



## **SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP**

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON THURSDAY, 26TH JUNE 2014 AT 5.00 P.M.**

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**PRESENT:**

Councillor H.W. David - Chair

**Councillors:**

Mrs P. Cook W. David, D.T. Davies, D. Havard, C.P. Mann, S. Morgan, and D. Rees.

**Together with:**

J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager), A. Price (Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer) and C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer).

#### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors, Miss L. Ackerman, Mrs E.M. Aldworth and J. Pritchard.

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

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

#### **3. MINUTES – 29TH MAY 2014**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Scrutiny Leadership Group meeting held on 29th May 2014 (minute nos. 1 - 5, on page nos. 1 - 5) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **REPORTS OF OFFICERS**

Consideration was given to the following reports.

#### **4. SPECIAL POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Mrs Forbes-Thompson outlined the arrangements for the special meeting of Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee to be held at St David's Community Centre in Rhymney. The meeting will be themed on the Welsh Housing Quality Standard and arrangements will be made for Members to visit properties that have benefitted from improvement works and Rowan Place, which was discussed at the last meeting of Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

There will be publicity to encourage local residents to come along and observe the meeting and the tenant representatives on the Caerphilly Homes Task Group along with local ward Members will be invited to attend and participate.

Members commented that it was important to manage the site visits carefully and ensure that tenants have the opportunity to speak. Mr Jones stated that Members will be able to observe the quality of works, speak to tenants about their experiences and use this information to inform their discussions during the meeting.

It was clarified that other Members would be welcome to come along and observe, as they would at any other meeting. Members asked what arrangements would be made for a pre-meeting, Officers stated that there would be pre meeting and arrangements would be agreed with the Chair.

Members noted the report.

## **5. GOOD SCRUTINY? GOOD QUESTION? WALES IMPROVEMENT STUDY: SCRUTINY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Mr Jones gave the background to the WAO scrutiny study and subsequent report, which identified five areas for improvement and nine recommendations. The Council took part in the study during 1012/13 and as a result developed a Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan. SLG has received updates on the progress of the SIAP with most of the recommendations completed.

The recommendations in the WAO report reflect many of the actions in the SIAP and can be related to the work already carried out.

Recommendation one: 'Clarify the role of executive members and senior officers in contributing to scrutiny.' This relates to the work we have done in the room layout for scrutiny committees, however there is more to do and training for Cabinet Members and Managers has been arranged in September. Members commented that they wanted to see Cabinet Members play a more active role in scrutiny committee meetings, this had been observed during visits to other authorities as part of the peer review process.

Recommendation two: 'Ensure that scrutiny members, and specifically scrutiny chairs, receive training and support to fully equip them with the skills required to undertake effective scrutiny.' Officers stated that there has been a great deal of training arranged for Scrutiny Members and we will be monitoring the impact of the training. Members commented that they have previously raised concerns regarding the contents of reports. It was suggested that CMT are invited to next meeting to discuss the issue. The Chair suggested that the Director of Corporate Services is invited but that SLG should identify reports as examples. Officers suggested that SLG meet prior to this and have a workshop with the example reports to identify issues. It was agreed that the Director and Cabinet Member would be invited to attend a future meeting of SLG.

Recommendation three: 'Further develop scrutiny forward work programming to:

Provide a clear rationale for topic selection; Be more outcome focused; Ensure that the method of scrutiny is best suited to the topic area and the outcome desired; Align scrutiny programmes with the council's performance management, self-evaluation and improvement arrangements'

Officers stated that this relates to forward work plans for scrutiny committees and there is further work to do with ensuring that performance management information is included in agendas.

Recommendation four: 'Ensure that scrutiny draws effectively on the work of audit, inspection and regulation and that its activities are complementary with the work of external review bodies.'

Recommendation five; 'Ensure that external review bodies take account of scrutiny work programmes and the outputs of scrutiny activity, where appropriate, in planning and delivering their work.'

The recent Gwent Scrutiny Challenge event gave an opportunity to engage with CSSIW and Estyn. Both were asked if they could send copies of their report to the lead Cabinet and Scrutiny Members. CSSIW said they would consider the request, however, Estyn explained they would only send their report directly to the Chief Executive. Mr Jones said that more work was required across Wales to ensure the work of scrutiny committees and regulators was more complementary. More effective arrangements would require changes to working practices by all concerned.

