reviews to add to or amend recommendations, it was not prohibited by the Council's constitution.

- **ACTION – Mr Jones to speak to Mr I Medlicott with regard to including the role of Council in Task and Finish Group reviews in the constitution**

Cllr Aldworth stated that due to the volume of new councillors, the role and remit of Task and Finish Group reviews should be re-affirmed. Mr Jones informed the group that as agreed previously, guidance on undertaking Task and Finish Group reviews had been produced and distributed by the Scrutiny Support Unit.

Cllr T. Williams queried whether all Scrutiny Committee members were given the opportunity to provide feedback on and input into the reports produced by Task and

Finish Groups. Cllr Reynolds stated that prior to presentation at Cabinet and/or full Council, all Task and Finish Group reports must be agreed by the relevant Scrutiny Committee. Cllr T. Williams also asked whether local ward members were consulted during Task and Finish Group reviews. Miss Allen stated that due to the nature of Task and Finish review topics, very few ward specific issues were considered. Mr Jones added that if any ward issues arose during the course of a Task and Finish review, the local member/s would be consulted.

Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny

Cllr T. Williams queried the need to include the recommendation in paragraph 4.23, "...that consideration be given to the allocation of chairs and vice-chairs of scrutiny committees", given that the report makes it clear that the majority of the Modernisation Working Group did not agree this proposal.

Cllr Reynolds agreed that while this issue was contentious, members needed to be mindful of the fact that the issue may need to be considered at a future date. Mr Jones and Dr Peppin agreed, stating that officers were obliged to include this recommendation as it had come out of the Democratic Renewal Report and the member focus groups.

Cllr Reynolds proposed that the views of the Panel be passed on to the Modernisation Working Group, but that the recommendation in Paragraph 4.23 should remain as the issue of chair and vice-chair allocation would be considered at the Annual General Meeting of full Council in May 2005.

- **ACTION – Mr Jones to inform the Modernisation Working Group that the Scrutiny Management Panel does not support the proposal to consider the political balance of Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Committees**

Finally, Mr Jones informed the group that the recommendation made in Paragraph 8.1 of the report would be amended prior to finalisation at Modernisation Working Group to be presented to CMT, Cabinet and full Council that the changes to scrutiny proposed in the report be accepted and come into effect from 5th July 2005.

Subject to the amendments outlined by members, the Panel agreed this course of action.

4. INTERNAL CLIENT SURVEY RESULTS – SCRUTINY SUPPORT UNIT

Miss Allen outlined the background to the report. Members were informed that in October 2004 the Policy Division had surveyed all elected members and senior officers in relation to their satisfaction with the Policy and Central Services Division. The report presented the results of that survey in relation to the services provided by the Scrutiny Support Unit (SSU).

The Panel was informed that on the whole the results of the survey were pleasing, with the majority of respondents expressing satisfaction with the services provided by the SSU. Miss Allen reminded the group that the SSU had only been in existence as an independent service area since 1st April 2004, and thus there was no data comparison from previous internal client surveys as none existed.

Members agreed that the areas with a dissatisfaction rating of over 30% could be improved via the options for improvement outlined in the report, which included:

- The introduction of a structured officer scrutiny training programme in order to improve officer awareness of the services provided by the SSU
- In order to more clearly define the overall aims of the SSU, it's consolidated annual report and Scrutiny Committee annual plans/work programmes could be published

- To achieve more effective communication from the SSU, there should be increased Scrutiny involvement in the 'Unlock the Potential' scheme and the distribution of the 'Scrutiny Spotlight' members newsletter should be extended to officers, via the intranet
- In order to increase customer focus in scrutiny, customers (councillors, officers and members of the public) should be encouraged to have a greater input into the review process by raising awareness of what scrutiny has to offer. This could be achieved via improved, more comprehensive scrutiny web pages on the internet and intranet and the publication of task and finish group and scrutiny review achievements
- The effectiveness of service delivery from the SSU will be raised via the implementation of the revised arrangements for the operation of scrutiny from July 2005
- The implementation of the new method of monitoring task and finish group recommendations will provide regular feedback on the progress of work undertaken by the SSU

Cllr Reynolds congratulated Mr Jones and Miss Allen on the survey results, and the group agreed that the enthusiasm and determination of the SSU in striving to improve the scrutiny function had not gone unrecognised.

Mr Jones stated that in addition to officer dedication and commitment, the scrutiny function also needs strong political leadership to drive forward improvement. He stated that the Scrutiny Management Panel was a helpful forum for the continued development of the scrutiny function.

5. SCRUTINY SUPPORT UNIT SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Mr Jones outlined the background to the report. He informed the group that all Council services were required to produce an annual Service Improvement Plan, outlining objectives for the coming year. Members were informed that the Scrutiny Support Unit's Service Improvement Plan objectives for 2004/2005 had been achieved.

The Panel was informed of the proposed Scrutiny Support Unit (SSU) Service Improvement Plan objectives for 2005/2006. Mr Jones stated that a challenging number of objectives had been proposed by the SSU, and the nature of these objectives were outlined as follows:

1. The modernisation of full Council, as per the Audit Commission recommendation in the Democratic Renewal Report
2. The introduction of regular liaison between the Scrutiny Management Panel and Corporate Management Team
3. Publicising changes to the scrutiny function among elected and co-opted members and officers
4. The revision of SSU guidance on the operation of scrutiny to reflect changes to the function
5. The development of a structured scrutiny training programme for elected and co-opted members and officers
6. The production and publication of a consolidated annual report outlining the achievements of Scrutiny Committees in the previous year and the challenges faced in the coming year
7. The introduction of meetings with Heads of Service to communicate the benefits of scrutiny
8. The establishment of a South East Wales Regional Scrutiny Champions Network, to provide a best practice sharing forum in the area
9. The further development of the scrutiny pages on the internet and intranet

In addition to these 9 objectives, the overarching council priorities of equalities and sustainability were also discussed. Mr Jones informed the group that in order to contribute to the achievement of these priorities, the following action was planned by the SSU:

- All staff to undertake equalities training
- Electronic dispatch of 'Scrutiny Spotlight', the SSU members newsletter
- Sustainability and equalities issues to be considered as part of Task and Finish Group reviews and subsequent recommendations

Finally, Mr Jones cited the potential threats to the delivery of the SSU Service Improvement Plan objectives as follows:

- Lack of political and officer support
- Sickness absence within the SSU
- Staffing compliment within the SSU

Dr Peppin informed the Scrutiny Management Panel that due to the high number of objectives in the SSU Plan, only some elements would be incorporated into the overall Policy and Central Services Service Improvement Plan. He added that this would be subject to agreement by Cllr Gerald Jones prior to its publication.

6. TASK AND FINISH GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS UPDATE

Miss Allen outlined the background to the report. Members were reminded of the last meeting held on 10th February 2004, where the Panel agreed that in order to fully realise the value of Task and Finish Group reviews, members need feedback on their recommendations in recognition of the time and effort spent on each review. In light of the poor response rate from Directorates at that time, Miss Allen had been charged with the task of gaining a full update on the status of all recommendations.

The group was informed that following the last meeting, Task and Finish Group progress tables were again sent electronically to the appropriate service directors. Directors were asked to complete the tables for submission to Scrutiny Management Panel and to the relevant Scrutiny Committee in order to allow the monitoring and management of agreed Task and Finish Group recommendations.

Miss Allen circulated updated Task and Finish Group recommendation progress tables, and outlined the main findings of this research exercise by Scrutiny Committee.

Education and Leisure

- The Provision of Sports Pavilions and Changing Rooms Provided by Caerphilly County Borough Council – No response had been received
- School Improvement Services in Caerphilly County Borough Council – No response had been received

Environmental and Housing

- Sheltered Housing and Housing with Extra Care for Older People in Caerphilly County Borough – Full updates received on all recommendations
- Preventing the illegal disposal of waste and abandoned cars in Caerphilly County Borough – Full updates received on all recommendations

Policy and Resources

- Sickness Absence Management – No response had been received
- The Preparation of the Asset Management Plan – The lead officer had been unable to complete the evaluation matrix due to staffing constraints and had instead submitted a progress report that had previously been submitted to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee
- The Implementation of the Peer Review Recommendations – Full updates received on all recommendations

Social Services

- Sheltered Housing and Housing with Extra Care for Older People in Caerphilly County Borough – Full updates received on all recommendations

Technical

- Country Parks in Caerphilly County Borough Council– Full updates received on all recommendations
- Highways/Housing Interface– Full updates received on all recommendations

The Scrutiny Management Panel agreed that the summary report provided in regard to the preparation of the asset management plan was not acceptable, and that the progress table should be completed by the lead officer in the interest of uniformity and ease of presentation to Scrutiny Committee members.

Cllr Reynolds stated that a strong message should be relayed to all Heads of Service via the Corporate Management Team, emphasising the importance of updating the progress tables.

- **ACTION – Scrutiny Support Unit to discuss this issue at Corporate Management Team to ensure the completion of all progress tables**

The Panel agreed that upon completion of the status of all the recommendations, the progress tables should be presented to the relevant Scrutiny Committees.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other items of business were raised.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next Scrutiny Management Panel is Thursday 5th May 2005 in Committee Room 4, Tredomen. Miss Allen suggested that as the general election may be held on this date, the next meeting be postponed to take place after the Annual General Meeting of full Council. In addition to this, Miss Allen suggested that the future dates of the Panel meetings be scheduled to the end of the calendar year. Members agreed.

- **ACTION – Miss Allen to schedule future meetings of the Scrutiny Management Panel to the end of 2005 and inform members accordingly**