



## **SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP**

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON THURSDAY, 29TH MAY 2014 AT 5.00 P.M.**

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PRESENT:

Councillor H.W. David - Chair

Councillors:

Miss L. Ackerman, Mrs E.M. Aldworth, W. David, D.T. Davies, D. Havard, S. Morgan, J. Pritchard.

Together with:

J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer).

#### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs P. Cook, C.P. Mann and D. Rees, together with C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer).

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

#### **3. MINUTES – 24TH APRIL 2014**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Scrutiny Leadership Group meeting held on 24th April 2014 (minute nos. 1 - 7, on page nos. 1 - 4) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **REPORTS OF OFFICERS**

Consideration was given to the following reports.

#### 4. **ROLE OF SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP**

With the aid of a slideshow presentation, the Democratic Services Manager presented the report to Members, which outlined the purpose, membership and terms of reference of the Scrutiny Leadership Group (SLG). This Group was set up following a recommendation from the Scrutiny Action Plan, which was endorsed by Council on 8th October 2013.

The purpose of the Group is to oversee the Council's scrutiny function by providing a strategic overview for scrutiny, discussing matters with CMT and Cabinet (as necessary), suggesting improvements to further develop the effectiveness of scrutiny and recommend training requirements. Membership of the Group is made up of all Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs plus the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Audit and Democratic Services committees.

Members were reminded of the terms of reference of the SLG which are as follows: oversee and co-ordinate the work of Scrutiny Committees through forward work programmes, ensure effective liaison across the work of the Committees, provide strategic leadership of the Scrutiny function, consider involvement in regional Scrutiny arrangements, encourage public engagement with Scrutiny and consider requests for scrutiny involvement, consider Councillor Calls for Action, monitor effectiveness of Scrutiny Committee pre-meeting, oversee specific scrutiny training requirements and monitor the Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan.

The Group has an important role in promoting the scrutiny function and Scrutiny Chairs are expected to report on the work of their respective committees and in particular identify areas for improvement or good practice. The SLG also monitors any task and finish groups and considers the impact of any recommendations.

The terms of reference listed in the report were discussed in detail by Members, and the Democratic Service Manager responded to the various queries that arose out of these discussions.

Members queried the nature of the scrutiny training requirements, and this was confirmed that this would take the form of training to make Scrutiny Committee Members aware of their role and of the roles of other Member portfolios in the Authority (such as Cabinet Members).

The Authority's involvement in regional scrutiny arrangements was discussed and it was confirmed that whilst the Council was permitted to arrange Joint Scrutiny Committees with other local authorities, there were currently no such arrangements in place (with the exception of Prosiect Gwyrd). It was suggested that this could be an area for consideration by the Scrutiny Leadership Group at a later date.

The possibility of trialling special Scrutiny meetings for specific individual items was discussed, in order to allow for detailed debate on these items. The Chair of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee queried the progress of his request for a special Scrutiny meeting to be arranged regarding the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS). It was confirmed that a report was currently being arranged in relation to this request.

Reference was made to the recent Wales Audit Office Corporate Governance Inspection Report, which highlighted a need to engage more fully with the public and stakeholders, and the importance of public engagement was discussed in detail by the Scrutiny Leadership Group. Members suggested it would be beneficial to hold Scrutiny Committee meetings in locations such as community centres, and it was confirmed that this was feasible providing the location was accessible to the public and that the agenda had some relevance to the area concerned. It was recommended that ways to increase interest in such meetings be examined and that the views and contributions of people attending be heard by the Committee for maximum interaction.

Members discussed previous occasions where Scrutiny meetings had been held in schools and the Chair of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee confirmed that there had been issues in relation to the facilities available at these meetings and also that the 5pm meeting start time resulted in a lack of engagement with stakeholders. He suggested the possibility of holding afternoon meetings and referenced the recent Secondary Rationalisation report relating to the new school proposed for Oakdale as an example of an item that could have been taken out into the locality.

The Vice-Chair of the Audit Committee commented that Scrutiny meetings were already well attended by members of the public and clarified the difference between these and public meetings. It was confirmed that public meetings involved an open debate from all interested parties, whereas Scrutiny meetings specifically scrutinised Council decisions, with the public able to view these meetings but not able to participate in discussions.

The Group discussed arrangements in regards to the order of agenda items at Scrutiny meetings. It was agreed that whilst there were agenda items that received a larger amount of public interest than others, it was important to maintain a balance so that the core work of the Scrutiny Committees could be demonstrated to the public throughout the course of the meeting.

The Vice-Chair of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee queried the recording and webcasting of meetings that was planned for the near future, and asked how this would be addressed if Scrutiny meetings were held outside of Council premises.

Officers confirmed that these plans were initially restricted to full Council and Planning Committee meetings and then it would be up to Members to decide whether to extend webcasting into other committees. It was confirmed that any such meetings held outside the premises would not be webcasted live but it might be possible to record them with a fixed camera and uploaded to the Council's website following the meeting. There was also the possibility that this process could be extended to Members' training and for internal staff communications in the future. Officers confirmed that there would be advice displayed at the meeting location and on the agenda to advise that the meeting would be filmed as part of proceedings.

The process behind Councillor Calls for Action was clarified to the Scrutiny Leadership Group. It was explained to Members that this was a process that could be invoked by Members if a complaint could not be resolved by any other means, with the complaint then heard through a public meeting process.

Members discussed the effectiveness of the Scrutiny pre-meetings, which were used as a means for Members to formulate and refine their questions for that evening's Scrutiny meeting, and each Committee Chair relayed their experiences of the pre-meetings thus far. The general consensus was that the Scrutiny meetings now felt more structured, and that items were being scrutinised and challenged by Members more thoroughly.

The Group discussed the length of meetings and Members enquired as to the possibility of Cabinet Members emailing their reports to Committee Members prior to the meeting so that questions on these reports could be prepared in advance. It was confirmed that this request had been passed to the Corporate Management Team.

Members discussed the processes surrounding the Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programmes, with it established that they would be brought to future meetings of the Scrutiny Leadership Group.

It was confirmed that Members' requests to remove Information Items and Future Report Requests from Scrutiny Agendas had been passed to the Corporate Management Team. The intent being that information items will be published electronically but not printed and, that report requests be received by Scrutiny Officers and taken back to the Corporate

Management Team and Scrutiny Leadership Group to be considered for inclusion in future Forward Work Programmes. Officers also clarified the procedure in relation to urgent Member requests.

The Chair of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee made enquiries as to which Scrutiny Committee was responsible for the Wellbeing. The Democratic Services Manager confirmed that he would check the terms of reference to establish the situation.

Members commented that the Scrutiny Leadership Group did not currently have a Vice-Chair, and the Democratic Services Manager confirmed that the Group were able to appoint such a position.

In that he already holds the position of Vice-Chair of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, it was agreed that Councillor S. Morgan be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Group,.

It was unanimously agreed that subject to the terms of reference of the Scrutiny Leadership Group being amended to reflect that the Vice-Chair of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee will also hold the position of Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Group, the content of the report be noted.

## **5. GWENT SCRUTINY CHALLENGE**

The Democratic Services Manager presented the report, which outlined the arrangements in respect of the 'Gwent Scrutiny Challenge' event, which aims to build on the success of the "Scrutiny in the Spotlight" conference in November 2013.

Members were informed that the five Gwent authorities are planning a collaborative training programme to share some of the key messages about effective scrutiny with a wider audience. The "Gwent Scrutiny Challenge" is due to begin with a high profile event to kick-start the debate and will be followed up with a package of training tailored to each of the five participating authorities. This will take forward the lessons learned from the event, develop a culture of confident challenge across Gwent and ensure that messages are taken forward within each authority.

The target audience will include all Members and Co-opted Members of the Gwent authorities, statutory officers and scrutiny/improvement/audit officers from each Council, representatives of Newport Fairness Commission, representatives from ABHB Non-Executive Members/Aneurin Bevan CHC, Gwent Police and Crime Panel (Co-opted Members), South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority, Local Service Board, Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations, and scrutiny champions from elsewhere in Wales.

The key partners and contributors at the event will be Welsh Government, Wales Audit Office, Centre for Public Scrutiny, Estyn, CSSIW and WLGA

The purpose of the event is to promote understanding of the importance of scrutiny in delivering effective challenge and supporting accountability, further develop members' skills in robust scrutiny questioning, promote a shared understanding amongst scrutiny members that 'challenge is my responsibility' and develop a culture of confident challenge within the organisations, including within service management.

It was added that the Challenge was also trying to promote Officers' expectations of Members and for Members to feel comfortable with regards to questioning techniques. The programme for the Challenge would review Scrutiny improvement action plans throughout Gwent and suggest shared areas of improvements.

Members were informed of the efforts taken by the collaborative approach to secure the speakers for the event, and were advised that Welsh Government were paying for the event costs. The event was perceived as innovative, with Caerphilly County Borough Council sending a delegation of 31 officers, Members and guests in total.

It was confirmed that the event would be held from 9am to 1pm and that transport arrangements had been made for the Caerphilly delegation. Officers advised that the event would be filmed and uploaded onto YouTube, with it hoped that all Members would subsequently view at least part of the conference, and that areas for improvement would be filtered through to full Council.

Members were pleased to note the arrangements for the Gwent Scrutiny Challenge Event and commented that the purpose and potential outcomes of the event would be very useful.

The meeting closed at 6.10 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 26th June 2014 they were signed by the Chair.

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CHAIR