



SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT PANEL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON THURSDAY, 23RD APRIL 2009 AT 5.15 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Taylor - Chairman

Councillors:

Mrs. V. Jenkins, M. Parker, L. Binding, M. Prew, Mrs. M. Sargent, D. Cullen and Miss. L. Hughes

Together with:

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

APOLOGIES

Apologise for absence were received from Councillor K. Lloyd.

1. POTENTIAL SCRUTINY DEVELOPMENTS

Mr. J. Jones stated that the Welsh Assembly Government has set out its policy intentions for Scrutiny in light of the Beecham review of public service delivery in Wales.

The Welsh Assembly Government want Councillors to become champions of better public services and scrutiny committees to take responsibility for the scrutiny of public service delivery at a local level, for example, the emergency services, public transport operators, utility companies and NHS. The WAG discussion paper on scrutiny, political structures, councillors and the community outlined more detailed options for strengthening the role of scrutiny committees.

The main issues under consideration are:

- **Allowing the establishment of joint scrutiny committees with other local authorities**
- **Allowing co-opted members of scrutiny committees to vote**

Members were concerned that although co-opted members provide a role in scrutiny committee, they should not be allowed to vote. Mr. J. Jones stated that the feedback given to WAG was that this could affect political balance.

- **Requiring representatives from other public sector organisations to attend scrutiny committees or provide information**

Members felt that this could be valuable and asked if there is a formal scrutiny relationship between the local authority the Police and Fire Service. Mr. J. Jones stated that there is no formal scrutiny or accountability relationship between CCBC and the Police and Fire Services.

Mr. Colin Jones stated that the Local Service Board is made up of representatives from Gwent Police, GAVO, Local Health Board, CCBC and WAG as the core group and they have agreed to invite other organisations to attend as necessary. The LSB would be willing to attend Scrutiny to discuss a particular issue.

- **The relationship between scrutiny committees and Community Health Councils (CHCs)**
- **The party whip**
- **Appointment of scrutiny committee chairs**

Mr. Jones explained that WAG wanted to make the sharing of scrutiny committee chairs and vice chairs across political groups compulsory. However, it would be likely that political groups could still refuse to take committee chairs.

- **Requirement for scrutiny committees to produce forward work plans**

Mr. Jones stated that this is already in place but could be developed further.

- **Officer support**

There should be sufficient senior and discreet support for scrutiny process.

- **Requiring scrutiny committees to involve public debate on strategic issues**

Mr. Jones stated that WAG has developed these ideas over the last 18 months. The next stage is for WAG to submit a Legislative Competency Order to Parliament to acquire the necessary statutory powers, however, a final timetable was not yet known.

2. SCRUTINY SKILLS TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Mr. J. Jones stated that last summer the Council was awarded the WLGA's Wales Charter for Member Support and Development. Members were asked to complete a training needs analysis and the findings used to develop a scrutiny skills training and development programme. Mr. Jones explained that he had developed a training programme specifically designed to improve new and more experienced members' scrutiny skills.

The WLGA will run a national Leadership Academy, consisting of a two-day residential training course aimed at scrutiny committee chairs. Mr. Jones said he would write to members to ask for nominations.

Members endorsed the draft scrutiny training and development programme.

3. ROLE DESCRIPTIONS

Mr. J. Jones explained that the role descriptions were devised to clarify the role of chairs and vice chairs and are a requirement of the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development. Members endorsed the role descriptions.

4. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

Mrs. Catherine Forbes-Thompson explained that task and finish groups are an opportunity for a small group of members to directly influence future council policies or review the operation of current services. The reviews carried out during the past year include:

- Education for Life Scrutiny Committee: Community Centre Task and Finish Group
- Living Environment Scrutiny Committee: Bereavement Services Task and Finish Group
- Regeneration Scrutiny Committee: Bus Services Task and Finish Group

Mrs. Forbes-Thompson stated that the planning for the task and finish reviews for 2008-09 is due to start in September 2008 and the subjects have yet to be agreed. She asked if members could consider possible subjects for review and she will contact members in the next few weeks to discuss their suggestions.

Members asked what reviews have been carried out in the past few years. Mrs. Forbes-Thompson said she would circulate a list of completed reviews.

Mr. Colin Jones suggested to members that when considering possible subjects for review that they could look at the Directorate Risk Assessment which sets out their major risks and feeds into the Joint Risk Assessment for the whole authority.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be determined.