

INTERIM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Minutes of the meeting of the Interim Scrutiny Committee held on
Wednesday, 16th June, 2010 at 5.00 pm in the Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT: Councillors V.A. Fletcher (Chairman), R.G. Chaplin, G.M. Green, T.J. Hope, L. Lomax, A.D. McClements, A.A. Meredith, C.P.R. Mollett, C.F. Smith, A.J. Stanton, H.J. Unwin, D.R.W. White (part) and H.J. Williams

ISC-4 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Interim Scrutiny Committee held on the 1st June 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

ISC-5 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

Councillor K.L. Tomlinson

ISC-6 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

None

ISC-7 DRAFT SCRUTINY HANDBOOK

The Scrutiny Manager advised that in order to provide a practical guide to Members, co-optees, officers and partner organisations, it was intended to publish a revised Scrutiny Handbook. Whilst the Handbook was based on the information which would appear in the Constitution, the views of the Committee were sought on specific issues of process.

The Scrutiny Manager pointed out that the handbook reflected the recommendations made at the last meeting regarding the new Scrutiny structure but that the Council Constitution Committee had not wholly supported the Committee's viewpoints and would be making slightly different recommendations to Council. Some of the members of the committee noted with disappointment the Council Constitution Committee's recommendations that there should be a maximum size of six, Members for all the priority themed Scrutiny Committees and that the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee should fall within the remit of Active Lifestyles, Leisure & Culture Scrutiny Committee. Some members felt that the Interim Scrutiny Committee should have autonomy in deciding the future of Scrutiny within the Authority and expressed frustration at the recommendations, seeking advice as to how some influence could be exerted on the final structure. The Head of Governance confirmed that both sets of recommendations would be available to Full Council to enable a full debate of the merits of the respective viewpoints to take place before a final decision was made on the structure.

Chairmen's Forum

The Members debated the merits of a suggestion that Scrutiny Chairmen should meet in private or be open for Scrutiny Assembly members to attend. The majority of Members considered that it was imperative for the open and transparent nature of Scrutiny to continue and fears were expressed that confidence in a balanced scrutiny environment would be lost and the Authority would be taking a backward step if Scrutiny Assembly members were excluded from observing the Chairmen's forum.

Scoring Matrix for Scrutiny Suggestions

Some members of the Committee considered that the criteria in the scoring matrix was overly subjective, with the majority of questions requiring a qualitative response. This led to concerns that if those assessments were made by officers the would have more influence on the work programme than Scrutiny Assembly members.

The Scrutiny Manager advised that it was not intended for Officers to influence the work programme but rather to assist in the management of the process of bringing as much relevant information to the Chairmen as possible. Councillor D R W White reminded the Committee Members that the Scrutiny process was subject to external inspection and that it was important to be able to demonstrate that criteria existed which supported the Members in deciding the work programme and which enabled them to justify the topics chosen. It was, therefore, suggested that the Interim Scrutiny Committee should accept the matrix with the provision that the Scrutiny Chairmen could modify its contents and extract relevant information to assist them in setting the work programme.

Allocation of meetings to Scrutiny Committees

The Committee considered that it was preferable to exercise a degree of flexibility in the number of meetings allocated to Scrutiny Committees.

Membership of In-depth Reviews

Members noted that reviews are not politically balanced and it may be that some issues were of a cross-cutting nature which would require greater input from two or more Committees. This could lead to issues of voting rights when co-optees were included in review memberships and the Committee would , therefore, need to consider this in their response.

The Committee considered that this proposal closely mirrored the existing scrutiny structure and felt that some discretion in the running of reviews should be retained by the Chairman.

Meetings for In-depth Reviews

The Committee agreed with the Scrutiny Manager's suggestion that it would be preferable for a regular schedule of meetings to be agreed at which the majority of Members were available.

Special Interest Meetings

The Committee supported a recommendation for a minimum number of 6 members to enable a Special Interest Meeting to take place subject to clarification that the meeting did not have to be politically balanced.

The Scrutiny Manager then set out plans to communicate the details of the new arrangements to all Members following their adoption at Full Council on 24 June 2010 and the subsequent arrangements for training. The Scrutiny Officer set out the proposed timetable for the next Scrutiny Assembly and the format it was likely to take following previous discussions by the Interim Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – that the following changes to the Scrutiny Handbook be made:

- (a) That the attendance of Scrutiny Assembly Members at Chairmen's Forum meetings be agreed
- (b) That the scoring matrix for scrutiny suggestions be agreed, subject to modification by the Chairmen
- (c) That flexibility be exercised in the allocation of meetings to Scrutiny Committees
- (d) That the membership of in-depth reviews should be subject to the discretion of the Chairman
- (e) That a regular schedule of meetings for in-depth reviews should be agreed at the scoping meeting and those meetings should go ahead when at least four members are available.
- (f) That a minimum of six members should be required for a Special Interest Meeting to take place.

(Councillor D R W White left the meeting at this point due to other arrangements).

ISC-8 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME ISSUES

Members noted the report of the Scrutiny Manager which set out the opportunities and risks associated with the Scrutiny of the Council's budget, performance and children in care.

ISC-9 MEMBERSHIP OF THE JOINT HEALTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee noted that Group Leaders had not met to discuss the make up of the Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The Scrutiny Manager advised that her understanding of advice from the Department of Health was that both Authorities would need to agree to waive political balance, and advised that since Shropshire Council had already opted to appoint its members reflecting political balance, this Authority would be required to appoint similarly.

RESOLVED – that Councillor R G Chaplin be appointed to the Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting ended at 6.55 pm

Chairman:

Date: