



SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON THURSDAY, 27TH NOVEMBER 2014 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor S. Morgan – Vice Chair

Councillors:

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

Together with:

A. Price (Interim Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer) J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager), M. Sprague (Development Officer for Older People) and E. Sullivan (Democratic Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs E.M. Aldworth, H.W. David (Chair), W. David and J. Pritchard.

Having received apologies for absence from Councillor H.W. David (Chair), Councillor S. Morgan presided as Chair for the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 29TH OCTOBER 2014-12-04

As a matter of accuracy Members were referred to minute no. 6 - Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programmes - Regeneration and Environment it was noted that the outcome of the procurement process for Bargoed Cinema would be known in May 2015 and not 2012 as stated in the minute.

RESOLVED that subject to the above amendment the minutes of the Scrutiny Leadership Group meeting held on the 29th October 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

4. CCBC WEBSITE REDESIGN - PRESENTATION

The presentation by M. Sprague (Development Officer Older People) and J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager) highlighted the background, development and improvements to the Caerphilly County Borough website.

Members were advised that the redesign sought to present users with a Caerphilly 'google' that would provide information in an accessible and task oriented way, enabling users entering the site for a specific reason to find the relevant information as quickly and directly as possible.

Officers demonstrated the different pages, links and search facilities of the new site and highlighted areas of improved functionality. The security restrictions applied to the exempt information access list were explained and the 'log on' function which allowed those on the list to view documents demonstrated. Members were encouraged to make as much use of the site as possible and inform Officers of any issues, concerns, additional items for inclusion or access problems.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their presentation and for demonstrating the website functions and Members questions were welcomed.

Members congratulated all those concerned with the redesign of the website which was far more user friendly than the previous facility. Members noted the Complaints and Feedback pages and queried if this could be revised to Compliments, Complaints and Feedback as they felt there were limited opportunities to post positive comments or thanks. Officers confirmed that alterations and updates were possible and problems should be brought to the attention of Louise Saddler who would continue to work on improving and expanding the site going forward.

Officers confirmed that a Member Training Seminar would be held on the 12th January 2015 where greater detail on the sites functionality would be demonstrated. The Democratic Services Manager provided details of the new subscription service which would email subscribers with a link to any new documents posted.

Members requested that consideration be given to providing training opportunities on the website on what was now available on site and how to get the most out of it. M. Sprague confirmed that she would be happy to work with all Councillors, either on a one to one or group basis.

Clarification was sought with regard to electronic voting and webcasting and how this would be posted to the site. Officers advised that following Council the outcome of each vote would be published on the website with the webcast available live or in archive. Members noted the excellent work done on the Community Council websites and were pleased with the support provided to Clerks from IT services. Members queried partner organisations representation on the site and particular reference was made to Governors Wales and the Gwent Fire and Rescue Authority. The Officer confirmed that the Fire Authority would be linked into the site in due course and agreed to inform IT with regards to Governors Wales.

5. PUBLICATION OF BEST PRACTICE GUIDANCE FOR ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION WITH OLDER PEOPLE ON CHANGES TO COMMUNITY SERVICES IN WALES.

M. Sprague introduced the report which highlighted the recent publications by the Older

People's Commissioner for Wales of the 'Best Practice Guidance for Engagement and Consultation with Older People on Changes to Community Services in Wales' and the 'Community Services Toolkit for Older People'.

Members were advised that under section 12 of the best practice guidance, older people must be involved in any service related decision making. It clearly defined a local councils duty to assess the impact of decisions from a service user perspective. Engagement should be undertaken as early as it can be and as extensively as possible to allow the views expressed to be considered and the impact on older people assessed before the decision is taken. Local councils must be able to demonstrate that they have listened, understood and considered older people and a detailed equalities impact assessment produced.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her report and full discussion ensued.

Members acknowledged the importance of community engagement in the decision making process and particular reference made to the extensive consultation process being undertaken in relation to the Budget. The importance of applying the same level of engagement to all community groups including children was discussed and it was agreed that the earlier the process started the better. The Officer asked Members to keep engagement in the forefront of their minds and ask the question when reports come through scrutiny.

Clarification was sought on how best to engage with the harder to reach, for example those older people who live alone and have little outside contact, who may want their wishes on service delivery noted but not in a formal way. Members were advised to contact Liz Sharma, Engagement Officer, who would be able to include their views on the corporate consultation database, even if they were made on an informal basis.

The SLG agreed that they would like to see a further report on engagement, focusing on the how we as an authority engage with the harder to reach, the costs associated with engagement and whether there has been any increase in order to mitigate the increased responsibilities.

The SLG also agreed that they would like to see the present report template amended to reflect the importance of engagement by changing Section 8 of report structure from Consultation to Consultation and Engagement. The Democratic Services Manager confirmed that any change to the report template would need to be approved by CMT and agreed to feed this back and provide an update at the next meeting.

Having considered the content of the report the SLG fully endorsed the recommendations contained therein.

6. EDUCATION SCRUTINY

A. Price, The Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced her report which sought to clarify the role of scrutiny in relation to legal functions and responsibilities of School and Council.

The role of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee within its terms of reference and how this sat with the role of the School Governing Body and the EAS and their specific functions and policy decision making was explained. It was noted that Head Teacher issues would be a matter solely for a school and their governing body and not the Council. The Council, however does have a role to play by providing support and challenge to a Head Teacher. The Officer accepted that the different functions, roles and responsibilities and how they intersected and separated was not the easiest to take on board and welcomed Members questions.

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

A Member expressed concern that the role of a school governing body was not fully understood by the EAS and governors were not getting the appropriate level of support. He was also concerned that there was little consistency in the quality of governor appointments and support to help governors improve was not at an appropriate level to ensure their effectiveness within the role. The Member expressed his disappointment at the lack of impetus in terms of governor status and referenced the Bronze Award initiative. The Interim Head of Democratic Services agreed that for the individual school its governing body were the most important challenge element but scrutiny did have a role in challenging the support provided to governors. Members were referred to section 4.18 of the report which outlined the Council's powers of intervention under the School Standards and Framework Act 2013 and the Schools Organisation Code.

Concerns were also expressed that even though the overall responsibility when children are not educated properly lay with the Council, due to its overarching duty for education it cannot individually challenge a schools achievement or Headteacher. The Head of Democratic Services advised that a failure to educate could include both elements but the overall responsibility for education was the Councils.

Members agreed that schools were not being challenged enough and that more intensive training needed to be provide to both Councillors and Governors. Concerns were expressed that as the primary responsibility lay with the Council so did the primary criticism particularly in relation to 'special measures'.

It was proposed and seconded that considering the complicated nature of the relationships involved that the report be presented to the next appropriate meeting of the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

Having fully considered its content the SLG noted the report.

The meeting closed at 18.39 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 29th January 2015 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR