



SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT PANEL

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE
ON WEDNESDAY, 17TH JUNE 2009 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor J Taylor – Chairman

Councillors:

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

Together with:

Colin Jones (Head of Performance and Policy) Jonathan Jones (Scrutiny and Members Services Manager) and Catherine Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

Councillor D Bolter.

2. MINUTES OF MEETING 22ND JANUARY 2009

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd April 2009 were approved as an accurate record.

3. DRAFTING AND CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Drafting

Gary George outlined the main principles of drafting minutes, he explained that minutes are not meant to be a verbatim record but should be brief, self contained and decisive.

The minute taker will pick up the main threads of the discussion that led to the conclusion and decision. Minutes should refer to every item of business on the agenda. The discussion is recorded in an impersonal way, which avoids requests for amendments to minutes to reflect personal statements.

Members discussed requests by scrutiny committee members for their statement to be noted in the minutes, Mr Jonathan Jones stated that the Councils' constitution allows recording of votes in the minutes. Mr G George stated that members might wish to record when they disagree with the recommendation of the committee.

Mr J Jones suggested that where there is a long debate and a close vote, the minutes could state that 'after a long debate many views were expressed' before recording the decision.

Councillor A Pritchard asked if the scrutiny recommendations that are passed to Cabinet could reflect the level of debate on an issue.

Members discussed if minutes should record when Members leave a committee meeting. Mr G George stated that the Monitoring Officer has previously written to members to advise them that if they intend to leave the meeting early and an item in which they should declare an interest will be discussed after they leave, that they should inform the Committee Clerk so that it can be recorded in the minutes.

Mr J Jones suggested that if a note were made in the minutes when a member leaves the meeting, the Councils' constitution would need to be updated. He stated that the Monitoring Officer is currently compiling a report on changes to the constitution so this request could be incorporated at the same time.

Action: Mr Gary George to discuss with Mr Dan Perkins changes to the constitution, to include an instruction that the time that members leave meetings is recorded in minutes.

Confirmation

Mr G George explained that when minutes are on the agenda for confirmation that this is for accuracy only, there is no agenda item for matters arising. He stated that it is important to note that if a matter from the minutes is discussed further leading to an action, e.g. a report, or a letter and this appears in the minutes it can lead criticism and is legally doubtful this is because every item that is discussed should appear on the agenda.

- Members agreed that there is a need for consistency across all meetings. Mr J Jones suggested that Chairs should retain some discretion and allow discussion on the minutes in exceptional circumstances.

4. SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENTS

Mr J Jones stated that this report is the outcome of a series of discussions with Directors, which sought their views on scrutiny.

Committee Agendas

The length of scrutiny committee agendas was discussed, it was felt that agendas are too long which results in a less focussed meeting. It was felt that 2 hours is the maximum length of time for a scrutiny committee meeting.

Requests for Reports

Mr Jones stated that requests for reports by scrutiny committee members needed to be considered carefully. The committee workload is heavy and a large number of requests affect the length of agendas. He highlighted the recent changes at Education for Life Scrutiny, in which the Chair asked the scrutiny committee to decide if requests for reports should be added to the forward work programme or dealt with outside of the meeting.

Councillor Binding illustrated an example of a rolling programme of agenda items used by other local authorities. They keep a gap on each agenda to allow committees the opportunity to insert any issues of concern.

Mr C Jones said that agenda's need to be reduced in size but still allow member requests for reports to come forward. The challenge for committees is to manage the size of their agenda in order to ensure that important reports are given sufficient time for debate.

Members agreed that a forward work programme could be useful by allowing members the opportunity to look at the background to issues before committee. The forward work programme can also take into account the priorities identified by members in the performance management workshops.

Presenting of Information to Committees

Members discussed presentation at committee, it was agreed that it is important for time slots to be allocated in order to ensure that enough time is available for the rest of the agenda.

Mr J Jones asked if Chairs and Vice Chairs should ask Directors how long agenda items would take and how do they fit into committee capacity. It may be useful to consider using workshops and presentations at committee but agree timescales beforehand.

Members agreed that officers presenting reports need to be reminded that only a brief overview is required, Chairs should discourage reading of entire report.

Size of Committee Membership

Mr J Jones stated that feedback has indicated that the present size of 20 members on a scrutiny committee is too large. He asked members to consider this over the coming weeks. He stated that a smaller committee of about 13 may be more manageable and could encourage scrutiny committees to work more as a group.

Cabinet Member Statement

Members agreed that the Cabinet Member statement should refer to important issues that have occurred in last 6 weeks and look forward to what is coming up. It should be brief and once questions are completed the Cabinet Member should be free to leave the meeting.

Role of the Chair

Members agreed that any training opportunities should be of good quality and focus on Wales.

Order of Agendas

Mr J Jones asked members to consider the order of agendas, in particular should minutes be moved to the end of the agenda. This would allow more time for debate on the main agenda items.

Mr Jones suggested the next stage in this process should be a questionnaire to all Members, relevant officers and co-opted members asking for their opinions. The outcome of the questionnaire exercise would be a series of workshops to discuss the main issues identified in the questionnaires, this could then be debated at full council.

Action: Mr J Jones to organise questionnaire and workshops on scrutiny improvements.

5. NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES: HEALTH WELLBEING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW ARRANGEMENTS.

Mrs C Forbes-Thompson stated that the Inquiry has now reached its conclusion and the report and its recommendations have been published. Members discussed the following recommendations:

- Recommendation 3: The recommendation to provide dedicated independent officers for scrutiny committees – Mr J Jones stated that Caerphilly County Borough Council has 3 staff providing dedicated scrutiny officer support, administrative support is provided by Committee Services and there is an option to ask for further support from Policy Unit and Performance Management Team.
- Recommendation 6: The recommendation to increase funding available from Scrutiny Development Fund (SDF) – Mrs C Forbes-Thompson explained that the Welsh Assembly Government has established the SDF in order to develop the scrutiny function in local authorities through individual projects. Bids to the fund can go up to £20,000 and will be for 60% of the overall cost of the project.
- Recommendation 7: Training to include backbench members of scrutiny committees – Members agreed that training should be available to all scrutiny committee members and be relevant to Welsh scrutiny.
- Recommendation 17: Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny to reflect party balance in each local authority – Mr J Jones stated that although legislation can be introduced to insist that chairs and vice chairs are offered according to party balance, the legislation cannot ensure that the offers are accepted.

6. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PRE-MEETINGS

Councillor J Taylor informed the meeting that he had recently reviewed the 15 minutes pre-meeting at Policy and Resources Scrutiny committee. He queried the benefit of the pre-meeting and suggested to P&R members that they discontinue it. However P&R scrutiny committee decided to continue with the pre-meeting and recommend to other scrutiny committees. Members discussed the possibility of rolling out pre-meetings to other scrutiny committees but were reluctant to formalise this. It was suggested that Chairs should instead ask questions at the beginning of the meeting regarding the order of the agenda and prioritisation.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

10th September 2009

CHAIRMAN