Recommendation six: 'Ensure that the impact of scrutiny is properly evaluated and acted upon to improve the function's effectiveness; including following up on proposed actions and examining outcomes.' This relates to the impact of scrutiny, Officers stated that we would review the SIAP in the autumn and report back to Scrutiny Leadership Group. We will work with Gwent colleagues to organise training following on from the Gwent scrutiny challenge event.

Recommendation seven: 'Undertake regular self-evaluation of scrutiny utilising the 'outcomes and characteristics of effective local government overview and scrutiny' developed by the Wales Scrutiny Officers' Network.' The self-evaluation characteristics will be used to review scrutiny arrangements as part of the legacy work to be undertaken by the Centre for Public Scrutiny and included in the Democratic Services annual report.

Recommendation eight; 'Implement scrutiny improvement action plans developed from the Wales Audit Office improvement study.' The Council has a well developed Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan which progress is being made.

Recommendation nine; 'Adopt Participation Cymru's 10 Principles for Public Engagement in improving the way scrutiny engages with the public and stakeholders Public Engagement principles.' Officers stated that public consultation has been included as part of the development of forward work programmes but it is proving very difficult to receive any suggestions from stakeholders and the public. The Welsh Government is expected to announce further legislation, which will introduce new responsibilities for scrutiny committees to consult on forward work programmes. Members commented that citizen engagement should be at the centre scrutiny activity. Scrutiny has a role to ensure that adequate engagement has been carried out when they scrutinise reports and Members stated they were prepared to defer reports until satisfactory consultation had been undertaken. Mr Jones suggested Members could also consider what stakeholder groups could be invited to give evidence when discussing forward work programmes.

Members asked for clarification on the process for identifying which cabinet reports came forward for pre decision scrutiny. Officers explained that the constitution provides for the one of the following tests to be satisfied; the decision is controversial, has significant risk or financial implications or will change the service delivery across the county borough. The Monitoring Officer will advise CMT but the tests are designed to be a matter of judgement.

Members noted the report and commented that the WAO report is over twelve months out of date and were pleased that most of the recommendations in the SIAP have been actioned. A report on the SIAP will be presented to the next meeting of SLG.

## **6. LEGACY OF GWENT SCRUTINY CHALLENGE**

As part of the Gwent Scrutiny Challenge bid the CfPS agreed to undertake legacy work with each partner authority to identify shared actions for improvement. This work will take the form of desktop research, interviews with leading members and officers and committee observation. The work will double as a peer review of the improvements made as a result of SIAP.

Members discussed the Gwent Scrutiny Challenge event and had noted the comments from Estyn on scrutiny of schools. Members sought clarification on the role of scrutiny in asking Head Teachers to scrutiny committee meetings. Officers stated that it had to be balanced against the role of School Governors and we should be clear about how it should be done. The best way forward would be through getting the co-operation of head teachers. Members were informed of a current Welsh Government consultation on head teacher's performance and Officers agreed to circulate the link.

Members asked why Estyn refused to send copies of their reports direct to scrutiny officers, it was suggested that there may be statutory guidelines stating where they can send their reports, but we are not sure if that precludes sending to scrutiny directly.

Members noted the report and asked that Officers report back with clarification on the role of scrutiny and inviting Head Teachers to scrutiny committee meetings.

## **7. PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO STANDARD SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AGENDA**

Officers stated that a report had been drafted taking forward comments from SLG on scrutiny committee agendas regarding information reports and members requests for reports.

Officers stated that Members had raised concerns about the printing of information reports, which are generally not discussed. The report suggests that this changes to an electronic only copy of information reports, that members can call forward for discussion and then hard copies will then be provided at the scrutiny meeting.

The forward work programme process, which changed this year, includes a consultation stage for Members to request items to be added. This means that the agenda item for report requests conflicts with this procedure and the report therefore suggests that this is removed from the agenda.

There was some concern about no longer providing hard copies of information reports and how this would be decided. Officers stated that this report would go to Democratic Services Committee and then on to Council for a decision to alter the constitution.

Members noted the report.

The meeting closed at 6.26 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 24th July 2014 they were signed by the Chair.

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CHAIR