



SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON THURSDAY, 25TH SEPTEMBER 2014 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor H. David – Chair

Councillors:

Miss L. Ackerman, Mrs P. Cook, D.T. Davies, D. Havard, C. Mann, S. Morgan, and D. Rees.

Together with:

G. Williams (Interim Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer) J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager) and C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors, E. Aldworth, W. David, J. Pritchard, D. Rees 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 – 24TH JULY 2014

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Scrutiny Leadership Group meeting held on 24th July 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. GWENT SCRUTINY CHALLENGE

Mr Jones introduced the report, which outlined proposals to continue the joint scrutiny improvement work being undertaken in partnership with the other 'Gwent' authorities and the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS).

The Gwent Scrutiny Challenge event held in June built on the Wales Audit Office's national study 'Good Scrutiny: Good Question?' Following the WAO report local authorities were tasked with developing a scrutiny improvement action plan. The next step in the Gwent Scrutiny Challenge is to review the Action Plans and undertake a series of Member Observation Groups to identify areas of good practice and shared areas for further improvement. The report proposes to establish peer review groups across the 5 local authorities, facilitated by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (Wales) commencing before the end of the year.

Members were asked to indicate their willingness to take part in the peer review groups. It was agreed that those not present at the meeting would be contacted by email to establish if they would also like to take part.

The following Members agreed to be part of the peer observation group; Cllrs L Ackerman, P Cook, D Havard and S Morgan and the following agreed to act as reserve Cllr H David, D.T. Davies and C. Mann.

It was agreed that once dates of meetings are available they would be circulated to group members and reserves to identify who is available.

Members noted the report.

5. SCRUTINY PRE-MEETINGS & TERMS OF REFERENCE

Mrs Forbes Thompson stated that two issues had recently been identified and it was agreed to bring them to Scrutiny Leadership Group for further discussion. The issues related to scrutiny committee pre-meetings and Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee terms of reference.

At a recent Regeneration and Environment scrutiny meeting Members who were not members of the scrutiny committee sat in to observe the pre-meeting. A query was raised on whether this was allowed and the advice at the time was that there were no specific guidance or protocol on this. Members discussed general points on the benefit of pre-meetings and allowing non-executive members to observe with some Members stating that the pre-meeting should be for the scrutiny committee only.

Mr Jones stated that there are no ground rules however it would be beneficial to have a consistent approach across all scrutiny committees. There is an open and transparent approach at Caerphilly with Members allowed to observe all meetings even where exempt items are being discussed. Members were therefore asked to consider if they wish to allow non-executive members to observe pre-meeting and agree a way forward.

It was proposed and seconded that no members should be allowed to observe scrutiny committee pre-meetings. Following a show of hands, and by the majority present, the motion was declared lost.

The second issue concerned Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee, where it was suggested that this committee should also receive the MTFP proposals in circumstances where they might impact on crime and disorder matters. It was agreed to bring the issue to SLG for further discussion.

It was stated that the terms of reference for Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee are set out in the Police and Justice Act 2006. The terms of reference are to scrutinise the outcomes of the work of the community safety partnership. The Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee does not have the power to scrutinise the individual partners beyond their role in the partnership. The MTFP cost savings options of CCBC sit under the terms of reference of individual scrutiny committees, for example CCTV sits within Regeneration and Environment.

The Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee could however scrutinise the affect of cuts if they have an impact on the work of the partnership.

Members noted the advice regarding the terms of reference.

6. SCRUTINY REPORTS

Mrs Forbes Thompson reminded Members they had previously raised concerns on the quality and information included in reports to Scrutiny Committees. Mrs Williams stated that as part of the improving governance programme officers had been provided with training on Report writing. As part of the programme Mrs Williams will be sampling Reports and reporting back to CMT. She was therefore interested to hear the concerns of members to feed into the review. She also mentioned that she has compared with CCBC reports with other local authorities and considers that on the whole, t the standard is quite good.

Members were asked to reflect on the areas suggested for improvement, and papers from the previous round of scrutiny committee meetings were circulated for reference. Members decided to give their general feedback as follows:

- Content of reports and accuracy; it was suggested that some MTFP reports lacked detail with some incorrect information, options included that are not possible on health and safety grounds.
- More detail around financial information, in particular costings attached to the o options put forward in a Report. Members were informed that it might be that officers only include financial implications where they may impact on the budget. If the proposals can be achieved within existing resources they will not necessarily be put in detail. Members stated that they would prefer that to be stated in the financial section so that it is clear and unambiguous.
- The inclusion of comparison data, Members would like data to be put into context, for example the Welsh average. Mr Jones stated that a report on performance management is currently being prepared and will outline how and what is presented to scrutiny committees.
- Members confirmed that officers present at meetings were generally able to clarify queries in relation to officers Reports however there are occasions when information has to be circulated afterwards, generally this information is provided but there are occasions when it is not. Some information can be buried in appendices, Members appreciate that reports cannot contain everything but there should be sufficient information to allow effective scrutiny.

The Chair summarised the main issues as above, he also highlighted that more detail is needed in financial and personnel sections, even if it is just to confirm that current budget or personnel are sufficient to support the proposals in the report. He re-affirmed that important information should be in the main body of the report and not in the appendices. Reports should include qualitative and quantitative data in order to provide context and balance. There should be a reasonable sample size, across geographic areas using a variety of methods, previous years data, current performance compared to national average.

Members commented that overall they felt that the quality of reports was good but asked that their comments be fed through as part of the review and to Officers, in order to improve the quality further.

The meeting closed at 6.09 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