



SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON THURSDAY, 24TH JULY 2014 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor - Chair

Councillors:

Miss L. Ackerman, Mrs P. Cook, D.T. Davies, S. Morgan, J. Pritchard and D. Rees.

Together with:

J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager) and C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors, Mrs E.M. Aldworth H.W. David, W. David, D. Havard, C.P. Mann and A. Price (Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 26TH JUNE 2014

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Scrutiny Leadership Group meeting held on 26th June 2014 (minute nos. 1 - 7, on page nos. 1 - 4) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

4. UPDATE SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN

Mrs Forbes-Thompson outlined the progress made against a number of the actions in the Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan.

The actions in respect of member training and development has included significant training for Members with most tasks completed, arrangements have also been made with the Centre for Public Scrutiny to carry out a peer review in September.

Most of the actions in respect of scrutiny development and organisation are completed. The final task against action 8 was to arrange scrutiny training, for Cabinet Members. This has been arranged for September along with a session for the management network on the same day. The outstanding action on designated persons is on hold until Welsh Government provides guidance. A further two outstanding actions relate to the scrutiny booklet which has been drafted and is currently out for consultation and progress has been made on the revised procedure for Councillor Calls for Action. A report will also be produced to outline scrutiny committee co-option arrangements, which will take into account the requirements of the Local Government Measure (Wales) 2011.

The actions in respect of performance management relate to training for Members will be arranged for October/November. A report has been drafted outlining a way forward and will suggest how scrutiny can be more involved in performance management and improvement arrangements.

The final section of the action plan related to forward work programmes, it was confirmed that these actions are fully completed.

Members raised the importance of proper engagement with officers, co-opted members and expert witnesses. Mr Jones stated co-opted membership of scrutiny committees has been largely static and whilst there is a need to recognise the contribution made by co-opted members, co-option may not always be the best way of involving others in the scrutiny process. There are benefits in inviting expert witnesses to scrutiny more frequently. To maximise the influence of co-opted members, it is important that they reflect the views of their organisation and feedback discussions.

Members asked how the contribution of co-opted members is measured; Mr Jones replied that the Council is required to co-opt members and remunerate certain co-opted members whilst others are co-opted voluntarily. There are three statutory co-opted members who sit on the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee. These co-opted members receive a payment for attendance and can vote on education matters. There are also voluntary co-opted members who do not receive payment and cannot vote.

Members stated that it is important to ensure that scrutiny engages with the wider community, Mr Jones stated that the Council should consider the benefits of using social media more widely as well as liaising more closely with GAVO.

Members discussed the issue of Member engagement and attendance at meetings, there was debate on which meetings should be included in attendance figure for Members Annual reports and Mr Jones advised that he has all the information available and would seek consensus with group leaders on a way forward. Members highlighted issues around work life balance in the context of the increased number of meeting, seminars and training requirements.

Members asked if there would be further observation visits arranged at other local authorities, officers confirmed that the arrangement for the CfPS peer review in the autumn will include some visits but further visits can also be arranged.

Members noted the report.

5. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Mrs Forbes-Thompson outlined the consultation responses received on the draft scrutiny committee forward work programmes. The consultation schedule also included outstanding member report requests.

There were no consultation responses in respect of Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee draft forward work programme, therefore no changes to the draft were required. In respect of Education for Life Scrutiny Committee members noted that the report requested on excess school places will be included in the forward work programme for November 2014.

There were some requests for Health Social Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee. An external review of the Gwent Frailty Programme will be reported in December which links into a request by Cllr Ackerman. Officers will be asked to provide the terms of reference of the review. Members asked that representatives from the 4 other Gwent local authorities be invited to the scrutiny meeting in December when the report is debated. Members noted several additions for the next quarter in respect of Hospital Discharge Process, Deprivation of Liberty Standards and Gwent Wide Integrated Equipment Store. Two outstanding report requests were discussed and Members advised that they would like the report from the Welsh Ambulance Trust to be pursued. Cllr Ackerman advised that she receives reports on stillbirths and cot deaths as a member of another group and will make enquiries to see if that information can be brought to scrutiny committee.

Members noted several changes to the draft forward work programme for Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee. A request for a report on Communities First will come forward on 28th October 2014. Officers will liaise with the Member regarding his request for a report on impact of car parking charges. The report on the business case for Bargoed cinema will be brought forward in due course. The request on public conveniences grant will need to be clarified as officers reported that the guidance was not yet available but Members queried if this was accurate. Members noted the remaining requests were in discussion or had been resolved.

There were requests for reports to be included in the forward work programme for Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee. A request about Newline received a detailed response and members therefore agreed that it would not be added to the FWP. It was noted that the report on damp in council houses would be brought to committee in September. There was an outstanding request for a report on a revised surveillance policy which members noted was a lower HR priority in view of the fact that surveillance is currently suspended. However, Members requested that this be added to the FWP for the next quarter period. Members noted the remaining amendments.

Mr Jones stated that Scrutiny Committees would need to have a more critical eye over their forward work programmes in future as there is limited capacity to give proper scrutiny in respect of the number of reports coming before scrutiny committees. Chairs have the final say over forward work programmes and should be more strategic and think about bringing in external witnesses.

Members agreed and suggested that forward work programmes should be aligned with the strategic priorities of council. Officers were asked to look at developing a matrix to help prioritise reports for scrutiny, including a pro-forma for members to request reports.

Members noted the report

6. DEVOLUTION, DEMOCRACY AND DELIVERY WHITE PAPER – REFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Mr Jones outlined the White Paper, which will have a significant impact on local government over the next few years. There are specific references to the role of scrutiny including creating independent democratic services in local authorities, similar to the organisation split between Welsh Government and National Assembly. Other proposals include changes to scrutiny governance around openness and transparency, webcasting becoming a statutory requirement and reporting arrangements for Audit and Inspection. The Welsh Government envisage more investment in scrutiny to raise the status of the function and introduce

mandatory LSB scrutiny.

Members noted the report

7. DRAFT PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT SCRUTINY

Mr Jones outlined the draft performance management framework for the characteristics of good scrutiny. The characteristics were developed by the Welsh Scrutiny Officers network and were endorsed by Wales Audit Office in the report on the national scrutiny study 'Good Scrutiny? Good Question?' These characteristics were reported and endorsed by Council in October 2013 along with the Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan. These performance measures will enable scrutiny to measure how it is performing and benchmark across Wales. It is anticipated that WAO will use these measures when they visit local authorities to audit scrutiny arrangements.

Members noted the report

The meeting closed at 6.24 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 25th September 2014 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR