



SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON THURSDAY, 29TH JANUARY 2015 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor H.W. David (Chair),

Councillors:

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

Together with:

A. Price (Interim Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer) J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs E.M. Aldworth.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 27TH NOVEMBER 2014

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Scrutiny Leadership Group meeting held on the 27th November 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

4. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMMES

Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee

Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that there had been no consultation responses to the draft work programme. The draft work programme was noted and confirmed by Members.

Education for Life Scrutiny Committee

Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that there had been no consultation responses to the draft work programme. It was noted that the outstanding request for a report on school uniforms requested by Councillor J Pritchard would be programmed when ready. Members agreed that the report on Education Scrutiny discussed at SLG in November 2014 would be added to the work programme for this quarter as an information item.

Health Social Care & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that there had been no consultation responses to the draft work programme. Members expressed concerns that there were still outstanding requests since 2013. Cllr Ackerman stated that as this information is already reported to other forums the information should be readily available and asked that the reports be presented as information items. It was agreed that the remaining outstanding report requests should be added to the work programme for March 2015.

Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee

Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that there had been no consultation responses to the draft work programme. It was noted that Officers were discussing the report request for compulsory purchase orders in respect of empty properties with Councillor Rees. A meeting has also been arranged with Councillor Binding to discuss the request in respect of the empty derelict buildings, Members queried if the two requests could be amalgamated. It was noted that the request in respect of council reserves is scheduled for October 2015 and the report on consultancy costs is included in the forward work programme for 14th April 2015.

Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that there had been no consultation responses to the draft work programme. It was noted that there had been no further response on the car parking report request, since the Bargoed TCMG report was forwarded to the Member concerned. Members therefore agreed to remove the request from the list of outstanding reports. SLG noted that the request in respect of Bargoed cinema has been dealt with under a notice of motion and a report will come forward in due course. Finally SLG noted there has been no update on the public conveniences report.

Cllr H David asked for Members views on the recent WAO report in the Public Interest in respect of scrutiny. The report stated that scrutiny agendas are too long and lack focus, and they recommended that scrutiny committee agenda's should be prioritised and information items handled outside the formal scrutiny process.

Members expressed concern that scrutiny may not see all pre-decision reports and wondered how scrutiny 6 weekly meetings could fit with Cabinet fortnightly meetings. Mr Jones stated that scrutiny agendas are overloaded and there are particular issues with Policy and Resources and Regeneration & Environment Scrutiny Committees. There are 2 - 2 ½ hours every 6 weeks to scrutinise all the work of the Executive. It is important to think about the purpose of the discussion, Members need to consider if their requests are appropriate and allow time to carry out more in depth work over several meetings and consider the benefits of using a balance of witnesses. Overall scrutiny needs to accept they cannot deal with all the work of the Executive and should prioritise key issues and do a few things well as opposed to everything.

Mrs Price stated that the number of items on agendas cannot be solved overnight, it is proposed that a solution is developed over the next few months and will aim to give Members ownership of agendas.

A Member stated that the moving of Public Protection service area to Health Social Care & Wellbeing would ease the pressure on Regeneration and Environment. However there is still an issue with the number of information and Cabinet reports, which can distort the agendas. It was felt that Members should meet with Officers rather than requesting reports on personal ward issues.

It was agreed that quality is important, however the balance of agendas should also ensure that concerns of Members are included. A wide terms of reference for some committees can cause difficulties, some felt it is difficult to do justice to more than three reports. However it was important to be flexible as some issues may require more time for example Customer Service Centres.

Members queried what good practice examples there are, as suggested by WAO. Mr Jones stated that Monmouthshire had shown good questioning skills, which was observed during the peer observations.

A Member raised the impact of Members not attending pre-meetings, but then asking questions at the meeting. It was suggested that those Members who attend the pre-meeting would have priority on questions ahead of those who don't who will wait to the end, as is the practice at Education for Life. Mrs Price agreed that it would be helpful to agree consistency across committees and share good practice. A Member stated that he felt that pre-meetings focus the mind and makes scrutiny meeting run more smoothly. Members stated that it was important that pre-meetings maintain a tight discipline and Chairs have to ensure that Members do not try to debate the issues.

Mr Jones thanked Members for their comments and stated that the intention is to carry out an engagement and consultation exercise with Members, Co-optees and Officers through workshops in order to highlight issues and find solutions.

The meeting closed at 18.03p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 26th March 2015 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR