

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale on Wednesday, 28th October, 2015 at 5.00 p.m.

PRESENT:

County Borough Councillor L.M.Adams – in the Chair

(Mrs.)J.Bonetto	P.Jarman	S.Rees-Owen
W.J.David	(Mrs.)S.Jones	G.Smith
(Mrs.)M.E.Davies	R.Lewis	P.Wasley
S.Evans	B.Morgan	R.Yeo
	(Mrs.)S.Pickering	

Non-Committee Members in Attendance:

County Borough Councillors G.Stacey and C.J.Willis

Officers in Attendance:

Mr.C.B.Jones – Service Director, Legal & Democratic Services
Mr.P.Griffiths – Service Director, Performance & Improvement
Ms.K.May – Head of Democratic Services

19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors A.S.Fox, S.Powderhill and M.J.Watts.

20. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, there were no personal declarations of interests made, pertaining to the agenda.

21. MINUTES

RESOLVED – to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 23rd September, 2015.

Minute 18(2) – The Committee was informed that the Service Director, Legal & Democratic Services and the Head of Democratic Services would be attending a Guidance Consultation event on Friday of this week (23rd October) in respect of the Draft Guidance for the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, 2015 and that the findings therefrom would be reported to the next meeting of this Committee.

22. **WELSH GOVERNMENT – CONSULTATION DOCUMENT – DRAFT DIRECTIONS TO THE LOCAL DEMOCRACY AND BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR WALES**

Following the meeting of Council held on the 30th September, 2015 (Minute No.47 refers), Members views were sought in respect of the above Welsh Government's consultation document.

Members had before them the Draft Directions and Consultation Questions together with the Councillor/elector ratio of lower than 1:4,000 which were based on the Minister's merger map that was published in June of this year i.e. the proposed merging authorities which if agreed would result in the reduction of 81 Councillors within Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf using the 1:4,000 ratio.

With the aid of PowerPoint slides the Service Director, Legal & Democratic Services and the Head of Democratic Services assisted Members in forming their views on the consultation document.

Following consideration of the consultation document, it was **RESOLVED** – that the following comments/views of Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be presented to the Council meeting on the 28th October, 2015:-

Directions – Local Government (Wales) Act, 2015

General Comments:-

(2) Interpretation

- To determine ward sizes taking account of poverty issues – Members felt that this was not appropriate.
- Members were of the view that the characteristics were too limited – age, gender and ethnic mix should also be included.

(5) General Directions

- Following an election Members may find that the “population” they have to represent is far larger than the perceived “electorate”.
- It was also hoped that the Boundary Commission would have more flexibility as previously they could not work outside of the “Directions”.

Yes/No Tick Boxes

Members did not wish to tick the yes or no boxes as they felt they were misleading but wished to give their comments, where felt appropriate, to each of the questions as shown below:-

Question 1 – Do you think the suggested ratio provides for effective and convenient local government?

- Some existing wards may already have the appropriate 1:4,000 ratio, but the direction appears to preclude them from continuing in their current form.
- Using a ratio could make it very difficult to take into account the individual character and culture of wards because of local features, topography etc.
- It is possible it could produce anomalies whereby wards with a bigger population will end up with a reduced population as a collateral consequence of what's happening in neighbouring wards.
- In order to reach the proposed ratio, urban and rural wards may find that their geographical areas to be very different i.e. rural wards will cover a much greater geographical area than urban ones.
- How does this reconcile with the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales determination that Members are compensated for three days work a week when the reality of "walking your ward" is likely to be very different in terms of demands on time, travel and characteristics of population e.g. student areas.
- Members are available 24/7 and many receive calls during the early hours of the morning when residents experience problems with flooding etc., and even take calls on Christmas day and other Bank Holiday periods.
- The demands on AMs/MPs time etc., are not so great as for the local Councillor.
- What about areas that have Community Councillors – no mention in the consultation document as to the ratio for Community Councillors and could/will result in Community Council areas not continuing in their current form.
- Diversity – for those individuals that work and/or have other commitments would find it very difficult to stand for election and this could have a big impact at the next elections whereby whilst there will be much fewer Councillors there could also be a great reduction in candidates.
- Members were also of the view that this was a "number crunching" exercise and no thought given to the comments raised above and throughout this response.
- Taking away yet more devolution from Local Government to Welsh Government.
- Many residents do not know who their AM or MP is but they know who the local Member is and very often AMs/MPs divert calls/cases to the local Member to act upon.
- Local Members contact details are also published on the Council's website thereby allowing residents to contact their member direct and not having to go via a Support Officer.

Question 2 – Do you think there is a minimum number of Councillors required to ensure the effective and democratic working of a local authority?

- The Directions do not specify a maximum or minimum number of elected members but they specify that the number of Councillors for a local authority should be no smaller than the number produced by a Councillor to elector ratio of one Councillor to every 4,000 electors.
- Should this not be left to the Boundary Commission to determine and for the Council to then be consulted upon.

Question 3 – Do you think a minimum number of elected members per local authority should be specified in the Draft Directions?

- Yes.
- Without a quoted minimum number, it's possible that the use of a ratio could produce anomalies on the ground. Rhondda Cynon Taf currently has 75 Members, under a much larger new merged authority incorporating Bridgend and Merthyr Tydfil – this total number would only rise by 6 Members thereby creating the possibility for many wards not to reflect the geographical and cultural boundaries which currently define them.
- Members considered that the number of Councillors is likely to affect the ability of any particular Council to discharge the heavy burden of functions and duties that now fall upon elected Members.

Question 4 – Do you think that there should be a cap on the maximum number of elected members per local authority?

- Please refer to the response as outlined in Q3 above.

Question 5 – Do you agree that each ward within a local authority area should have roughly the same number of electors per elected member?

- Possibly, but this ignores other crucial factors such as – density, population, topography, culture and poor health.

Question 6 – What effect should the particular characteristics of an area have on the number of councillors needed to represent the population?

- Members were of the view that their ability to be familiar with local characteristics is extremely important.
- New developments will influence ratios and thereby have the potential for artificially skewing local boundaries.
- Larger areas could make community engagement far more difficult.

Question 7 – Do you agree that commonly used Welsh language names for wards do not need an English language equivalent?

- Members agreed that the status quo should prevail.

- Members also raised concerns on cost issues (signage) and how new developments maybe affected.

Other Comments

Members did not agree with the aim of the Directions and also felt that the questions were misleading.

23. CABINET WORK PROGRAMME – PRE-SCRUTINY

Members had before them the Cabinet Work Programme (subject to approval by Cabinet) for the three month period November/December, 2015 and January, 2016 together with potential items to be considered at future meetings of the Cabinet.

Members were asked to ascertain if there were any topics that could undergo pre-scrutiny by this Committee or any of the four `themed' Scrutiny Committees and as part of this Members were requested to note that any suggested areas for pre-scrutiny would be subject to Cabinet agreeing the work programme at its meeting on 22nd October.

The Chair informed Members that whilst it was indicated at the last meeting of this Committee that the Leader would be invited to this meeting (Minute No.18(3) refers), he felt that this would be inappropriate whilst the Committee were discussing possible items for pre-scrutiny.

The Chair further stressed the importance of Members being mindful when selecting topics for pre-scrutiny that there be valid reasons and for it to be reasonable to expect the work of scrutiny committees would assist Cabinet when making their final decisions.

Following consideration of the proposed Cabinet Work Programme, it was **RESOLVED (based on Cabinet agreeing a work programme on 22nd October 2015):**

- The Leisure Services Strategy Review (potential item to be considered by Cabinet at a future meeting) – due to the cross cutting nature of the strategy that would impact on all age groups within the County Borough, for this to be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and
- The Leader's Draft Corporate Plan 2016-2019 (potential item to be considered by Cabinet at a future meeting) – to help inform the development of future work programmes in terms of priority areas for scrutiny, for the Leader's Draft Corporate Plan 2016-2019 to be scrutinised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

24. **THE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME –
MONITORING OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS
MADE BY EXTERNAL AUDITORS – WALES AUDIT OFFICE ANNUAL
IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2014-15**

The Committee were informed that at the Council Meeting to be held on the 28th October, 2015, Members would receive Mr. Colin Davies of the Wales Audit Office who would present the Annual Improvement Report 2014-15 for Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Members had before them the recommendations that were contained within the report of the Wales Audit Office and their consideration was sought on the recommendations that relate to this Council and following a discussion, it was **RESOLVED** -

1. That the recommendations of the Wales Audit Office in respect of `Good Scrutiny/Good Question!` are already subject to scrutiny within the Committee's Work Programme with an update on progress to be reported to the next meeting of this Committee;
2. That updates on the progress the Council is making to implement the recommendations of the Wales Audit Office in respect of `Young People not in Education, Employment or Training`; `Delivering with Less – the impact on Environmental Health Services and Citizens on Social Housing Tenants in Wales` be included within the Work Programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**L.M.ADAMS
CHAIRMAN**

The meeting closed at 6.15 p.m.