



SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT TY PENALLTA ON THURSDAY 24TH APRIL 2014

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Councillors, L. Ackerman; E. Aldworth; H. David (Chair); D.T. Davies; D. Havard; D. Preece; D. Rees,

Together with:

J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager); C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer) and S. J. Byrne (Senior Manager PwC)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors; W. David; B. Jones; C. Mann and J. Summers.

2. WELCOME

Sara Jane Byrne from Price Waterhouse Cooper was welcomed to the meeting.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

4. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 27TH MARCH 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on the 27th March 2014 were agreed as a true record.

5. REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. SCRUTINY DEVELOPMENTS

Officers outlined the background to the report, which highlights the issues identified in respect of scrutiny contained in the Wales Audit office Corporate Governance Inspection report published in January 2014. The report also contains the recommendations from the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery (Williams report) also published in January 2014 that relate to scrutiny.

Members were reminded that at a previous meeting of Scrutiny Leadership Group the WAO Corporate Governance report was briefly discussed and a request was made for further information to be brought to a future meeting. As a result an invitation was extended to Sara-Jane Byrne from PwC so that she may provide background information to the scrutiny elements of the Corporate Governance report.

SJB thanked Members for the invitation and outlined how the information for the report had been gathered. Two scrutiny committee meetings were observed, Policy and Resources and Regeneration and Environment. They met with some chairs and vice chairs, surveyed all Members with questions on the governance arrangements and scrutiny, and finally interviewed officers.

The key messages in the report were mixed. Members and officers had mixed views about the effectiveness of the biannual performance scrutiny committees. These performance scrutiny committee meetings have now stopped. The intention is to include performance information as part of routine business, this should strengthen reports and they were pleased to see this being taken forward. There needs to be a move towards greater evaluation of performance along with contextual information as opposed to data gathering.

There were positive comments from Members, who felt that they had respect for Officers and received the information they wanted.

The Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan (SIAP) includes a number of changes, which are ongoing. There were concerns from some Chairs that they weren't getting the right reports to assist them in their role. SJB stated that training is a key element of the Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan.

She found that the changes to scrutiny were more embedded at Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee than Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny. She had some concerns over the lengthy debate on the BMI report and was concerned how the committee would deal with the challenging times ahead, in terms of budget scrutiny. She had been reassured however by officers that the subsequent budget scrutiny had been robust at Regeneration and Environment.

When the meetings were observed the Director sat opposite the Chair at Policy and Resources and she felt was clearly held to account. However at Regeneration and Environment the Director sat next to the Chair. Both meetings were well attended with Members of the public present as well as outside representatives. It was felt that although valid questions were asked, these could have gone further to explore issues more fully. Cabinet Members gave a verbal update at each meeting but they were not particularly challenging issues, and were more of interest. This opportunity to challenge the Executive could be used more effectively. The Notices of Motion at P & R were handled well by the Chair.

SJB stated that the remit of Regeneration & Environment was large and agreed that extra meetings proposed for the budget scrutiny would be helpful. She didn't think that the issues discussed at the observed meeting were particularly strategic but appreciated that there has to be a balance.

The SIAP includes arrangements to continue with observation visits to other councils and she agreed that this was a useful development tool and should help Members to develop questioning skills.

It was noted that presentations were given to scrutiny but were not necessarily available on the council website afterwards, consideration should be given to uploading presentations to improve transparency.

The Chair of Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee agreed that at the meeting that was observed the Director did not sit opposite him, however since then the seating arrangements have been changed in accordance with the SIAP. The large remit of the scrutiny committee means that there are three Cabinet Members who report to the committee and there is limited room for officers to sit at the meeting table. There has been prioritisation of the forward work programme by the Chair who has moved or delayed reports where there are too many on the agenda. He felt that it would be useful for the scrutiny committee to have sight of the Cabinet Members statements prior to the start of the scrutiny committee.

SJB stated that she had received confirmation that the new procedures had been implemented and agreed that because of the wider remit it is important to ensure that the Chair manages the content of the agenda. She agreed that having three Cabinet members is difficult and that advance notification of the verbal statement would allow the committee to prepare.

Members debated requesting Cabinet Members statements prior to the start of the scrutiny committee meeting, whether to receive them with the agenda, or request them for the pre-meeting. Officers reminded members that the intention of the Cabinet Members statement is that it is verbal and up to date. If it had to be ready for the agenda it would have to be written three weeks beforehand and would not be up to date.

Members agreed that they would not want the statement at the scrutiny committee pre-meeting as that would distract from the purpose of the pre-meeting, however they agreed that an emailed copy on the day before would be useful. Members also asked that the statement be strategic and relevant and not 'good news' stories.

The Chair of Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee outlined the recent visits made to Bridgend and Cardiff Councils to observe and did not feel that having the timings on the agenda at Cardiff allowed the flow of the meeting to work well. He felt that the recent scrutiny of the budget proposals was done well with follow up reports and an additional meeting arranged to allow full scrutiny of the areas of concern.

Officers stated that scrutiny meetings are held every six weeks averaging 3 hours each means that the agenda needs to be carefully managed through the forward work programmes. It is better to focus on the three to four important issues and have a full discussion. Members agreed that it was important to use judgement and consider if issues are strategic.

Members outlined the work carried out by the 21st Century Schools cross party member working group. This group met twice weekly over a period of time to agree and make recommendations on the secondary schools rationalisation programme. This group is a good example of a team of members working together, where they prioritised, scored and analysed data and options for different sites. They felt that this was a good model for looking at bigger issues.

Members commented that there has been a culture change in scrutiny over the last 12 months, Policy and Resources Scrutiny committee was already on the path and the other scrutiny committees are catching up. They felt that they are more of a critical friend and are asking more effective questions. It is critical that new members are given time to settle in and provided with training and support. The pilot pre-meetings at P & R have made a difference

already, however it is important that Executive Members and Officers also receive training on scrutiny.

Officers stated that this was an important issue and that full Council recently endorsed a report that outlined training for Members, Cabinet Members and Officers. Members commented that Democratic Services Committee had wanted the training for Cabinet Members and Officers to be compulsory, however this was not accepted but it was agreed that it would be provided and monitored. It was also noted that a Cabinet Member had moved the recommendation.

SJB commented that the Improvement Governance Board had discussed Officers role in scrutiny meetings in presenting and writing reports, and there had been a commitment to improve this

The Chair stated that at the last meeting of SLG they had discussed the format of reports, SJB advised that the Improvement Governance Board had received a critique of the report format.

Members thanked Sara-Jane Byrne for her attendance and insights.

7. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S FORWARD WORK PROGRAMMES

Officers outlined the draft forward work programmes and consultation feedback, as follows:

Education for Life Scrutiny Committee

Members agreed with the draft forward work programme, subject to the Improvement Objectives Year End Performance 2013/14 report being added to the agenda for the meeting on 4th June 2014. It was noted that the report on the outcomes of interventions on behalf of vulnerable children in the County Borough would be reported in September 2014.

Health Social Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

Members agreed with the draft forward work programme subject to the Improvement Objectives Year End Performance 2013/14 report being added to the agenda for the meeting for 24th June 2014.

Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee

Members agreed with the draft forward work programme, subject to the Improvement Objectives Year End Performance 2013/14 report being added to the agenda for the meeting on 3rd June 2014. Members noted the requests in respect of Section 215; Surveillance policy/practice; Procurement policy/blacklisting and 'Use of cycle bells' and noted that further information will be obtained before they are added to the forward work programmes.

Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Members agreed with the draft forward work programme subject to the Improvement Objectives Year End Performance 2013/14 report and the Caerphilly County Borough LDP first review to be added for 1st July 2014. The Impact of Car Parking Charges on Town Centres to return to scrutiny for discussion but not on the current forward work programme. SLG noted that the two Members requests Mobile Animal Zoos and Emergency Tree Works scheduled for 20th May have been moved to the 1st July 2014.

The meeting closed at 18:22 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 24th April 2014 they were signed by the Chairman.

CHAIRMAN