



SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT PANEL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON THURSDAY, 22ND JANUARY 2009 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Taylor – Chairman

Councillors:

L Binding, M Sargent, V Jenkins, M Parker, K Lloyd, D Cullen and L Hughes

Together with:

Colin Jones (Head of Performance and Policy) Jonathan Jones (Scrutiny Co-ordinator) and Catherine Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Councillor M Prew.

2. MINUTES OF MEETING 10 OCTOBER 2009

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2008 were approved as an accurate record.

Members asked what progress has been achieved in the forward work programme. Mr Jonathan Jones stated that meetings have been held with Directors following the performance management meetings. The discussion involved the size of the agendas and the capacity of the scrutiny committee to fully scrutinise. Mr Jonathan Jones will bring a report to a future meeting of SMP in order to discuss the options.

Members asked for feedback from Councillor L Binding on the WLGA's chairing skills leadership academy that he attended on 29th and 30th November 2008. Councillor Binding reported that there were some interesting elements but felt that one day would have been sufficient. Councillor L Hughes received a copy of the handouts and Mr Jonathan Jones will arrange for copies to be circulated to SMP members.

Action: Mr J Jones to circulate copies of training handouts from the Chairing Skills Workshop.

3. NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES: HEALTH WELLBEING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT SCRUTINY

Mrs Forbes-Thompson summarised the main elements of the evidence presented to the committee inquiry to date. Evidence has been presented by:

Dr Brian Gibbons the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government

Dr Gibbons indicated that the Legislative Competence Order that is seeking additional powers for the National Assembly in respect of local government would hopefully be completed by the summer of 2010.

The Minister gave an overview of some of the scrutiny developments in recent years. The Scrutiny Development Fund of £100,000 was available last year for local authorities to bid for and support the development of scrutiny. He stated that local authorities that are committed to improvement should ensure that effective scrutiny support is in place. The Minister felt that there is little evidence of formal whipping in scrutiny but there is some informal whipping or peer pressure. There is a new role for members in scrutinising public services. Dr Gibbons stated that the role of call-in will need to be looked at and the involvement of voluntary organisations in scrutiny will be a matter for future debate.

Members discussed the timing of the LCO and Mr Jonathan Jones stated that he understands that there are some issues that may affect the timing.

Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)

The WLGA stated to the committee that local members face a number of challenges in terms of balancing their roles as community leaders and ward activities, membership of committees and partnerships and the expectation that they have expertise in the scrutiny role. The WLGA have been involved in a number of support activities which include member training. The WLGA facilitate the Scrutiny Champions network and have been involved in the production of a number of scrutiny practice guides. They were closely involved in the Scrutiny Leadership Academy. The WLGA also carried out a survey of local authorities in Wales on their call-in procedures and have urged WAG to give clearer guidance.

Wales Audit Office (WAO)

The WAO informed the committee that most local authorities have a cabinet forward work programme but their quality and timeliness varies. The full potential of scrutiny has not been realised and there is evidence that some scrutiny committees are fed and are happy to receive a number of items 'for information'. Member training has improved but is generally not well supported by dedicated scrutiny support and research facilities. There is a lack of clarity in how scrutiny can support policy development without compromising its independence.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CFPS)

The CFPS agreed with the WLGA concern about the capacity of some authorities to meet the challenge of scrutiny development. The CFPS agreed with WAO regarding the effectiveness of scrutiny but disagreed with the submission that many authorities have failed to look outside the traditional areas of the council responsibility.

CRG Research

CRG Research reported on their findings that related to scrutiny from the research carried in 2006 out on behalf of WAG, which was entitled 'The Role and Function of Elected Members'. They recommended that WAG build a cadre of officers to support scrutiny and national partners. It was recommended that scrutiny look at issues that cut across traditional boundaries but WAG should avoid central prescription or legislation to enforce this.

Cardiff Business School (CBS)

Cardiff Business School also took part in the WAG research project on the role and function of elected members and reported that interviewees identified scrutiny as underdeveloped and

underpowered. Local members were unable to give examples of effective scrutiny. CBS reported that scrutiny of performance was patchy and not sufficiently challenging. Some council's have made efforts to involve the public but overall there was little evidence of engagement.

One Voice Wales (OVW)

OVW reported to the inquiry that there is variability in the operation of scrutiny across Wales. They felt that further involvement of interested parties such as community and town councils could be encouraged through task and finish groups. Where there is wider involvement of co-opted members, they do not have access to council email and intranet systems. The wider publicity of scrutiny committee work programmes would promote wider engagement in scrutiny. OVW reported that pre-decision scrutiny is lacking and there should be greater emphasis on the overview element. The committee were also informed that OVW would like to see scrutiny training available to community and town councillors and LSB partners.

Members discussed the involvement of community and town councils and agreed that CCBC already consults through the Community and Town Council Liaison Committee and the Town Centre Management Group. Scrutiny Committee's also consider requests to attend scrutiny committee from community and town councils when there is a relevant issue under discussion.

Members discussed the difficulty of providing training for community and town councillors without funding.

Members asked if there is any intention to give voting rights to voluntary organisations. Mr Jonathan Jones stated that he has already given a response to WAG with his concerns.

Catherine Forbes-Thompson informed members that the Committee have met today to examine the written evidence, which they requested by 5 December 2008. The Committee may then invite oral evidence and ask follow up questions from those who have submitted evidence. There is no completion date for the committee inquiry report as yet.

4. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT MEETINGS: AUTUMN 2008

Mr Colin Jones stated that the risk assessment process worked well with good feedback from members. Mr Jonathan Jones and Mrs Ros Roberts will now meet with Directors to discuss the outcomes and agree when they can appear on the forward work programme.

Members agreed that the process used at the PM scrutiny meetings was interesting and easy to understand. Members discussed the difficult budget settlements for the council and the need to ensure that performance management is used to effectively manage problems and prioritise where there are budgetary constraints.

Mr Jonathan Jones stated that the risk workshops looked at risks that had already been identified by senior management teams. Members were asked to pick out the most significant risks and their role was to ask questions on how services will be provided. The next step is to look at the areas identified and how to manage the risks.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be arranged.