



SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON THURSDAY 28TH JULY 2016 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor S. Morgan – Chair
Councillor G. Kirby – Vice Chair (Presiding)

Councillors:

L. Ackerman, Mrs E.M. Aldworth, Mrs P. Cook, W. David, D.T. Davies, C. Mann, J. Pritchard and D. Rees

Together with:

C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services), G. Williams (Interim Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer) and E. Sullivan (Democratic Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received, however it was noted that Councillor S. Morgan (Chair) had notified the Committee that he would not be present at the start of meeting and so Councillor G. Kirby as Vice Chair took the Chair in his absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 10TH MAY 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Scrutiny Leadership Group meeting held on 10th May 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

4. SCRUTINY REVIEW: CABINET MEMBER STATEMENT DRAFT PROTOCOL

The Interim Head of Democratic Services introduced the report which presented a draft protocol in respect of Cabinet Members statements for consideration and comment.

The protocol outlined the guidance on the provision of Cabinet Member's statements at Scrutiny Committee which would encourage a more strategic and forward looking content than that currently provided. The four key focus areas for a statement were detailed and it was noted that they would be circulated to Committee Members on the Friday before the committee meeting to allow Members ample time to prepare any questions.

The Officer asked Members to consider the protocol and take a view on the attendance of Cabinet Members at meetings going forward.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the report and full discussion ensued.

Members noted the length of time taken in certain scrutiny committees by Cabinet Members statements that encompassed more than one portfolio within their remit and acknowledged that this was far from ideal. The quality and duration of the current statements was discussed at length.

The Committee agreed that they would like to see Cabinet Members take a more proactive and answerable role at scrutiny and they should be prepared and able to robustly answer any questions from Members with regard to their portfolio objectives.

Cabinet Members attendance was fully discussed and the Committee agreed that as long as there had been a prior discussion with the Chair of the relevant Scrutiny Committee, the respective Cabinet Member need not present a statement but should be in attendance.

In relation to the protocol as attached in Appendix 1 of the Officer's report the Scrutiny Leadership Group fully endorsed its content.

Following consideration of the Officer's report it was moved and seconded that the comments of the Scrutiny Leadership Group be noted and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the draft protocol as detailed in Appendix 1 of the Officer's report be agreed.
- (ii) Cabinet Members statements be circulated to the relevant Scrutiny Committee Members on the Friday before the committee meeting.
- (iii) with prior discussion with the relevant Scrutiny Committee Chair, the respective Cabinet Member need not present a statement but should be in attendance.

5. SCRUTINY REPORTS QUALITY WORKSHOP

The Interim Head of Democratic Services outlined the parameters of the workshop which would support Members to review, compare, monitor and comment on the quality of reports being presented at Scrutiny.

Copies of performance management reports were distributed and Members were requested to review the purpose, summary and main body of the report to establish it was clear and understandable with any references to National Standards or Legislation easily recognisable.

Members reviewed the documents and provided comments to the Officer.

Members agreed that for the most part the purpose and the content of the reports under review were clear and understandable. However they noted a lack of comparative and accumulative data which would help establish perspective, should this data not be available then that should be made clear within the report. Members noted that there was often excessive amounts of information incorporated into reports and agreed the importance of ensuring that any data presented is salient and relevant.

Reference was made to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and the impact this would have on reports was discussed at length. It was noted that training had already been provided to the Future Generations Panel and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee in this regard with further training to be rolled out to all Members in due course.

Members agreed that it was difficult to judge content in a stand alone environment, as many of the reports under review would have been delivered with an accompanying presentation that would have brought further clarity. It was noted that report writers should also be mindful that this information is in the public domain and would therefore need to be understood by members of the public with no prior knowledge or understanding of the topic.

The Interim Head of Legal Services acknowledged the difficulties that Officers experienced in striking the right balance in terms of report content and the appropriate technical level to set with a report that would need to be understood by Members, with background knowledge, as well as members of the public. It was noted that training was available to Officers in order to improve report writing.

Reference was made to the use of appendices and concern expressed that now that the scrutiny agenda was limited to four items, Officers may come to rely on over-extended appendices to convey the meat of the report and the importance that the content of any report should be able to stand alone was emphasised, with only additional information attached as an appendix. Members agreed that jumping back and forth between the main body of a report and the appendices did little to enhance the readability of a report.

Having reviewed the quality and content of the reports provided the Scrutiny Leadership Group agreed that this monitoring exercise should be undertaken on a biannual basis and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that report monitoring be undertaken by the Scrutiny Leadership Group on a biannual basis and this activity should be added to the forward work programme.

6. SCRUTINY REVIEW: SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Interim Head of Democratic Services introduced the report which set out the revisions to the terms of reference for the Scrutiny Leadership Group.

Members were referred to section 4.1 of the report which highlighted the Group's additional responsibilities.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her report and full discussion ensued.

Having fully considered its content the Scrutiny Leadership Group noted the report and the revisions to its terms of reference.

7. SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Interim Head of Democratic Services introduced the report which presented the draft forward work programme for comment and agreement.

Members noted that a report on Scrutiny Self Evaluation and Peer Review added to the programme for October and sought clarification as to what would inform the review. The Officer confirmed that this was the final stage in the Scrutiny Review process, the self-evaluation element would take the form of a questionnaire and a small peer group would be invited to attend meetings and make observations, this group would include outside bodies, for example a Member from a neighbouring authority. A report on the outcome of the review and evaluation would then be brought back to the Scrutiny Leadership Group for consideration.

Reference was made to the Audit Committee's role within a review of this kind and requested that the outcome of the evaluation also be reported to that committee. Members were then advised that Sara-Jane Byrne of the Wales Audit Office had requested to attend the Group's October meeting in order to discuss a number of projects they will be bringing forward including a Thematic Governance Review.

With regard to observations at scrutiny, Members were advised of a request from Nicole Scammell in relation to senior staff development. Senior Staff would be invited to attend committee meetings in order to see how reports are presented as part of their continuing personal development.

Members welcomed the inclusion of external representatives within the peer review group, the presence of Senior Staff at scrutiny meetings to observe practice and the attendance of the Wales Audit Office representative at their October meeting.

Following consideration of its content the Scrutiny Leadership Group noted the report and it was moved and seconded that Scrutiny Reports Quality Monitoring be added to the forward work programme for the 27th April 2017 and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that Scrutiny Reports Quality Monitoring be added to the forward work programme for the 27th April 2017.

The meeting closed at 18.27 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 27th October 2016 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR