

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, on Monday, 9th June 2014 at 5 pm.

Present:

County Borough Councillor R K Turner – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors:

H Boggis	(Mrs) J Cass	G R Davies
(Mrs) M E Davies	P Jarman	(Mrs) C Leyshon
M A Norris	(Mrs) S Rees	R Smith
G Stacey	G Thomas	P Wasley
C Willis		

Officers in Attendance:

Mr P J Lucas – Director of Legal & Democratic Services
Mr P Griffiths – Service Director, Performance and Improvement
Ms A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

In attendance:

County Borough Councillor G Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Children’s Social Services and Equalities

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors, S Bradwick and C J Williams.

2. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting, in particular, those new to the Committee, namely, County Borough Councillor R W Smith the new vice Chairman and County Borough Councillor C Willis.

The Chairman also welcomed the former vice-chairman, County Borough Councillor G Hopkins, now Cabinet Member for Children’s Social Services & Equalities.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED to note that in accordance with the Members’ Code of Conduct, there were no declarations of interest made in relation to the agenda.

4. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED: to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 28th April 2014.

REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

5. **SCRUTINY OF THE COUNCIL'S DRAFT 2014/15 PRIORITY ACTION PLANS**

The Committee was presented with the report which provided Members with the feedback from the Scrutiny Working Groups established to scrutinise the Council's 2014/15 draft priority action plans which will be incorporated into the Corporate Plan for 2014/15. The feedback and revised action plan in relation to Medium Term Service Planning was also circulated to Members.

The Service Director, Performance & Improvement commented that the process had been enlightening for officers and had resulted in changes being made to the plans. He hoped that the process was one that could be built on over the year and explained that the Corporate Plan would be presented to Council at the end of June.

To highlight the impact of the process, the Service Director, Performance & Improvement provided examples of how some of the action plans had been amended in light of Members' comments and in particular drew attention to the changes made to the Medium Term Service Planning (MTSP) action plan which the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had responsibility to scrutinise. He also advised the Chairman of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee that as a result of the points put forward by the Working Group, the Service Director, Public Health and Protection had re-reviewed the target in relation to the indicator 'the number of private sector dwellings that had been vacant for more than 6 months at 1st April that were returned to occupation during the year through direct action of the local authority'. The outcome of this review was an increase in the target from 1% to 3%.

The Chairman of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee welcomed this news. He explained that whilst he accepted that there was less demand for housing in the Northern areas of the county borough compared to the South, it was a major issue for those having to live next door to properties left empty for several years or more.

The Service Director, Performance & Improvement suggested that a way forward might be to consider including the issue on the work programme of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee for further debate.

With regard to the MTSP action plan, a Member asked whether the Council was able to access any grant funding for 'green' energy.

The Service Director, Performance & Improvement reported that the specific work included within the priority plan for 2014/15 was not supported by grant

funding although he assured the committee that external funding opportunities are considered and explored for all such projects,

In conclusion, the Director of Legal & Democratic Services acknowledged that the timescales for this new process had been extremely tight but hoped that for next year there would be a more planned approach.

RESOLVED: to note the feedback from the scrutiny working groups and the amendments to the draft priority action plans.

6. WALES AUDIT OFFICE: SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT STUDY

The Committee was presented with the report of the Wales Audit Office (WAO), 'Good Scrutiny? Good Question!' which had been published on 29th May 2014. The Director of Legal & Democratic Services explained that the report was the culmination of the WAO's Improvement Study into scrutiny and reminded Members of the self assessment process and peer learning exchange visits which had taken place during 2012 -13.

The Director of Legal & Democratic Services explained that the report makes a number of recommendations aimed at improving the recognition, effectiveness and impact of scrutiny and drew Members' attention to recommendation 9 which refers to improving the way in which scrutiny engages with the public and stakeholders. He informed the Committee of the intention to utilise two of the scrutiny working groups established in relation the priority action plans, namely Streetcare and Managing People's Independence, in order to undertake a pilot project which would involve the use of citizen focus groups to feed into the working groups when they consider the Council's Delivery report in the autumn.

The Director explained that he would welcome the Committee's views on how to examine and take forward the issues raised in the report.

The Chairman reminded the Committee of the work which had been undertaken as part of the WAO study and also informed Members of the key message from an event which he had attended on 6th June, 'the Gwent Scrutiny Challenge' which had been used to launch the report, namely, that inspectors and regulators would be focussing much more on scrutiny to ensure that there was effective challenge.

The Committee discussed the key issues drawn from the report and raised concerns in relation to some areas of current practice. Upon conclusion the Chairman proposed that a working group be set up to consider the report and the issues raised in more detail.

RESOLVED:

- (i) to note the content of the report;

- (ii) that a working group be formed to consider and take forward the recommendations contained within the WAO report.

R K Turner
Chairman

The meeting closed at 5.55 pm.