



SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT PANEL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, TREDOMEN
ON WEDNESDAY, 12TH OCTOBER 2005 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor K.V. Reynolds – Chairman

Councillors:

R.T. Davies, K. James and T.J. Williams

Together with:

T. Peppin (Head of Policy and Central Services), C. Jones (Head of Performance Management), J. Jones (Scrutiny Co-ordinator) and S. Hopkins (Scrutiny Research Officer)

Also in attendance for agenda item 3:

Non Jenkins (Performance Specialist, Wales Audit Office), Chris Bolton (Performance Specialist, Wales Audit Office) and John Herniman (Audit Manager, Wales Audit Office)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs. C. Forehead, Ms. E.E. Forehead, D.M. Gray, Ms. A. Morgan, Mrs R. Passmore and A.S. Williams.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES 28TH JULY 2005 AND MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes were moved and approved as accurate. Both outstanding actions had been completed:

- **ACTION – CfPS Self-Evaluation Framework follow-up work to be undertaken by SSU and reported at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Management Panel**
This has been completed and is at Agenda Item No. 5.
- **ACTION – Mrs. Hopkins to reschedule next meeting of SMP and inform members accordingly**
This has been completed; a letter informing members of the next date was distributed on 1st August 2005.

3. SUPPORTING IMPROVEMENT PROPOSALS

The Scrutiny Management Panel welcomed representatives from the Wales Audit Office (WAO) to the meeting. John Herniman explained that as part of its Democratic Renewal audit work, the Wales Audit Office has undertaken a number of reviews and support work at CCBC. The aim of these has been to help to further improve political management arrangements, including decision-making, scrutiny and accountability arrangements.

In order to further support improvement, the Panel was informed that the WAO has agreed to facilitate joint learning sessions for mixed groups of members and officers. The aim of these sessions is to enable members to challenge, question and listen more effectively. Additionally, they will assist officers to identify communication techniques to help scrutiny committees' discharge their roles and responsibilities effectively.

Mr. Herniman introduced the WAO proposal document. It was proposed that the improvement sessions be delivered through three phases. Mr. Herniman informed members that the introductory phase would raise awareness and equip attendees with experiences and tools to make them more effective questioners, listeners and communicators.

The Scrutiny Management Panel was informed that their role in the improvement sessions would be vital. It was proposed that each session be hosted by a chair and vice chair of Scrutiny. Mr. Herniman stated that this would be an opportunity for the Panel to play a central role in developing their own chairing, scrutiny management and facilitation skills.

Mr. J. Jones informed members that the proposed supporting improvement sessions were important to member development. He stated that the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) had recently undertaken a member's training needs analysis, and the proposed sessions address many of the needs identified.

Non Jenkins added that scrutiny is important to the Council as a whole, not just to Scrutiny Committee members. Ms Jenkins stated that the improvement sessions provide an opportunity for the Executive, scrutiny committee members and officers to attend and work together to improve the Council and the services it provides.

The Scrutiny Management Panel was invited to give its views on the supporting improvement session proposals.

Cllr. Reynolds stated that a lot had been done in the past twelve months to improve the scrutiny function and performance management via scrutiny in the authority. He stated that an increased commitment to scrutiny had become apparent over the past year, and that more work needed to be done to further development member and officer engagement. Cllr. Reynolds added that he believed the supporting improvement sessions to be a natural extension of the improvement work to date, and gave a commitment that the Scrutiny Management Panel would work with the WAO in facilitating further changes and improvement.

Cllr. Reynolds asked for clarification on the proposed dates and duration of the sessions. Ms. Jenkins confirmed that each session would last 2½ hours to maximise attendance and involvement. Mr. J. Jones added that 7 afternoon and evening Phase 1 sessions had been scheduled between 25th November and 14th December 2005. Mr. Jones confirmed that the proposals had been discussed with Corporate Management Team (CMT), who agreed that the sessions would be offered to officers on a voluntary basis. Mr. Jones added that there had been a high level of officer interest in the Scrutiny Support Unit training courses, and as such expected a good level of officer attendance at the WAO sessions.

Cllr. Davies recommended that a morning session should also be offered to accommodate the varying needs and availability of members. The Panel agreed that this course of action would maximise attendance.

