



SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON WEDNESDAY 2ND OCTOBER 2019 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Pritchard – Chair
Councillor G. Kirby – Vice Chair

Councillors:

Mrs C. Andrews, D.T. Davies, C. Forehead, A. Hussey, T. Parry, J. Ridgewell and Mrs M.E. Sargent.

Together with:

C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager) and M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bevan, L. Binding and Mrs D. Cushing.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES –

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Scrutiny Leadership Group meeting held on the 28th March 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. SCRUTINY REVIEW ACTION PLAN

The Scrutiny Manager informed Members that the plan was developed in line with the recommendations to improve the scrutiny function as outlined in the Scrutiny Review Report, which was considered by Council on 16th April 2019. The recommendations were developed following the Wales Audit Office report, 'Scrutiny Fit for the Future', alongside the findings of the scrutiny self-evaluation questionnaire and scrutiny workshop sessions. The principal aim of the report was to update the SLG on the progress made to date.

Members were advised that two of the Scrutiny Committees had been renamed to better reflect the terms of reference for each committee. A new Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee had also been created. It was explained that significant effort was undertaken to realign the work programmes to reflect the new terms of reference for affected scrutiny committees and also identify additional dates for the year ahead.

The Scrutiny Officer told the group that progress has been made in the area of developing the profile of scrutiny through the use of social media platforms. The Scrutiny Officer had worked with the Council's Communications Team and started promoting the Scrutiny "Get Involved" webpage, though both Facebook and Twitter. Members were advised that the public were engaging with the posts, but at this stage the engagement was not leading to feasible suggestions for inclusion on the Forward Work Programmes. Unfortunately the general tone of comments tended to be negative and not related to the Scrutiny function. The Scrutiny Officer then showed the group examples of some of the posts and the engagement each one had generated. One post on Facebook achieved a reach of 7,490 and led to 491 engagements. Another post on a Notice of Motion to ban the giving of animals as prizes on Caerphilly County Borough land reached 5,200 people and an associated online video was viewed by 1,438 people. A version of this post for Twitter received 218 "Likes" and 64 "Retweets." The Scrutiny Officer pointed out that the Social Media Team had advised that on average Caerphilly County Borough Council tweets receive 10 "Likes" and 3 "Retweets," so this particular post had performed very well.

The Scrutiny Officer advised the Scrutiny Leadership Group that attempts to increase public engagement with the Scrutiny process would continue through suggested measures such as short online videos with Scrutiny Chairs, publicising specific items on committee Forward Work Programmes and a News Line article on the role of Scrutiny and how members of the public can engage with the process.

Members generally supported the plans to continue increasing public awareness via social media platforms. Questions were raised about the desire to be as interactive as possible, whilst managing abusive posts. Members queried how any suggestions for topics would be decided upon and the need to manage expectations. The Scrutiny Manager explained that all requests must fulfil the criteria and that the Scrutiny Committee would need to use the Prioritisation Flowchart to make their decision. The Scrutiny Committee have various demands that include pre-decision scrutiny, monitoring budgets and performance and need to ensure that any requests are set against other demands. However, should any requests not be added to the work programme efforts would be made to respond to the person in another way.

On the issue of recording short videos for social media, one Member suggested that external contributors should also be encouraged to share their views via Council platforms. For example, it was pointed out that recently RSPCA Cymru had spoken at a Scrutiny meeting in support of the Notice of Motion to ban the giving of animals as prizes on Caerphilly County Borough land. It was also suggested that members of the public who had successfully suggested a topic for consideration by a Scrutiny Committee, should also be asked to share their experience of the process via video clips for social media. One Member pointed out that Council achievements highlighted in reports for Scrutiny Committees should also be promoted positively via social media following discussion at Committee. One example given was the Council's Procurement Strategy which had recently been praised at a meeting of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee. It was also suggested that social media activity should immediately follow Scrutiny Committee meetings, to ensure the immediacy and relevance of any posts.

The Scrutiny Manager then outlined to Members a series of proposals for scrutiny training. They included questioning and listening skills, developing E-Learning opportunities, scrutiny function training and further peer observations. The Scrutiny Leadership Group were advised that training arrangements have commenced and that all scrutiny committee members had been invited to express their interest in attending sessions on Questioning and Listening

Skills, with 17 Members expressing an interest. It is hoped that this can be arranged in the New Year. It was proposed that scrutiny function training should take place in the form of a series of short drop-in sessions immediately before scrutiny committee pre-meetings. The Scrutiny Manager also informed Members that an email to remind Members of the WLGA good practice guides for scrutiny, which are available on the Members Portal, was sent out during the summer. It was proposed that the short drop-in training sessions would take place over the next 12 months starting in the New Year. The Scrutiny Manager said that dates and topics would be circulated to Members in due course.

Members were advised that the Scrutiny Officer had been circulating webcasts from scrutiny committee meetings at other Local Authorities as part of an ongoing peer observation exercise since May. The Officer tried to match as closely as possible what was discussed at these meetings with forthcoming items on committee Forward Work Programmes. It was also pointed out that in the future, visits to other local authorities to observe meetings taking place would be organised.

It was recognised that Policy Development work on committee agendas needed further development, and the Scrutiny Manager has had some initial discussions with officers. Members were advised that the Social Services Scrutiny Committee had recently begun a Task and Finish inquiry into charging for non-residential social care. In addition the forward work programme workshops are due to be held in March 2020 when Members will have the opportunity to identify potential topics for the year ahead.

The meeting closed at 17.45 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the next appropriate meeting they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR