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Date: 18th March 2015

Dear Sir/Madam,

A meeting of the **Scrutiny Leadership Group** will be held in the **Ebbw Room, Penallta House, Tredomen, Ystrad Mynach on Thursday, 26th March, 2015 at 5.00 pm** to consider the matters contained in the following agenda.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Burns".

Chris Burns
INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

A G E N D A

Pages

- 1 To receive apologies for absence.

- 2 Declarations of interest
Councillors and Officers are reminded of their personal responsibility to declare any personal and/or prejudicial interest(s) in respect of any item of business on this agenda in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution, and the Code of Conduct for both Councillors and Officers.

- 3 To approve and sign the following minutes:- Scrutiny Leadership Group held on 29th January 2015 (Minute nos 1-4)

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Correspondence may be in any language or format | Gallwch ohebu mewn unrhyw iaith neu fformat



Circulation:

Councillors L. Ackerman, Mrs E.M. Aldworth, Mrs P. Cook, H.W. David (Chair), W. David, D.T. Davies, D. Havard, C.P. Mann, S. Morgan (Vice Chair), J. Pritchard and D. Rees

For Information:

Councillor Mrs C. Forehead

And Appropriate Officers



SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON THURSDAY, 29TH JANUARY 2015 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor H.W. David (Chair),

Councillors:

Miss L. Ackerman, Mrs P. Cook, W. David, D. T. Davies, D. Havard, C. Mann, S. Morgan, J. Pritchard and D. Rees.

Together with:

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

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs E.M. Aldworth.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 27TH NOVEMBER 2014

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Scrutiny Leadership Group meeting held on the 27th November 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

4. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMMES

Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee

Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that there had been no consultation responses to the draft work programme. The draft work programme was noted and confirmed by Members.

Education for Life Scrutiny Committee

Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that there had been no consultation responses to the draft work programme. It was noted that the outstanding request for a report on school uniforms requested by Councillor J Pritchard would be programmed when ready. Members agreed that the report on Education Scrutiny discussed at SLG in November 2014 would be added to the work programme for this quarter as an information item.

Health Social Care & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that there had been no consultation responses to the draft work programme. Members expressed concerns that there were still outstanding requests since 2013. Cllr Ackerman stated that as this information is already reported to other forums the information should be readily available and asked that the reports be presented as information items. It was agreed that the remaining outstanding report requests should be added to the work programme for March 2015.

Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee

Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that there had been no consultation responses to the draft work programme. It was noted that Officers were discussing the report request for compulsory purchase orders in respect of empty properties with Councillor Rees. A meeting has also been arranged with Councillor Binding to discuss the request in respect of the empty derelict buildings. Members queried if the two requests could be amalgamated. It was noted that the request in respect of council reserves is scheduled for October 2015 and the report on consultancy costs is included in the forward work programme for 14th April 2015.

Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that there had been no consultation responses to the draft work programme. It was noted that there had been no further response on the car parking report request, since the Bargoed TCMG report was forwarded to the Member concerned. Members therefore agreed to remove the request from the list of outstanding reports. SLG noted that the request in respect of Bargoed cinema has been dealt with under a notice of motion and a report will come forward in due course. Finally SLG noted there has been no update on the public conveniences report.

Cllr H David asked for Members views on the recent WAO report in the Public Interest in respect of scrutiny. The report stated that scrutiny agendas are too long and lack focus, and they recommended that scrutiny committee agenda's should be prioritised and information items handled outside the formal scrutiny process.

Members expressed concern that scrutiny may not see all pre-decision reports and wondered how scrutiny 6 weekly meetings could fit with Cabinet fortnightly meetings. Mr Jones stated that scrutiny agendas are overloaded and there are particular issues with Policy and Resources and Regeneration & Environment Scrutiny Committees. There are 2 - 2 ½ hours every 6 weeks to scrutinise all the work of the Executive. It is important to think about the purpose of the discussion, Members need to consider if their requests are appropriate and allow time to carry out more in depth work over several meetings and consider the benefits of using a balance of witnesses. Overall scrutiny needs to accept they cannot deal with all the work of the Executive and should prioritise key issues and do a few things well as opposed to everything.

Mrs Price stated that the number of items on agendas cannot be solved overnight, it is proposed that a solution is developed over the next few months and will aim to give Members ownership of agendas.