- **ACTION – Scrutiny Support Unit to schedule a morning Supporting Improvement Session**

Ms. Jenkins informed the Scrutiny Management Panel that they could further assist in the improvement sessions by stirring up interest amongst other members. She suggested that announcements at scrutiny committee meetings would facilitate this. Cllr. Reynolds suggested that in addition an all member letter be sent from himself and Mr. J. Jones to invite members to attend. Mr. Jones stated that the October issue of Scrutiny Spotlight would be focussing on the sessions. The Panel agreed that the sessions should be promoted internally.

- **ACTION – Supporting Improvement Sessions to be promoted via all member letter, Scrutiny Spotlight, announcements at Scrutiny Committees etc**

Cllr. Williams stated that as Scrutiny Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs he felt that members of the Scrutiny Management Panel had made great strides in encouraging debate at meetings and in increasing the openness, transparency and effectiveness of the Council. He welcomed officer involvement in the improvement sessions to maximise the success of scrutiny. Cllr. James agreed that the success of scrutiny depended on the knowledge and skills of officers as well as members.

Ms. Jenkins acknowledged that the willingness of CCBC to improve allowed sessions such as those proposed to be a success.

In conclusion, Mr. Herniman thanked the Panel for showing such enthusiasm and support for the proposed course of action. Cllr. Davies requested that the WAO feedback to the Panel after the completion of the sessions with their views.

- **ACTION – WAO to feedback their views to Scrutiny Management Panel upon the conclusion of the Supporting Improvement Sessions**

The WAO representatives left the meeting at 5.30pm.

4. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT UPDATE

Mr Colin Jones, Head of Performance Management attended the meeting to provide a verbal performance management update to members. Mr C. Jones distributed a briefing paper entitled "Performance Management Scrutiny Meetings". Members were reminded that the purpose of these meetings is to highlight the role held by Scrutiny Committees in the promotion of Performance Management and Service Improvement, to support and challenge service provision and to develop a culture of performance management throughout the Council.

Mr C. Jones reminded the Panel that the first round of Performance Management Specific Scrutiny Committees had taken place approximately 6 months ago, and had resulted in a positive response from members. The first round of meetings had consisted of an introduction to Performance Management, an introduction to the Caerphilly Performance Management Information System (CorVu) and a service-specific presentation on the issues faced in delivering the Council's Priorities.

With the next round of Performance Management Specific Scrutiny Committees fast approaching, Mr C. Jones invited the Panel's views on what should be coming forward to Scrutiny Committees. He stated that the aim of the discussion was to agree a consistent agenda for future meetings in order that officers are aware of what is expected of them in advance.

The Panel was informed that the briefing paper presented at the meeting provided suggestions for a structured way forward for all Scrutiny Committees. The suggestions were presented and discussed as follows:-

Cabinet Member Update on Progress with Appropriate Cabinet Priorities

Mr. J. Jones stated that Cabinet Members are now actively participating in Scrutiny Committee meetings via the 'Cabinet Member Statement' item on each Scrutiny Committee agenda. The Panel agreed that this was successful and would continue.

CorVu

Mr. C. Jones stated that all members had seen the potential of CorVu at the initial Performance Management meetings. He suggested that in future meetings CorVu presentations should be delivered by officers from each service area, allowing them to inform members of their appropriate indicators, current outputs and how they utilise the CorVu tool to manage their performance. This will allow Scrutiny Committee members to find out from officers what they do with the figures, and to challenge them if they don't do anything. Members of the Panel agreed that officers should use this performance information to change the way the Council operates and to improve Council services.

Other Service Delivery Issues

While Cabinet Priorities are important, Cabinet monitors progress on them. Mr. C. Jones stated that other Council priorities must also be delivered, and believed that there may be a role for Scrutiny Committees in monitoring these. Cllr. Reynolds agreed that Scrutiny Committees should monitor the day-to-day council services not identified as Cabinet Priorities, although he felt that by retaining the Cabinet Member input at Scrutiny Committee meetings it would ensure that Scrutiny Committees are also kept up to date on strategic issues. Cllr. Williams agreed that Scrutiny Committees should monitor the needs of residents under non-Cabinet Priorities. Mr. C. Jones stated that by undertaking this role, Scrutiny Committees could ensure that non-Cabinet Priority service areas are not inadequately funded at the expense of Priority areas.

