



## **SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH  
ON THURSDAY 27TH JULY 2017 AT 5.00 P.M.**

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PRESENT:

Councillor J. Pritchard – Chair

Councillors:

W. David, D.T. Davies, Ms J. Gale, Mrs G. D. Oliver and Mrs M.E. Sargent.

Together with:

C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services) and E. Sullivan (Democratic Services Officer)

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L. Binding, Mrs C. Forehead, C. P. Mann and Mrs D. Price.

### **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 26th January 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **REPORTS OF OFFICERS**

Consideration was given to the following reports: -

### **4. SCRUTINY TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

Mrs Cath Forbes-Thompson, Interim Head of Democratic Services introduced the report which outlined scrutiny training practice and presented various options for future delivery of Members training.

The specifically tailored training programme for scrutiny development that was rolled out from November 2013 through to March 2014 was noted and the feedback received and response to the comments made, in terms of additional training provision was detailed.

Mrs Emma Sullivan, the Interim Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the Training Needs Analysis Questionnaire to determine the training programme from 2018-2020 would be ready to circulate shortly and would include scrutiny focused training. The inclusion of a skills-audit was highlighted and the Officer confirmed that this data would help to inform training development opportunities going forward.

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

A Member emphasised the importance training Scrutiny Committee training and specifically questioning and chairing skills. Mrs Sullivan confirmed that 'Introduction to Chairing Skills' and well as 'Advanced Chairing Skills', 'Holding Effective Pre-meetings' and the 'Importance of Questioning Skills; Being an Effective Critical Friend' modules were being offered on the questionnaire. There would also be courses on 'Communication, Influencing and Negotiation Skills' as well as 'Public Speaking and Presenting to an Audience' which will be recommended to all Councillors and will hopefully help newly elected Councillors to gain the confidence needed to speak out at meetings.

Members referred to the training on pre-meetings and a concern was expressed with regard to their value and attendance levels. A request was made for a record to be kept for pre-meeting attendance. Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that although it would not be possible to keep a formal attendance record but an informal note could be taken and the results brought back to this committee. Members agreed that they would like to see the information come forward in order to establish whether or not there were any attendance trends developing. It was also noted that some new Councillors had not be aware of the pre-meeting process or their start times. Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that Members had been advised during the recent workshops and via email and agreed that reminders would be sent to Committee Members with regard to pre-meeting times and the importance of their attendance would be emphasised.

Having fully considered its content the Scrutiny Leadership Group noted the report and welcomed the proposal to include a skills audit with the forthcoming training needs analysis and requested that an informal attendance record be kept at pre-meetings in order to establish any developing attendance trends and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the report be noted;
- (ii) an informal record of pre-meeting attendance be taken and the results reported back to Scrutiny Leadership Group;
- (iii) reminders be send to Scrutiny Committee Members with regard to pre-meetings.

## **5. SCRUTINY REVIEW: SCRUTINY REVIEW SELF EVALUATION AND PEER REVIEW**

Mrs Cath Forbes-Thompson presented the report which informed the Scrutiny Leadership Group of the outcome of the recent self-evaluation and peer review process.

Members were advised that the questionnaire circulated had been based on the characteristics of good scrutiny and had been issued to all 73 Councillors as well as Senior Officers. In January 2017 the response rate for Members was 38% with a total of 28 responses received. Scrutiny Leadership Group considered the responses at that time and

recommended that the questionnaire be re-circulated in order to encourage more responses. This was done and resulted in one additional response being received giving an overall Members response rate of 39.7%.

The Officer provided a break-down of the responses received and referred Members to Appendix 1 of the report which provided the full detail and to paragraph 4.5 of the report which highlighted the key areas. It was noted that respondents were invited to provide comments on each of the sections as part of the feedback process.

The arrangements for the Peer Review were outlined. Members from Newport City Council and Monmouthshire County Council took part in reciprocal peer evaluations assisted by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and Wales Audit Office (WAO) who provided a briefing for the peer group. The Policy and Resources and Health Social Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee's were observed and the assessments returned were detailed in section 4.9 and 4.10 of the Officers' report. Mrs Forbes-Thompson highlighted the key themes arising from the peer comments and the areas for improvement recommended by the peer reviewers.

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

The Scrutiny Leadership Group expressed concern with regard to the low response rate to the questionnaire and asked if there was anything that they could do to improve this going forward. Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that a 39.7% response rate was very good for a survey, where on average a 25% response rate is judged as a high level of return. Although if Members were minded to they could use pre-meeting time to highlight the importance of responding to any future surveys.

Members requested that any comments directly relating the performance of Scrutiny Chairs be fed back to those concerned to enable future development and requested that consideration be given to including more qualitative rather than quantitative data gathering in future surveys. The Officer confirmed that each question had been accompanied by a section that allowed comments to be made by the respondent.

A Member expressed concern that of those surveyed 37.93% disagreed with the principle that scrutiny operated non-politically and felt that this required further review. Members present agreed that it was not something that they had been conscious of at meetings but felt that given this response rate further investigation was required and more needed to be done to get the message out on the value of scrutiny and how it operates. The Scrutiny Leadership Group considered this to be of particular importance given the number of new Councillors coming into scrutiny for the first time. The Officer advised that the questionnaires had been anonymised so could not be followed up with the individuals commenting and the comments made might stem from a perception of political bias over a line of questioning or even the inability to ask a question or comment during a meeting. Mrs Forbes-Thompson reminded Members that the changes to the scrutiny process as a result of the review were still relatively new and required time to bed in, she suggested that the survey results before Members might stand as a baseline and that the self evaluation process could be repeated in order to establish comparisons and then identify any underlying trends. Members agreed that this would be worthwhile going forward and fully discussed the most appropriate timeframe. Following consideration the Scrutiny Leadership Group agreed that twice per Council Term (every two years) would be sufficient to monitor any trends.

RECOMMENDED that:

- (i) Council be advised of the comments of the Scrutiny Leadership Group;
- (ii) the Self Evaluation and Peer Review process be repeated twice per Council Term (every two years).

The meeting closed at 17.50 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 January 2018 they were signed by the Chair.

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CHAIR