A Member stated that the moving of Public Protection service area to Health Social Care & Wellbeing would ease the pressure on Regeneration and Environment. However there is still an issue with the number of information and Cabinet reports, which can distort the agendas. It was felt that Members should meet with Officers rather than requesting reports on personal ward issues.

It was agreed that quality is important, however the balance of agendas should also ensure that concerns of Members are included. A wide terms of reference for some committees can cause difficulties, some felt it is difficult to do justice to more than three reports. However it was important to be flexible as some issues may require more time for example Customer Service Centres.

Members queried what good practice examples there are, as suggested by WAO. Mr Jones stated that Monmouthshire had shown good questioning skills, which was observed during the peer observations.

A Member raised the impact of Members not attending pre-meetings, but then asking questions at the meeting. It was suggested that those Members who attend the pre-meeting would have priority on questions ahead of those who don't who will wait to the end, as is the practice at Education for Life. Mrs Price agreed that it would be helpful to agree consistency across committees and share good practice. A Member stated that he felt that pre-meetings focus the mind and makes scrutiny meeting run more smoothly. Members stated that it was important that pre-meetings maintain a tight discipline and Chairs have to ensure that Members do not try to debate the issues.

Mr Jones thanked Members for their comments and stated that the intention is to carry out an engagement and consultation exercise with Members, Co-optees and Officers through workshops in order to highlight issues and find solutions.

The meeting closed at 18.03p.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 March 2015 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR

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SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP – 26TH MARCH 2015

SUBJECT: SCRUTINY DEVELOPMENTS

REPORT BY: ACTING DIRECTOR CORPORATE SERVICES & SECTION 151 OFFICER

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To outline a work programme to identify improvement to the operation of scrutiny following the findings of the Wales Audit Office report 'Follow-up of the Special Inspection and Reports in the Public Interest', dated January 2015.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report identifies the issues for improvement contained the WAO report, a suggested project group to oversee the improvement programme, how those issues can be explored, members and officers who will contribute to this review and the timeline of key milestones.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The operation of scrutiny is required by the Local Government Act 2000 and subsequent Assembly legislation.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The Wales Audit Office report 'Follow-up of the Special Inspection and Reports in the Public Interest', dated January 2015 has identified further improvements scrutiny. The report recognised the work carried out under the scrutiny improvement action plan and the structural arrangements put in place. However, the report identifies that the next stage is to develop the effectiveness of scrutiny and clarify its role.

- 4.2 The WAO's main findings can be summarised as:

- The Chairs and Vice Chairs of scrutiny committees have mixed views on the benefits of pre-meetings.
- Effectiveness of scrutiny's challenge role is limited.
- The role of scrutiny is confused.
- Meetings are long and agendas lack focus.
- 'For Information' agenda items could be handled more efficiently outside of the formal scrutiny process.
- The Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee's terms of reference are very wide which restricts the time available to discuss subjects in depth.
- Agenda items need to be prioritised and focused on the Council's priorities.
- Information provided to scrutiny is good, however, Chairs and Vice Chairs would like more use of qualitative, historical and comparative information.

- Task and Finish Groups should be used more frequently to review specific issues in more depth.
- Members want to continue to improve their scrutiny role.

Responsibility and Oversight

4.3 The Improving Governance Project Board (IGPB) have overall responsibility for overseeing the improvements to scrutiny recommended by the Wales Audit Office report 'Follow-up of the Special Inspection and Reports in the Public Interest', which is chaired by the Acting Director of Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer. The Chief Executive and CMT have also asked to be kept informed of progress.

Project Group

4.4 In order to identify how improvements can be made it is proposed to set up a project group to oversee the improvement programme, they will report on the projects progress to the IGPB. The suggested members of the project group are:

- Gail Williams Interim Monitoring Officer & Head of Legal Services
- Angharad Price Interim Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer
- Councillor Hefin David Chair Scrutiny Leadership Group
- Councillor Colin Mann Chair Democratic Services Committee
- Councillor Christine Forehead, Cabinet Member HR, Governance and Business

4.5 Democratic Services Committee is responsible for keeping under review the resources available for Democratic Services. Therefore, it is proposed that the Chair of Democratic Services Committee will Chair the project group, and the Vice Chair of Democratic Services, Councillor D. Tudor Davies to act as substitute. Scrutiny Leadership Group provide oversight for scrutiny, therefore, it is proposed that the Chair, Councillor H. David is a member of the project group and the Vice Chair, Councillor S Morgan to act as substitute.