Update on Service Improvement Plan (SIP) Progress

Mr. C. Jones informed that group that all directorates have a statutory obligation to produce an annual action plan outlining proposals for service improvement. The Panel agreed that progress on implementing the action plan was key. Dr. Peppin stated that the use of exception reports (which identify actions that are not making the required progress, the reasons why and the proposed course of remedial action) to monitor progress on SIP action plans would allow Scrutiny Committee members to question officers on why their service hasn't improved. Mr. J. Jones agreed that exception reporting would allow key outstanding issues to be picked up by Scrutiny Committees. He also highlighted the importance of Chairs and Vice-Chairs in agreeing a conclusion from the Scrutiny Committee on the way forward for improvement. Cllr. Reynolds agreed that the formal view of the Scrutiny Committee should be presented to Cabinet, as this would generate interest in members in providing meaningful feedback and comments. Mr. J. Jones suggested that the issues and conclusions identified by each Scrutiny Committee be collated in a report and passed up to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee for discussion. The Panel agreed that this course of action would motivate Scrutiny Committee members to work together to reach a way forward for service improvement.

Identification of Future Cabinet Priorities

The Scrutiny Management Panel discussed their potential role in suggesting future priorities for Cabinet consideration. Mr. J. Jones stated that Cabinet could come to rely on Scrutiny Committees in identifying problem areas worthy of future consideration and prioritisation. This would provide a source of motivation to Scrutiny Committee members by illustrating the important role of scrutiny. Mr. C. Jones added that this would be an excellent means by which Scrutiny Committees could feedback into the performance management culture loop.

Cllr. Reynolds asked Mr. C. Jones to take the Panel through the next steps in Performance Management Scrutiny Committees. Mr. C. Jones stated that he would ensure that the issues raised by the Panel at this meeting would be addressed by officers at future Performance Management Scrutiny Committees.

5. SELF EVALUATION ARRANGEMENTS

Mr. J. Jones outlined the report. The Panel was reminded that at their last meeting, members approved the principle of using the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Self-Evaluation Framework to measure the effectiveness of scrutiny in CCBC. This report aimed to address the implementation issues of adopting the CfPS Framework.

The Panel was informed that the CfPS framework consists of four areas of questioning along the four principles of effective public scrutiny as follows:

1. Providing a 'critical friend' challenge
2. Reflecting the voice and concerns of the public and its communities
3. Ensuring scrutiny members lead and own the scrutiny process
4. Making an impact on service delivery

The CfPS framework is evidence based and requires examples of what we do well, areas for improvement and any potential opportunities and barriers for improvement.

In order to gain subjective data on the performance of scrutiny, it was proposed that a cross sector of stakeholder views be sought. Mr. J. Jones suggested holding two focus groups to complete the Self-Evaluation Framework, the first consisting of representatives from Scrutiny Committees, Co-opted Members/Partners, Cabinet, CMT and Officers. The views of this focus group could then be fed into the second focus group (consisting of members of the Scrutiny Management Panel) before agreeing an action plan for future improvement.

Looking to the future, Mr. J. Jones suggested that in order to further extend the challenge to CCBC, the self-evaluation process could be extended to peer representatives from other local authorities.

Mr. J. Jones further proposed that several key performance indicators (PI's) be introduced to allow the measurement of objective information. The following PI's were proposed:-

In order to measure Scrutiny Committees' influence:-

- Number of recommendations made by scrutiny committees as a percentage of those accepted by Cabinet
- Number of task and finish group recommendations accepted by Cabinet as a percentage of the total made
- Number of task and finish group recommendations implemented to the satisfaction of the Scrutiny Management Panel as a percentage of those accepted by Cabinet

In order to measure the effectiveness of Forward Work Programmes:-

- The percentage of reports considered by scrutiny committees on the dates published in the scrutiny committee forward work programme

In order to measuring the time taken to respond to Committees' requests:-

- Number of reports requested by members and the time taken for them to be considered by a scrutiny committee, expressed in meeting cycles

Mr. Jones informed that Panel that if the proposals were accepted, it was envisaged that the first self-evaluation of the scrutiny function would commence in March 2006 in order to report

back at the end of the Council year. The views of the Scrutiny Management Panel on the Self Evaluation proposals were invited.

