



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH (SIRHOWY ROOM) ON TUESDAY 17TH MARCH 2015 AT 5:00PM

PRESENT:

Councillor C.P. Mann Chair
Councillor D.T. Davies Vice-Chair

Councillors:

P.J. Bevan, H.W. David, W. David, R.T. Davies, Mrs C. Forehead, Mrs P. Griffiths, Ms J. Jones, G. Kirby, Mrs D. Price, A. Rees, Mrs M.E. Sargent and J. Taylor.

Together with:

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

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs G. Bevan and Mrs E. Stenner.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the beginning or during the course of the meeting.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 15th December 2014 be approved as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Cllr Mrs C. Forehead referred to minute no. 6 and the update provided on the webcasting system, she congratulated Officers on the successful webcast of the last Council meeting but referenced the difficulties experienced with the guest speaker microphone connected to the lectern. Officers confirmed that improvements to the webcasting system were on-going and these included the introduction of a 'lapel' microphone facility; this would enable speakers to move more freely without losing amplification.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

5. SCRUTINY DEVELOPMENTS

Mrs C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer) introduced the report which proposed a programme to address the issues for improvement contained in the Wales Audit Office (WAO) report 'Follow-up of the Special Inspection and Reports in the Public Interest'.

The Scrutiny Research Officer summarised the main findings of the report and outlined the role of the Improving Governance Project Board (IGPB) in overseeing the improvements to scrutiny. It was noted that in order to identify how improvements could be made a Project Group would be established to report to the IGPB.

The composition of the Project Group membership was outlined and noted that the Chair of Democratic Services Committee, Councillor C.P. Mann, would Chair the Project Group with the Vice Chair, Councillor D.T. Davies, acting as substitute. The Project Groups' scrutiny oversight would be provided by the Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Group, Councillor H.W. David, with the Vice Chair, Councillor S. Morgan, acting as substitute. Members were advised that the group would be supported by Jonathan Jones and Catherine Forbes-Thompson.

In order to ensure that all interested parties were involved in the improvements programme a series of four workshops would be organised. The workshops membership was highlighted and would include a Cabinet Member, CMT representative and a Scrutiny Chair with the remainder of places mixed proportionally. It was noted that in order to ensure fair representation the Backbench membership of four places per scrutiny committee would be politically balanced across those 16 places.

Members were referred to section 4.9 of the report which outlined the purpose of the workshops and section 4.11 which detailed the programmes timetable in order to meet the October 2015 deadline agreed by Council.

The Project Group would consider the options drawn up by the workshops and following consultation with all Members and Senior Officers make recommendations to the IGPB based on those options. The IGPB would then make recommendations to the Scrutiny Leadership Group and Democratic Services Committee who in turn would make recommendations to Cabinet and then Council for decision.

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

Members expressed their support for the report and its recommendations and welcomed the proposals to improve the scrutiny function. The need to ensure that Senior Officers as well as the Executive understood the importance and purpose of scrutiny was emphasised as a vital element of the process going forward.

Clarification was sought as to whether there was any scrutiny representation on the Improving Governance Project Board. The Cabinet Member for HR/Governance and Business Manager informed Members that the work of the Board was coming to an end and confirmed that the Board membership did not include scrutiny representation.

Having fully considered the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendation contained therein be approved and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons given in the Officer's report the project plan be agreed.

6. MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2015-17

Ms A. Price (Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer and Head of Democratic Services) introduced the report which advised Members of the outcome of the Members Training Needs Analysis (TNA).

Members were advised that the questionnaires had been distributed both electronically and in hard copy with a response rate of 42% achieved. Members were referred to Appendix 1 of the report which provided an overview of the responses and to Appendix 2 which detailed Members preferences in relation to meeting and training times. It was noted that the TNA programme would not begin until September 2015 to allow the mandatory and recommended training sessions currently underway to be completed. TNA sessions would be facilitated by a mix of external providers and internal Officers and in order to make the best use of Members and Officers time alternative methods of delivering training such as e-learning tools and the recording of sessions were also being looked at. The Officer welcomed Members views on the training offered, the timing of sessions and any other considerations they would like to see in the programme going forward.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her report and sought Members views on the outcome of the Training Needs Analysis.

Members expressed concern at the volume of training and seminars currently underway and were pleased to note that the requested training programme would not start until the mandatory and recommended training programme had been completed.

Concern was expressed that a 42% response rate from the questionnaires were too low to give a clear indication of Members preferences. Clarification sought as to whether Members who had not expressed an interest through the TNA would be still be able to attend the training sessions. The Officer confirmed that all Members would be offered the opportunity to attend all of the sessions, however first choice would be given to those who had expressed an interest.

A Member requested that consideration be given to including a training session on dealing with 'the press', in particular building successful relationships and dealing with the pitfalls. The Officer confirmed that this would be looked at and advised Members that the Communications Unit would be able to provide support.

A Member noted the course on Public Speaking and Presenting to an Audience and welcomed this session particularly now that meetings of full Council were being webcast. Reference was made to the limited number of Councillors that spoke during meetings and it was hoped that this course might encourage more Members to speak up. Given that more meetings would eventually be webcast it was suggested that this training should be included on the mandatory programme.

Distance and E-Learning opportunities were welcomed by Members and clarification was sought as to how this could be facilitated. The Officer confirmed that a training session could be recorded using the current webcasting equipment, a secure link could then be emailed to Members unable to attend allowing them to view the training session.

A Member referenced the training time preferences in Appendix 2 and asked that consideration be given to offering alternative timings with perhaps a morning and evening timeslot provided for each session. The importance of providing opportunities for those Councillors that worked full time was discussed and agreed that the programme would benefit from offering a wider choice of timings, particularly for mandatory session.

Having fully considered its content the Democratic Services Committee noted the report.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on the 27th May 2015 they were signed by the Chair.

The meeting closed at 17:35pm.

CHAIR