4.6 It is proposed that a project team consisting of Jonathan Jones, Democratic Services Manager and Catherine Forbes-Thompson, Scrutiny Research Officer supports the Project Group.

Improvement Programme Workshops

4.7 The aim of the improvement programme is to identify possible changes that may require recommendations to Council. In order to ensure that all interested parties are involved it is proposed to hold four workshops over a two-week period. Each workshop will consist of approximately 20 people made up of Members and Officers. The workshops will allow all the scrutiny issues identified in the WAO report to be debated within the context of what can be reasonably achieved in terms of capacity and resources. In order to ensure all Members and Officers are represented it is suggested that the following groups are invited to take part:

- Scrutiny Leadership Group and Democratic Services Committee Members = 23
- CMT, Heads of Services = 22
- Co-opted Members of Scrutiny Committees = 8
- Third Tier Officers (4 per directorate) = 16
- Backbench Members (4 per scrutiny committee) = 16
- Leader and Deputy Leaders = 3

4.8 There will be four workshop dates and each workshop will include, 1 Cabinet Member, 1 CMT representative and 1 Scrutiny Chair, the remainder to be mixed proportionately. Prior to the start of the workshops a briefing note will be circulated to all participants outlining the main findings of the WAO report (see 4.2 above) and also give an overview of the main issues facing scrutiny. These include Welsh Government proposals included in the White Paper Devolution, Democracy and Delivery – Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People.

4.9 The purpose of the workshop will be to discuss the WAO findings and to find a ‘long list’ of options to action those findings. At each workshop the attendees will be split into groups, and each group will debate the issues identified by WAO (see 4.2 above). The groups will be asked to consider the following questions with the assumption that there is likely to be reduced officer time available.

- What are we trying to achieve?
- How can we do it?
- What are the benefits/constraints?

4.10 The project group will consider and agree the outcomes of the workshops and will carry out consultation with all Members and Senior Officers. Following the consultation the project group will then report to the IGPB who will make recommendations in a report to Scrutiny Leadership Group and Democratic Services Committee who in turn recommend to Cabinet and then Council for a decision.

Timetable

4.11 The deadline agreed by Council for the findings of the WAO report was agreed for October 2015. In order to ensure that sufficient time is allowed it is proposed that the following timeline is agreed at the outset.

Action	Responsibility	Deadline
Agree Project Plan	SLG Members, Democratic Services Committee & CMT	20 March 2015
Plan Workshop Programme	Project Group	31 March 2015
Arrange 4 Workshops	Project Team	30 April 2015
Agree Workshop Outcomes	Project Group	8 May 2015
Consultation with Members and Officers involved	Project Group	22 May 2015
Develop Recommendations	Project Group	29 May 2015
Agree Report with recommendations	IGPB	12 June 2015
Report to CMT 18 June 2015	IGPB	15 June 2015
Report to Democratic Services Committee 1 July 2015 (Special) – SLG to be invited	Project Group	22 June 2015
Covering report to include comments from SLG and Democratic Services Committee	Democratic Services	3 July 2015
Report to Cabinet 15 July 2015	IGPB	6 July 2015
Report to Council 21 July 2015	IGPB	6 July 2015

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This report is for information purposes, so the Council's EqIA process does not need to be applied.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no financial implications not contained in the report.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no personnel implications not contained in the report.

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 There are no consultation responses not contained in the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 That Scrutiny Leadership Group comment on the project plan.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 In order to respond to the recommendations in the follow up of the special inspection and reports in the public interest.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000.

Author: Catherine Forbes-Thompson Scrutiny Research Officer

Consultees: Chris Burns, Interim Chief Executive

Sandra Aspinall Acting Deputy Chief Executive

Nicole Scammell Acting Director of Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer

Dave Street, Corporate Director Social Services

Gail Williams Interim Monitoring Officer and Head of Legal Services

Angharad Price Interim Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Jonathan Jones Democratic Services Manager