RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Overview & Scutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, on Wednesday, 16th July 2014 at 5 pm.

Present:
County Borough Councillor R K Turner – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors:
H Boggis
(Mrs) M E Davies
R W Smith
C Willis
S Bradwick
(Mrs) C Leyshon
G Stacey
(Mrs) J Cass
(Mrs) S Rees
G Thomas

Officers in Attendance:
Mr P J Lucas – Director of Legal & Democratic Services
Ms A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

7. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors G R Davies, P Griffiths, P Jarman and P Wasley.

8. 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.

9. MINUTES

RESOLVED: to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 9th June 2014.

REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

10. SCRUTINY DEVELOPMENTS

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services provided the Committee with an update in relation to a number of scrutiny developments.

The Director referred to the Wales Audit Office (WAO) report “Good Scrutiny? Good Question!”, which had been reported to Committee on the 9th June 2014. He informed Members that the first meeting of the scrutiny working group set up to consider the report’s findings and recommendations in detail had taken place earlier that day. He outlined the way in which the Working Group intended to undertake its task explaining that a number of key issues
had been drawn from the report and it was intended to consider each in more
detail on an individual basis. The first meeting of the Working Group had
focussed on committee pre-meetings. He further explained that the Working
Group had agreed to present any recommendations to the Overview and
Scrutiny Committee as and when each issue was concluded thereby avoiding
any delay in improvement action.

The Director explained that as a result of its first meeting, the Working Group
had formed a number of conclusions with regard to the operation of pre-
meetings and had agreed that the recommendations as set out below be
presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for ratification, namely:

- That pre-meetings be introduced to all scrutiny committees subject to
  their agreement;
- That the pre-meetings should not be open to the public;
- Pre-meetings should take place immediately before the committee
  meeting;
- Pre-meetings should be used to guide lines of enquiry and not to
  provide Members with prepared questions;
- Pre-meetings should be used to assist Committees in achieving
  outcomes;
- It was agreed that feedback on Committee meetings is a useful tool for
  improvement but rather than formal post committee meetings, feedback
  could be gathered electronically;
- That a protocol for Rhondda Cynon Taf be developed based on the
  Caerphilly Good Practice Guide;
- Officers providing PowerPoint presentations rather than reports should
  be asked to provide a summary of their presentation in advance of the
  meeting to enable Members to prepare;
- Officers to be encouraged to produce a summary of their report if
  particularly long and detailed;
- That the operation of pre-meetings be monitored throughout the year;
- That should the Overview & Scrutiny Committee be in agreement, that
  a report be presented to each of the service scrutiny committees in
  their September cycle informing them of the recommendations of the
  Working Group and proposing that they be introduced for all scrutiny
  committees during the October cycle.

The Director explained that a draft good practice guide would be prepared by
officers and presented to the next meeting of the Working Group.

The Committee discussed the proposals and Members were assured that
absence from a pre-meeting would not prevent a Member asking questions at
Committee. The operation of the pre-meetings would also be monitored
throughout the year.

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services drew Members’ attention to
section 4 of the report which referred to the Local Service Board Scrutiny
Working Group and advised on the need to appoint to the vacancy which has
occurred as a result of Councillor Geraint Hopkins, former vice chairman of the Committee being appointed to the Cabinet.

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services also informed Members of a project which would explore the use of performance information to support the accountability and scrutiny of public services by citizens and elected members. He explained that the Council had been approached by the Welsh Government to undertake this work with a view to developing a case study. To support Members in their public engagement role he reported that a development session had been arranged for 24th July 2014 which would be delivered by Participation Cymru.

Finally, the Director referred to the recently published White Paper “Reforming Local Government”, and pointed out that whilst media attention had been focussed on the content in relation to the merger of local authorities, the document is much broader with an emphasis on governance and scrutiny arrangements. He suggested that the relevant sections of the White Paper be circulated to Members for information.

RESOLVED:

(i) to note the information provided;

(ii) to endorse the recommendations of the Scrutiny Working Group “Good Scrutiny? Good Question!” as set out above in relation to the operation of committee pre-meetings;

(iii) that the vice chairman, County Borough Councillor R Smith be appointed to the LSB Scrutiny Working Group;

(iv) that Members be provided with a copy of the relevant section of the White Paper “Reforming Local Government” which relates to scrutiny.

11. WORK PROGRAMME

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services reported on the preparation of a work programme for the Committee. It was noted that the Committee was still awaiting a response from the Executive to its report on Welfare Reform. It was also pointed out that the work programme is a flexible document and would need to response to changing priorities.

Following consideration it was RESOLVED to agree the draft work programme as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

R K Turner
Chairman

The meeting closed at 5.55 pm.