



SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON THURSDAY 26TH JANUARY 2017 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor G. Kirby – Vice Chair (Presiding)

Councillors:

L. Ackerman, Mrs P. Cook, W. David and C. Mann.

Together with:

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

CHAIRS' ANNOUNCEMENT

It was noted that an apology of absence had been received from Councillor S. Morgan (Chair), in his absence Councillor G. Kirby took the Chair.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs E.M. Aldworth, D.T. Davies, S. Morgan, J. Pritchard and D. Rees

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 27TH OCTOBER 2017

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Scrutiny Leadership Group meeting held on 27th October 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: SCRUTINY SELF EVALUATION AND PEER REVIEW

Mrs C. Forbes-Thompson summarised the report which detailed the outcome of the scrutiny self-evaluation and the arrangements for the planned peer review.

Members were advised that the evaluation questionnaire had been sent out to all Members and Senior Officers and the questions contained therein had been based on the Outcomes and Characteristics of Effective Scrutiny. The Officer referred to section 4.3 of the report which detailed a breakdown of the responses received and noted that an overall response of 35% had been achieved amongst scrutiny members, with the majority responding in the Agree or Strongly Agree categories. The questionnaire also allowed respondents to give comments at the end of each section and all comments received had been listed within the report.

In terms of the Peer Review, Mrs Forbes-Thompson outlined the arrangements to date and confirmed that Councillors at Newport and Monmouth Council had agreed to take part in a reciprocal peer evaluation. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) have also agreed to assist each group to carry out the observations and Wales Audit Office (WAO) will provide a briefing for the peer group members but would not take part. The Officer circulated a series of dates and scrutiny meetings within the various authorities that would be suitable for observation and asked that Members identify any available dates so that she could take arrangements forward.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her report and Members questions were welcomed.

Members expressed concern at the relatively low response rate and were advised that the majority of questionnaires achieved only a 20%-25% response rate, so the 35% achieved here was above average. Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that there was still an opportunity to recirculate the questionnaire if Members thought this would be worthwhile. The Leadership Group confirmed that they would like to see it recirculated to see if a higher response rate could be achieved.

Reference was made to the comment at paragraph 4.9 of report and which stated that Councillors lacked awareness of back office work and queried how this could be improved. Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that structure charts were currently being compiled in readiness for the forthcoming induction programme, which would illustrate the service area structure from the head of service downwards. These charts would include photographs and areas of responsibility and should assist Councillors understanding of what happens within each directorate and should be fully completed by May.

Members expressed concern and frustration at the number of 'Don't Know' responses received and Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that during the final evaluation process these would be analysed further with a view to taking them forward as part of the annual training programme following the election. It is intended that these sessions would be utilised as a 'back to basics' primarily targeted at newly elected Councillors, ensuring that going forward there is an overall understanding of how scrutiny operates.

Task and Finish Groups were discussed at length in light of the comment at 4.6 of the report and Members agreed that these groups were a very valid and worthwhile process providing tangible outcomes and a greater understanding of issues under review. It was noted that Mrs Emma Sullivan had moved over into an interim scrutiny role and would be assisting Task and Finish Groups. Attendance levels on Task and Finish Groups was discussed and the Leadership Group agreed that membership opportunities on Task and Finish Groups should be opened up to all Councillors rather than just those on the reviewing committee and that this should be included within the evaluation review.

RESOLVED that the self evaluation responses and arrangements for the peer review be noted and the comments of the Scrutiny Leadership Group be incorporated into the final review report.

5. WORKSHOP: SCRUTINY REPORTS QUALITY REVIEW

Mrs Forbes-Thompson circulated a copy of a recent scrutiny report together with a summary worksheet on the reports constituent parts for Members analysis and comment. Members were asked to review the various sections of the report in terms of its clarity, understandability, information content and relevance to the topic under scrutiny.

Having read through the report Members agreed that it was well written, covered the subject well with clear recommendations but felt that the initial summary of the report was overly long and there did seem to be a degree of repetition between the summary and the main body of the report. Members agreed that the Wellbeing of Future Generations section of the report was well thought out and nicely drew together how the subject contributed to each of the wellbeing goals. It was agreed that this was an excellent example of how the new legislation was being imbedded into working practices.

The content was detailed enough to allow thorough scrutiny of the subject, opening up opportunities for questioning and there were no irrelevant details. Appendices were relevant to the report and provided useful supporting information and graphically data easily referenced from the body of the report.

Having fully considered the content against the analysis criteria, Members congratulated the author on a well written and interesting report and it was moved and seconded that a further quality review be conducted in six months and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that a further quality review be conducted in six months.

The meeting closed at 6.20 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 April 2017 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR