

**NOTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHAIRS AND VICE-CHAIRS OF THE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEES, AUDIT COMMITTEE AND STANDARDS
COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS ON
THURSDAY 27 OCTOBER 2011**

PRESENT: County Councillor J. G. Morris (Chair)
County Councillors J H Brunt, Mrs L V Corfield, Miss M Davies, Miss A Holloway, Col
T J Van Rees, and Independent Member P Swanson

Officers in Attendance: Geoff Petty (Strategic Director Finance and Infrastructure),
Janet Kealey (Head of Legal, Scrutiny and Democratic Services), Wyn Richards
(Scrutiny Services Manager) and Lisa Richards (Senior Committee Clerk), Richard
Hughes (Corporate Policy Manager) and Melanie Amor (External Policy Officer)

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors R G Brown, L R
E Davies, Mrs S C Davies, Mrs M McKenzie and Independent Member R.
Miller. Clarence Meredith and Liz Patterson.

2. Notes of Meeting held on 23 September 2011

The notes of the meeting held on 23 September 2011 were agreed. The Chair
would write to WLGA regarding improvements to Ffynnon once further
information was available.

3. LSB Scrutiny – Richard Hughes and Melanie Amor

The Welsh Government have introduced a new policy focussing on plan and
partnership rationalisation. One of the key points is to strengthen accountability
and scrutiny including robust performance management. All Local Authorities
have until April 2013 to put the principles in place. The Local Government
Measure will impact on the scrutiny of LSBs with local authorities taking the
lead in the operation of the LSB and into scrutiny. It is proposed that
Modernisation and Improvement Committee assume the responsibility for
scrutiny of the LSB and One Powys Plan. There was the potential for future
collaboration and more regional working which may lead to 'super' scrutiny
committees. As yet the impact of the regional agenda was unclear.

The Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs were invited to submit their comments
prior to a meeting of the LSB on 13 December. It was considered prudent that
the Chairs should meet the Leader and Chief Executive to discuss the
operation of LSB scrutiny prior to the December meeting. Further guidance
from the Welsh Government would be welcomed.

Concern was raised regarding the work load which would be placed on the
Modernisation and Improvement Committee and consideration may need to be
given to reallocating some work between the remaining committees.

It was recommended that

- i) A meeting with the Joint Chairs and the Chair of the LSB and Chief Executive be arranged in mid November with a view to formulating a process for undertaking the scrutiny of the LSB.**
- ii) The proposal to allocate the role to Modernisation and Improvement Committee was supported subject to ongoing monitoring.**
- iii) The Corporate Policy Manager and External Policy Officer be asked to review how LSB scrutiny was undertaken elsewhere in Wales for consideration by the Joint Chairs as LSB scrutiny develops in Powys.**

4. Work Programmes

i) Cabinet

Although the cabinet work programme had improved there were further improvements that could be made. It was suggested that the Cabinet work programme should be circulated to scrutiny committees to ensure a more co-ordinated approach was taken. There was a need for clarity in determining whether the Cabinet was delivering the Powys Change Plan. Suggestions could also be made regarding those items which were not included on the Cabinet forward work programme where there were thought to be issues which the Cabinet ought to be considering.

ii) Scrutiny Committees

Modernisation and Improvement

Treasury Management would no longer be considered by this committee with effect from the New Year. The Sickness Absence Review was completed and would be circulated to all Committees and Portfolio Holders.

Children, Social Care and Health

The Committee was meeting monthly and the extra meetings were generally well attended. It was suggested that the Care and Repair Scrutiny Review undertaken by the Regeneration and Environment Committee be forwarded to support their review into providing disabled adaptations.

Learning and Leisure

There were capacity issues in running several scrutiny reviews. At present only one was underway, Schools with Deficit Budgets, but there were others to be undertaken.

It was generally considered that most work in scrutiny committees was undertaken by smaller working groups. The new system of prepared questions

would allow Portfolio Holders to give in depth answers but this would not be sufficient to replace a full scrutiny review. However, there were concerns that political issues could divert attention from genuine scrutiny work. Committees also needed to be mindful of the public and be seen to be addressing issues that were of concern to them.

The Scrutiny Services Manager was hoping that a more co-ordinated approach could be adopted by scrutiny, finance and performance officers and remove the quantity of information provided and focus on quality in line with the vision of the Chief Executive for the development of scrutiny.

Environment, Crime and Disorder

A number of reviews were essentially complete, but were maintaining a monitoring role. There had been significant changes in the way some services were delivered during the course of reviews undertaken by this Committee. Further information was being sought on the conflict between the 10 year ecological plan and grass and hedge cutting requirements. The Portfolio Holder had commenced a review on car parking and if the Committee were not satisfied with progress, a full scrutiny review would be instigated.

The Co-opted Member was proving very useful and a greater amount of committee time could be spent solely on crime and disorder issues.

Audit

Noted.

Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs

The outcome of discussions on LSB scrutiny would be reported in December.

5. New Scrutiny Processes

The Scrutiny Services Manager sought feedback on the new arrangements for conducting scrutiny meetings. Generally, prepared questions were welcomed but this must not stifle spontaneity. Caution must be raised regarding political influences and good management of committees was essential. A debrief at the end of the committee would also be welcome. The scrutiny team should be more aware of information available from regulators and perhaps identify patterns of concerns.

It was suggested that a report was required identifying the resource requirements to deliver the new proposals including those in the Local Government Measure. A Democratic Services Committee (DSC) had been established prior to the introduction of the Local Government Measure and it was thought that this was the appropriate body to discuss resource requirements. The views of this meeting could be forwarded to the DSC.

The Chief Executive had made a presentation to Council regarding improvements he would wish to see in scrutiny. Members queried what was required of them. The Scrutiny Services Manager thought that scrutiny needed to be more challenging and ensure that the Cabinet is meeting the aims of the Powys Change Plan. Scrutiny needed to be more robust and independent. The Scrutiny Services Manager also asked Chairs and Vice Chairs to advise him of what additional support they required to drive forward the development of scrutiny.

6. Collaboration

Concerns had been raised at Learning and Leisure Committee, following a presentation on SWAMWAC, regarding the governance arrangements of collaborative work. The Chair has discussed the issue with the Cabinet Member who has assured her that this issue was to be raised with the Minister. One of the issues of concern related to different patterns of regionalization from Assembly Ministers

7. Local Government Measure

Whilst draft guidance was being issued the timetable for implementation has slipped. The Democratic Services Committee has been appointed by the Council earlier than required, as it was likely that formal approval for such a committee would not be received until following the County Council elections.

8. Joint Working Update

Nothing to report.

9. Items for next scheduled meeting 7 December 2011 – 10.00am

LSB – progress.

10. AOB

Member Development - should scrutiny training be mandatory? This arose from the last meeting of the Member Development Working Group. Members supported the idea but queried whether this could be enforced. There would need to be a resolution by County Council to this effect. The Scrutiny Services Manager proposed that bespoke training be provided to both Cabinet and Scrutiny Members and for the ruling group and opposition in relation to scrutiny.

County Councillor J. G. Morris
CHAIR

Meeting closed 12.31