



SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT PANEL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON THURSDAY, 10TH OCTOBER 2008 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Taylor – Chairman

Councillors:

V. Jenkins, M. Parker, M. Prew, K. Lloyd, D. Cullen and L. Hughes

Together with:

Jonathan Jones (Scrutiny Co-ordinator) and Catherine Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer).

APOLOGIES

Councillor L. Binding, M. Sargent.

2. MINUTES OF MEETING 2 JULY 2008

The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd July 2008 were approved as an accurate record.

3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

Mr Jonathan Jones informed the meeting that there are two performance management meetings in the timetable for each scrutiny committee and in previous years they have looked at the corporate electronic PIMS system. This system uses a simple traffic light indicator to reflect performance against set targets, which Members have found useful and has allowed effective challenge of officers.

For the next round of performance management meetings it is proposed to change the format and use the Directorate Risk Assessment (DRAT). This was used successfully at a recent Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and members requested that a workshop be set up to consider possible actions (if any) the scrutiny committee should take.

It is proposed therefore that the autumn 2008 round of performance management scrutiny committee meetings will undertake the same workshop exercise, which should make the scrutiny committees more member led and strategic.

Mr. Jonathan Jones stated that he and Ros Roberts from Performance Management Unit would organise the arrangements for the workshops. The intention is to use small groups of

members who will look at risks and hopefully improve overall performance. This proposal has the full support of Directors.

Members stated that in the past the Scrutiny Committees have only looked at what officers have put forward, by using the DRAT they can pick up on risks and ask more in depth questions on the management of those risks.

Mr. Jonathan Jones stated that if we can demonstrate that scrutiny is managing risk it might reduce the level of external regulatory monitoring of the Authority.

Agreed: The autumn 2008 Performance Management Scrutiny Committees to be a workshop format using DRAT.

4. SCRUTINY OF PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

Mr. Jonathan Jones stated that the Welsh Assembly Government have published a number of policy reports that are likely to have an affect upon scrutiny:

- The Beecham Review 'Delivering beyond Boundaries'
- WAG's policy statement 'A Shared Responsibility'
- WAG's discussion paper on scrutiny, political structures, councillors and the community.

The main message from these documents is that local authorities must take on responsibility for delivery of public services within their area. A Bill will go to Parliament in 2009, which will include new powers for the Welsh Assembly Government. These new powers will allow local authorities to require public service providers to come to scrutiny committee's. Mr. Jones suggested that he visit public service partners to discuss the proposed changes and raise their awareness.

Mr. Jones stated that an invitation to full council for partners would be the way forward with a protocol to ensure that questions are organised around themes. Members discussed the importance of a protocol for questions with a theme in order to ensure meetings run smoothly. Mr. Jones stated that by inviting partners to full council it will allow sharing of learning amongst all members and a protocol of themed questions should ensure that the partners questioning would be focussed and informative.

Members agreed that supplementary questioning would need to be carefully controlled. Mr. Jones agreed and suggested that they are treated as clarification questions.

Agreed: Mr. J Jones to contact partners to inform them of proposals.

5. REQUESTING REPORTS

Mr. Jones stated that this report is included for clarification purposes following a request from Scrutiny Chair.

Councillor L. Hughes raised concerns that she does not receive the reports for Education and Leisure SMT before the meeting, which does not allow her sufficient preparation time. Mr. J. Jones to raise the matter with senior management team.

6. CABINET MEMBER STATEMENT – VERBAL REPORT

Mr. Jones stated that Mr. S. Rosser Chief Executive has asked him to raise the issue of cabinet members statements with SMP. Mr. Jones explained that originally the cabinet

member statement was intended to update scrutiny committee members with important issues coming forward. However the report has now become a good news item for service areas with details of awards etc.

Members discussed the last Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee when no Cabinet Members were available and a written statement was provided. The Chair, in consultation with Nigel Barnett, decided not to read out the statement as he felt it was in conflict with his role.

Members agreed that at present the verbal report brings little added value to the scrutiny meeting and members seem unaware that the cabinet member is at the meeting to answer questions on any report included on the agenda, most questions are directed to officers.

Mr. Jones suggested that if members wish to question cabinet members on a report, the agenda could ask members to notify a day in advance that they wish to ask a question. If there were no questions the cabinet members could leave, if they wish, once they have made their verbal statement.

Members agreed that the cabinet member statement should become more relevant it should be personal and look forward to future events.

Members were concerned about the length of some scrutiny agenda's. Mr. Jones stated scrutiny agendas become overloaded when the forward work programme is not updated. He has raised this with the Directors. Mr. Jones suggested that the forward work programme reports are moved from information items to the last discussion item, this would allow members to take more control of future agendas.

Action: Mr. Jones to arrange for changes to Scrutiny Agenda.

7. FEEDBACK ON ADVANCED CHAIRING SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Jones stated that the training on the 19 September 2008 went very well with good attendance and the WLGA gave good feedback on the day. Councillor L. Binding and Councillor L Hughes will attend the charring skills leadership academy.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be arranged.