Cllr. James expressed concern in relation to the proposed PI for measuring time taken in responding to Scrutiny Committee requests, as he felt this may encourage an influx of 'frivolous' report requests.

Mr. J. Jones assured members that this PI hasn't been designed to measure the number of reports but to measure the time taken for reports to be presented by Directorates. Cllr. Davies agreed, and suggested that officers be required to present reasons for the delay of report presentation to Scrutiny Committees. Cllr. Reynolds stated that all Scrutiny Committees have the right to request and receive reports, and agreed that if a report is requested and not received, officers should explain this to members at Committee.

Mr. J. Jones suggested that in order to keep members informed of outstanding reports, a list could be published and provided as an information item at every Scrutiny Committee meeting. Cllr. Reynolds requested that a list of outstanding reports for all Scrutiny Committees be presented at the next meeting of the Panel in order to allow members to properly assess the situation.

- **ACTION – Scrutiny Support Unit to provide a list of outstanding reports by Scrutiny Committee to the next Scrutiny Management Panel meeting**

The Panel agreed this course of action.

6. TASK AND FINISH GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS UPDATE

Mrs. Hopkins outlined the background to the report. Members were reminded of the meeting held on 30th September 2004, where it was agreed that Task and Finish Group progress tables be sent electronically to the appropriate Service Directors. Directors would be 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.

Members were reminded that in March 2005, 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, Mrs. Hopkins had been charged with the task of gaining a full update on the status of all recommendations.

The group was informed that Task and Finish Group progress tables had again been sent electronically to the appropriate Service Directors, this time with a much better response rate. Mrs. Hopkins outlined the main findings of this research exercise by Scrutiny Committee.

Education for Life

- The Provision of Sports Pavilions and Changing Rooms Provided by Caerphilly County Borough Council – Progress has been made on six of the seven recommendations.
- School Improvement Services in Caerphilly County Borough Council – No response had been received.

Living Environment

- Sheltered Housing and Housing with Extra Care for Older People in Caerphilly County Borough: Joint review with Health, Social Care and Well-Being Scrutiny Committee – Progress has been made on all thirteen recommendations.

- Preventing the illegal disposal of waste and abandoned cars in Caerphilly County Borough – Progress has been made on seven of the eight recommendations approved by Cabinet.
- Response Repairs Service in Caerphilly County Borough Council – Progress has been made on all recommendations.
- Country Parks in Caerphilly County Borough Council – Progress has been made on five of the six recommendations approved by Cabinet.

Policy and Resources

- Sickness Absence Management – Four of the six recommendations have been completed, one is ongoing and the remaining one has been incorporated into the work-plan for the Personnel Department's Policy and Performance Unit.
- The Preparation of the Asset Management Plan – Eight of the eleven recommendations are ongoing, the remaining three are pending.
- The Implementation of the Peer Review Recommendations – Progress has been made on all twenty-two recommendations.

Health, Social Care and Well-Being

- Sheltered Housing and Housing with Extra Care for Older People in Caerphilly County Borough: Joint review with Living Environment Scrutiny Committee – Progress has been made on all thirteen recommendations.

Regeneration

- Highways/Housing Interface– Two of the five recommendations have been completed and the remaining three are ongoing.

Members agreed that the Task and Finish Group progress tables be presented twice yearly as information items to each Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Reynolds requested that in addition the updated tables should also be referred to the Scrutiny Management Panel on a six monthly basis. Members agreed this.

- **ACTION – Task and Finish Group recommendation progress tables to be presented to Scrutiny Committees as information items and to Scrutiny Management Panel on a twice yearly basis**

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mrs. Hopkins informed the Panel that the 'Introduction to Scrutiny' training programme agreed at the last meeting was now underway. Members were told that one training date had been completed thus far, with 2 elected members and 7 officers of varying grades in attendance. Feedback forms had been completed by officers upon completion of the training course, the results of which were circulated to the Panel. Members were pleased to note that the overall rating for the day was 94%.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next Scrutiny Management Panel is 1st December 2005, at 5.00 p.m. in Committee Room 4. Cllr. Williams requested that a list of confirmed and cancelled meetings be distributed to allow members to delete rescheduled dates from their diaries.

- **ACTION – Mrs Hopkins to redistribute confirmed and cancelled SMP dates to members.**