

Scrutiny Peer Review 2017				
Local Authority Caerphilly			Meeting of Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee 28th February 2017	
Peer Observers Newport and Monmouthshire County Council Facilitated by WLGA				
A. Scrutiny Environment				
1. Scrutiny has a clearly defined and valued role in the council's improvement arrangements (based upon the observation of this meeting)				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Comments It was difficult to assess the role of scrutiny in the council's 'improvement arrangements' from observing part of a single meeting, however, the meeting gave the impression that scrutiny is valued within the governance arrangements of the authority. This was evidenced by the fact that attendance was high and 4 cabinet members, including 2 Deputy Leaders were in attendance, and engaged in open and constructive dialogue with the committee, responding positively to proposals from the committee to follow up on correspondence for example. The Cabinet Members' apparent commitment to and relationship with scrutiny was observed by the peer team, however, the peer team noted that the Cabinet Members were in attendance throughout the meeting (at least the parts of the meeting observed by the peer team) and wondered whether it would provide clearer 'demarcation' of responsibilities if they attended only for their specific items (although the peer team understood that cabinet members also wanted to remain for the presentation from BT)				
2. Scrutiny has the dedicated support it needs from officers (based upon the observation of this meeting)				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Comments Evidence of preparation and support was seen from scrutiny support officers at the meeting, this included advice to the chair at appropriate points during the meeting and the preparation of comprehensive reports in advance. Many members of the peer team had met or worked with Caerphilly's scrutiny officer previously and all were complimentary and held her in high regard. Several senior officers were in attendance at the committee meeting, which presumably is a customary approach, though it was noticeable that Cabinet Members answered most of the committee's questions, with officers providing only technical clarifications; the peer team regarded this as a positive approach as it showed clear political leadership.				
3. Scrutiny members appear to have effective training and development opportunities, evidenced through their questioning, listening and analysis skills and understanding of the subject under scrutiny				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Comments It <i>appeared</i> that members have received 'effective training and development' given the effective approach undertaken during the meeting. Questions were varied, well balanced and some were obviously well researched beforehand. Members were proactive in their approach to business, including using the meeting as an opportunity to shape future business with an ad hoc proposal to add to the forward work programme. The peer team noted that some members were more involved than others during the meeting; this might be due to different levels of confidence or engagement or whether this was due to the wide policy breadth covered by the committee and that members may have different interests and specialisms, which might not have been applicable or relevant to the specific housing matters under consideration at this meeting.				
Conclusion: please consider which of the following applies:				
Arrangements are hindering improvement	Arrangements are partly supporting improvement	Arrangements are positively supporting improvement	Arrangements are playing a significant role in supporting improvement	
B. Scrutiny Practice				
1. Scrutiny takes into account the views of the public, partners and regulators, balancing the prioritisation of community concerns against issues of strategic				

risk/importance				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Comments				
This was evidenced at the meeting with the attendance and presentation from a group of tenants' representatives (although it was not clear how regular an occurrence this was). Members generally demonstrated good community knowledge, conveying community concerns and views about particular matters; it was noted that this was managed well and struck a healthy balance of providing a community perspective without appearing overly parochial.				
2. Overview and scrutiny meetings, activities and work programmes are well-planned (based on observation of this meeting)				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Comments				
Planning and preparation appeared to be very effective; the peer team observed part of the pre-meeting which was well-attended, appeared constructive and the questioning strategy well-managed by the chair; some members' had clearly researched some matters extensively, notably the questioning of the BT representative; and the proposal to amend the Forward Work Programme (as noted above) showed a clear approach to planning for the future. Members' questions appeared to be self-generated rather than 'scripted' by scrutiny officers. The layout of the committee room was noted as being conducive to constructive dialogue and was less adversarial than traditional layouts in council chambers for example.				
3. Overview and scrutiny meetings and activities are chaired effectively				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Comments				
The chair welcomed guests (including peer team and external witnesses), and had an assured, consensual, constructive approach to managing business. He was clear and firm when business needed to be moved on, when other members needed to be brought in or reminded to focus on the agenda and outcome required. He was also organised and rounded up discussions well, for example, reminding the Cabinet Member of the agreed action regarding the sending of a letter.				
4. Overview and scrutiny meetings demonstrate through their activities the best use of the resources available				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Comments				
This was not immediately clear at the meeting; there were a number of 'For Information' reports and it was not explicitly clear why the BT item was on the agenda, although it produced an engaging discussion and was probably effective in terms of relationship management. Some peer members questioned why some senior officers attended throughout the meeting, despite only having limited agenda items, but on balance it was felt that they may have benefited from observing the debate and views of members.				
5. Scrutiny operates non-politically and deals effectively with sensitive political issues, tension and conflict				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Comments				
The committee's business was discharged in a constructive manner; questions were appropriately challenging, but relations between the committee and Cabinet Members was courteous, constructive and respectful. Given the run-up to the elections and the likely political tensions emerging, this approach was commended by the peer team and one peer member noted 'it was difficult to see who belonged to which party'.				
6. Scrutiny builds trust and good relationships with a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders (based on observation of this meeting)				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Comments				
A number of internal stakeholders (senior members and officers were in attendance) as well as external stakeholders at this meeting, including BT and a tenants group. All were made to feel welcome and questioning was constructive and challenging where necessary.				
Conclusion: please consider which of the following applies:				

Arrangements are hindering improvement	Arrangements are partly supporting improvement	Arrangements are positively supporting improvement Monmouthshire County Council	Arrangements are playing a significant role in supporting improvement
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C. Impact of Scrutiny

1. Scrutiny engages in evidence based challenge of decision makers (based on observation of this meeting)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
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Comments

Scrutiny of Cabinet Members and senior officers was effective, with some challenging questions which demonstrated evidence and preparation, for example, a number of examples and issues were highlighted as part of the questions.

2. Scrutiny engages in evidence based challenge of service providers (based on observation of this meeting)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
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Comments

The scrutiny of the BT representative was similarly effective and appeared based on prior research and evidence from the communities. However, it is not clear how regularly other service providers, other than the council, attend scrutiny meetings.

3. Scrutiny provides viable and well evidenced solutions to recognised problems (based on observation of this meeting)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
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Comments

This was not evidenced at the meeting.

4. Non-executive members provide an evidence based check and balance to Executive decision making

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
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Comments

Cabinet Members were scrutinised extensively during the meeting; interestingly the focus of questions largely related to the Cabinet Member 'Statements' which were circulated in advance and read out during the meeting rather than on the Committee's Reports which appeared to be largely 'For Information'. The peer team regarded the Cabinet Member statements as an interesting and effective approach to informing members of decisions and developments and encouraging challenge and scrutiny.

5. Decision makers give public account for themselves at scrutiny committees for their portfolio responsibilities

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
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Comments

As noted above, 4 Cabinet Members were in attendance throughout, provided written and verbal updates to the Committee and were receptive to members' challenge and suggestions e.g. a suggestion for the cabinet to write to follow-up on a matter and were receptive to the suggested addition to the forward work programme which was viewed as mutually beneficial.

6. Overview and scrutiny enables the 'voice' of local people and communities across the area to be heard as part of decision and policy-making processes

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
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Comments

As noted above, the committee heard from a tenants' representative group and members raised issues of community concern throughout.

Conclusion: please consider which of the following applies:

Arrangements are hindering improvement	Arrangements are partly supporting improvement	Arrangements are positively supporting improvement	Arrangements are playing a significant role in supporting improvement
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