

NOTES OF A MEETING OF THE JOINT CHAIRS AND VICE-CHAIRS STEERING GROUP – SCRUTINY AND AUDIT COMMITTEES.

14TH SEPTEMBER, 2012 – COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS.

PRESENT: County Councillors W.T. Jones, Mrs K.S. Silk, A.W. Davies, Mrs M. Mackenzie, Mrs D. Bailey, E. Michael Jones.

Officers:

Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager), Lisa Richards and Liz Patterson (Scrutiny Officers), Rhian Jones (Corporate Planning Officer)

1. Election of Chair / Rota for Chairing Meetings.

As the Steering Group was not yet fully constituted it was agreed that County Councillor W.T. Jones be elected Chair for the meeting.

The Steering Group discussed the possible rotation of the Chair between the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees and the Audit Committee with each being the chair of the Steering Group for a year in rotation.

Outcomes:

- Schedule the rota for chairing meetings on agenda for next meeting.

2. Apologies.

County Councillors J.G. Morris, Mrs S.C. Davies, Janet Kealey (Head of Legal, Scrutiny and Democratic Services), Geoff Petty (Strategic Director – Finance and Infrastructure), Clarence Meredith (Strategic Director – Law and Governance).

3. Notes of Last Meeting.

Documents Considered:

- 13th July, 2012.

Outcomes:

- Received.
- Page 3 – Item 8 – 3rd Bullet Point – amend to read – “scrutiny support and capacity of officers to undertake workload”.

4. Inclusion of the Chair and Vice-Chair of Democratic Services Committee as Members of the Joint Chairs Steering Group.

Documents Considered:

- None

Issues Discussed:

- Role of the Democratic Services Committee.
- Benefits of the Chair and Vice-Chair of Democratic Services attending meetings on a formal or informal basis.
- Would the involvement of the Chair and Vice-Chair of Democratic Services detract from the role of Joint Chairs in developing scrutiny.
- Link between Member Development and how scrutiny resourced.

- School Modernisation – decisions being taken based on a lack of evidence – evidence of where there are issues to be considered when decisions are taken – assurances required that the process for decision making is robust.

Outcomes:

- Chair and Vice-Chair of the Democratic Services Committee to be formal members of the Joint Chairs.

5. Annual Performance Report

Role of scrutiny in considering document discussed. Steering Group asked to comment on how the document presented itself to the public.

Issues Discussed:

- Satisfaction rates 60% overall therefore 40% dissatisfaction – no comparative figure for last year.
- 80% satisfaction – customer services only compared with 60% satisfaction overall – this needs to be made clear and both figures inserted where appropriate.
- Outcomes – little information in the document about outcomes of changes – what difference has this made to the public.
- Executive Summary (Pages 5 – 7) – detail is located in 3 places (Executive Summary / Main Part of Document and data tables) – confusing for public trying to find information. Need for the sections to be pulled together to make it more readable.
- Regeneration – New Grants Scheme – this is a business expansion scheme and needs to be clarified in the document.
- Is there detail in the report of complaints and how they have been resolved?
- Generally there are comparative figures included in the report – more could have been included.
- Very little information in the report about what we're not good at.
- No mention in report about improvement in sickness absence in some areas – except for reference to scrutiny committee review. It was acknowledged that sickness absence had not improved in specific areas.
- Executive Summary – should include page number references to main detail in remainder of the document.
- P6 – Key achievements – regeneration of Brecon Town Centre did not go ahead as planned – how is this a key achievement?
- P7 – Council – number of calls answered has increased – why is this important – have we received more complaints – are calls answered quicker?
- P8 – report gives a false impression of the position by comparison to where we are now - e.g. increased access to reablement whilst current position is consideration of cuts in reablement. Although report is for a specific period should it be updated with a note about the current position? Should foreword be amended to read that this is the position at the time of the report but that the position can subsequently change.
- P8 – Comments – there are no negative comments in the document to provide a balance – this is too much of a good news story.
- P8 – Adult Services Transformation – written in jargon – unclear as to meaning of text.
- P9 – Differences box – delete detail as these do not show what difference was made.
- P9 – Communications Hub – this should specify that it was a pilot in Radnorshire and is to be rolled out to the remainder of the county.

- P10 – Review of community meals – this was reviewed by scrutiny previously – why is this being undertaken again.
- P14 – Affordable Housing – non mention of new mortgage scheme.
- P14 – Adaptations – improvements to the way that adaptations are provided – is there detail about how adaptations are removed.
- P16 – Young Person’s comment – incomplete comment.
- P20 - Active and Healthy Lifestyles Strategy – should there be reference to ongoing review / action plan to progress the strategy.
- P22 – Leisure Centre Review – What is the position with this? – funding for repairs – how does this tie into the review of leisure centres.
- P26 – Estyn inspection – judged adequate – the 3 bullet points were not why the Council was judged as adequate – the detail from the report needs to be included here as well as these bullet points.
- P28 – debt not “dept” (3rd ballot paper – R5)
- P28 – fund for schools with deficit – this did not come in until after year end – should not be included.
- P30 – tick against Brecon Town Centre – should be cross.
- P32 – Chart is confusing – should there be reference that the take up of the scheme is low.
- P32 – Robert Owen Community Banking – this ceased at the end of the year – should be reference to this.
- P34 – comparative status of Powys by comparison to other authorities in Wales – recycling – Powys’ performance is poor.
- P35 – amount sent to landfill – comparison to 2010 / 11.
- P36 – replacement of vehicles – savings should be balanced against capital cost of replacing vehicles – these were not just replaced as they are fuel efficient – part of the normal turnaround of vehicles. Telemetry systems also have made savings – can this be quantified?
- P39 – customer satisfaction figure – this is for customer services only not for Council overall.
- P40 – why is Job Evaluation included as we did not achieve it. What difference has the achievement of the Member Development Charter made to the people of Powys.
- P40 / 41 – no comments about sickness levels. Also no comment about the overall financial position of the Council.
- P42 – Outcome Agreement – omissions in paragraph 4.
- P48 – planning protocol – amend second table box to read “Recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee” ...
- P54 – Objective 10 – simplify wording of leading paragraphs. In addition in paragraph 2 amend wording to read “improvement activity for each of the objectives can...”
- P57 – page does not make sense e.g. was £70 million spent over 3 years to save £4.5 million? Is this information presented in the best way possible / as clearly as possible. Should the information show additional spending rather than spending within budgets?
- P58 – comparison to Welsh Measures – should be a reference in the text to Table 2 and 3.

Outcomes:

- That the comments of the Joint Chairs be submitted to the Cabinet and Council for consideration.

6. Wales Audit Office Study of the Effectiveness of Scrutiny.

Documents Considered:

- Email from Chair of Scrutiny Officers' Network.

Issues Discussed:

- Timetable and process for WAO review:
 - September 2012 – Completion of Self Evaluation Tool;
 - October / November 2012 – Regional Meetings to discuss findings of self evaluation assessments;
 - December 2012 to March 2013 – fieldwork to be undertaken to include peer reviews by officers and Members from other authorities.

Outcomes:

- That the WAO self evaluation tool be circulated to the Joint Chairs when it is received.

7. Characteristics of Effective Overview and Scrutiny.

Documents Considered:

- Draft Document from the Welsh Local Government Association.

Outcomes:

- Document noted.
- Members to email Scrutiny Manager with any comments to forward to the WLGA.
- Democratic Services Committee to consider as elements of document could be relevant.
- Scrutiny Committees to consider.

8. Staff Resources.

9. Welsh Government Scrutiny Development Work Programme.

Documents Considered:

- Letter from Welsh Government (20/07/12) – Developing Scrutiny in Wales.
- Letter from Welsh Government (15/08/12) – Developing Scrutiny in Wales.

Issues Discussed:

- Implications of Local Government Measure 2011.
- New Scrutiny Development Fund and possible use of fund for regional scrutiny projects.
- Need for a business case for additional staff resources for scrutiny. In addition a need to consider a realignment of work by existing staff as an alternative to the provision of additional staff.

Outcomes:

- Chairs of Scrutiny Committees and Scrutiny Manager to draft a business case for next Joint Chairs Meeting.

10. Attendance of Scrutiny / Audit Chairs and Vice-Chairs at Cabinet – Consideration of Rota Arrangements.

Issues Discussed:

- Chair or Vice-Chair attendance at Cabinet an approved duty (Members' Salaries Report to County Council 24th May, 2012, Paragraph 8.6.2, confirms that this is the case)
- Group Leader unable to attend Cabinet – could substitute be paid travelling (Members' Salaries Report to County Council 24th May, 2012, Paragraph 8.6.2, confirms that this is the case if the Member is allowed to speak).
- Rota of member attendances.
- Diary clashes between meetings of the Cabinet and Regulatory Committee making Cabinet attendance difficult for some Chairs or Vice-Chairs.

Outcomes:

- Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny and Audit Committees to determine attendance at Cabinet between themselves.

11. ICT in Maesydderwen Schools Catchment Area.

Issues Discussed:

- £500k expenditure on ICT equipment made without a budget provision, reduced to £300k. Report considered at July Cabinet.
- Executive Leader suggested to Cabinet that it was not a matter of finding fault but making sure that such an occurrence did not happen again. He would determine who should consider this.
- Executive Leader not taken this decision to date – suggested that it should be referred to Audit Committee for consideration.

Outcomes:

- Matter referred to the Audit Committee for consideration.

12. Discussion on Role of Scrutiny Committees and Division of Responsibilities Between Committees.

Issues Discussed:

- Revised allocation of responsibilities between the 2 scrutiny committees not working – too much work allocated to the People Scrutiny Committee and insufficient to the Environment, Infrastructure and Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee.
- Scrutiny Chairs to discuss reallocation of responsibilities and then discuss with Scrutiny Manager.
- Audit Committee functions and responsibilities to remain as currently revised.

Outcomes:

- Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees to discuss revisions to the roles and responsibilities of the scrutiny committees and bring proposals to October Joint Chairs meeting.

13. Allocation of Work.

Issues Discussed:

- Issues raised at last meeting by Executive Leader.
- Items for the Environment, Infrastructure and Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee:
 - Central Support Services such as the ICT Service and links to possible European Commission grant funding;
 - Local Development Plans and delays in the development of the new plan;
 - Delays in registration of new planning applications submitted to the Council;
- Need for discussion with Chief Executive as to issues for scrutiny to consider.

Outcomes:

- Chair of the Environment, Infrastructure and Crime and disorder Scrutiny Committee to consider above items for inclusion in committee's work programme.
- An item for a discussion with the Chief Executive be included on all future Joint Chairs agendas.
- Scrutiny Manager to circulate the current assessment lists to Chairs and Vice-Chairs.

14. Discussion on Role of Joint Chairs and Vice-Chairs Steering Group.

Issues Discussed:

- Finance and Performance Monitoring to be undertaken by Audit Committee.
- Powys Change Plan – role for both Audit and Scrutiny Committees – Joint Chairs to have a co-ordination role.
- One Powys Plan – Joint Chairs to consider performance report considered by the Local Service Board.

Outcomes:

- Powys Change Plan – Joint Chairs to consider Quarter 1 report at October meeting.
- One Powys Plan – Joint Chairs to consider performance report considered by the Local Service Board.

15. Overview and Scrutiny Chairs Themed Networks 2012 / 2013.

Documents Considered:

- Email from the Welsh Local Government Association.

Issues Discussed:

- Member attendance at the Themed Networks, to be held at the WLGA Pavilion, Builth Wells.

Outcomes:

- Education / Lifelong Learning – 29th November, 2012 – County Councillor Wynne Jones attending.
- Social Services / Health – 24th January, 2013 (amended date) – County Councillor Michael Jones attending.
- Housing – 14th December, 2012 – County Councillor Kathryn Silk attending.
- Environment – 11th January, 2013 - County Councillor Kathryn Silk attending.

- Regeneration / Economic Development – 7th December, 2012 – County Councillor Maureen Mackenzie attending.
- Corporate Policy / Resources – 16th November, 2012 – Audit Committee Chair when appointed to attend.

16. Data Unit Wales Event.

Issues Discussed:

- Information Leaflet – National Intelligence Event 2012 – “Putting Evidence at the Heart of Public Service Delivery” – 20th September, 2012.

Outcomes:

- Scrutiny Manager to discuss attendance with Cabinet Manager.

17. INLOGOV Seminars / Workshops – Feedback from Members.

Issues Discussed:

- County Councillor Kathryn Silk discussed attendance at INLOGOV Seminar in July.
- Mixture of attendees from a variety of Council from across the UK.
- Much of the information reassuringly similar to that provided by the WLGA at the Council’s own training sessions.
- Seminar stressed need for scrutiny to work with Cabinet Members and Executive Leader – need for constructive tension.
- Basic tips – keep meetings short – maximum of 2 hours. Much of what is done should be in Working Groups. Presentations to committees should be brief with presenters allowed a maximum of 5 minutes to make their opening comments.
- Scrutiny is not about a constant holding to account as monitoring sessions at meetings will take up too much of the meeting. Holding to account should be undertaken by single topic only.

Outcomes:

- Feedback received and noted.

18. Meeting dates.

- 11th October, 2012 – 10.00 a.m.
- 8th November, 2012 – 10.00 a.m.
- 6th December, 2012 – 10.00 a.m.

**County Councillor W.T. Jones
Chair**