

SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on Friday, 27th March 2015 at 11.00am in Meeting Room 3, Darby House, Telford

PRESENT: Cllrs. D. White (Chair), K. Guy, A. McClements, C. Turley

APOLIGIES: Cllrs. V. Fletcher, C. Mollett, S. Reynolds.

IN ATTENDANCE: F. Bottrill, Scrutiny Group Specialist

SMB-16 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meetings of the Scrutiny Management Board held on the 14th November 2014 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

SMB-17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr. S Reynolds

SMB-18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

SMB-19 END OF YEAR REPORT ON SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2012-15

The Chair presented the end of year report and said that this had been a good year for Scrutiny and the report reflected the good work that had been carried out. He highlighted the work on the Scrutiny Review of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) which had held 2 public inquiry days.

Cllr. K. Guy added that this had been a good piece of work, but that this was the start of the process. He commented that it takes a lot of time to plan this work and required officer support.

The Chair said that another significant pieces of work had been scrutiny of Adult Care. This work had been recognised by Cabinet and had increased the

reserves for Adult Social Care. The work of the Joint HOSC on health services particularly the acute hospital services and the work on NHS Continuing Healthcare (CHC). The level of CHC funding had improved but this was something that Scrutiny will need to continue to monitor.

The Chair asked each of the Scrutiny Chairs to provide a review of the work of their Committee.

Cllr. A. McClements reported that much of the work of the Co-operative and Communities Scrutiny Committee had focussed on the impact of the welfare reforms. Some of this work had been carried out jointly with the Budget and Finance Scrutiny Committee. The report and recommendation on the impact of benefit sanctions was presented to Cabinet in March. This is an issue that will need to be scrutinised further. The review highlighted the need for close working between the Council and Job Centres to plan for the introduction of Universal Credit. Cllr. McClements said that she was pleased with the work of this Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair asked if Members from different political groups contributed to this work?

Cllr. A. McClements said that members from different political groups were involved. The policy on benefit sanctions is set nationally and the Government has made the cuts. The review highlighted concerns about vulnerable people and that people do need to use food banks. The Committee also contributed to the development of the Council's loan scheme which has been commissioned from Just Credit.

Cllr. K. Guy reported that the Children's and Young People's Scrutiny Committee held a meeting to monitor school results and this had identified the issue that new rules meant that schools are judged on the results that students at GCSE get when they first take the exam so re-sit makes are not included if they are at a higher grade. The Committee had also completed a review on Youth Unemployment. This review had been started under the previous Chairman Cllr. Mike Ion. The review found that youth unemployment is reducing and made recommendations about how the Council can work with partners, including developing a skills strategy. The Committee's review of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) has completed the first stage and will follow this up by talking to front line staff and some individuals who have come forward during the review. The review will also include the issue of licensing and taxis, many of which are licensed by Shropshire Licensing Authority. Several of the national reports on CSE in other areas have been critical of the lack of scrutiny if this issue.

The Chair said he recognised that this review had required a lot of officer support which had reduced the amount of work that other Committee were able to carry out.

Cllr. C. Turley reported that his Committee had received briefings on a number of issues and had held a meeting to consider the implications of the Transport Review for the bus subsidy policy.

The Chair reported that at a regional level the West Midlands Regional Scrutiny Network continued to raise the profile of Scrutiny. The Network has been successful at starting to develop links with Select Committees and wants to enable Select Committees to consider the evidence from relevant Local Government Scrutiny reports e.g. on welfare reform. The election of the Chair of the West Midlands Scrutiny Committee was postponed until after May. It was also likely that there will be a national review of Local Government Scrutiny, following the recommendation of the CLG Select Committee. It is important that this review looks at the successes of Scrutiny as well as the failures. He expressed the view that the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) had reduced its support for local government scrutiny. The CfPS had promoted the development of Local Public Accounts Committees which would scrutinise the public funding spent in a geographical area.

Cllr. A. McClements said that it would concern her if this would mean that Scrutiny became focussed just on finance.

The Chair said that the model for this proposals is the Public Accounts Select Committee and that this is focussed on funding. The Chair also informed the Board that as Chair of the West Midlands Regional Scrutiny Network he had sent a letter to all the Leaders of West Midlands Councils to raise their awareness of the importance of effective local government scrutiny. He highlighted the need for specialist scrutiny support.

Cllr. A McClements said that she was proud of the work that the Co-operative and Communities Scrutiny Committee had carried out on community centres. This was not focussed on finance but had made a real difference for local people.

The Chair said that the Scrutiny Review on Meals on Wheels focused on the views of service users and volunteers. The Committee agreed that the service needed to change but he was disappointed that when he reviewed the response to the recommendations after 9 months the cuts had been made, but the Good Neighbours Service has not been developed. This highlighted the need for the Council to be able to work with communities and respond more quickly.

Cllr. A McClements commented that as part of the review on Benefit Sanctions she had met with the Regional manager for DWP. The role of the Scrutiny Committees is to work formally and informally.

The Chair said that the Joint HOSC had continued to oversee the work of the local NHS, particularly the hospitals and the Future Fit Programme. He had also discussed the voluntary sector grants with the CCG.

The Chair also requested that the Board reflects on the Budget Scrutiny Process. He explained that he had met with the Group Leaders who had agreed to the process to scrutinise any alternative budgets so that they would have officer support and resources to develop alternative proposals and that these would be published at the same time.

The Scrutiny Group Specialist said that while this had been agreed by the Group Leaders, the Council's constitution set out that any alternative budget proposals could come to the Committee during the consultation period.

Cllr. K. Guy asked if it should be considered that the constitution could be changed?

The Committee agreed that this is something that the Management Board should consider after May.

The Scrutiny Group Specialist said that the end of year report showed that over the 3 years covered in the report the Scrutiny Committees had exceeded the total number of planned meetings. The report also showed that the work programme for each Committee varied over the years with some Committees holding more meetings than others. The Board recognised that in some cases the frequency of meetings was determined by the work of other organisations e.g. the role of the Joint HOSC in scrutinising the NHS. The Scrutiny Group Specialist brought to the attention of the Board that some issues on the work programme had not been completed or were ongoing pieces of work. The Board **RECOMMENDED** that the following issues should be included in the 2015/16 Scrutiny Work Programme:

- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Adult Care Budget and Savings
- Bus Subsidy Policy
- Housing Allocation Policy
- Scrutiny of Budget Proposals
- Welfare Reform
- Section 106 Annual Report
- Continuing Healthcare
- Scrutiny of LEP and LTB
- Mental Health services and consultation on Castle Lodge
- Transport Review and Bus Subsidy Policy

The Scrutiny Group Specialist also asked the Board to consider the Scrutiny Suggestion set out in Section 4.5 of the report. The Board considered that this was not a relevant issue for Scrutiny. The Board were informed that one submission had been made to the CfPS Annual Good Scrutiny Award on the joint work of the Health and Adult Care and Budget and Finance Scrutiny Committees on the Adult Care Budget and Savings. An external endorsement has been sought for the work of Scrutiny Management Board on access to affordable housing, if this was received by the deadline this work would also be submitted.

SMB-20 **SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD REPORT – ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

The Chair explained that this report had been presented to the March Cabinet

meeting. All the recommendations had been accepted, except Recommendation 9 which had been rejected as the letting agency fees are non-refundable and could not be covered by the Bond scheme.

SMB – 21 LGA CONSULTATION ON SECTOR LED IMPROVEMENT

The Scrutiny Group Specialist explained that the response to the consultation had been submitted to meet the LGA deadline. The purpose of submitting the response was to highlight the role of Scrutiny in service improvement.

SMB – 22 CHAIR’S UPDATES

Cllr. A. McClements said that the Co-operative and Communities Scrutiny Committee had received an update on the work the Committee had done on the Co-operative Commission. This found the Co-operative values had fed through to the staff in the organisation but there was inconsistency in the way team briefs operated in different teams. The Managing Director has continued his annual meetings with staff and this was well received. It was recognised that the restructures and cuts will continue, but that the Senior Management Team had tried to manage this as sensitively as possible. There have only been 55 compulsory redundancies.

The Chair added that the relationship between Scrutiny and the Cabinet has been excellent this year. One of the key issues that Scrutiny will need to continue to look at is to ensure that vulnerable people are safeguarded against the cuts. It is essential that people have the opportunity to be heard, the policy may not change but it must be a fair process.

Cllr. A. McClements said that the Council’s approach to income generation has meant that there will be additional money to support services. The growth agenda will help protect adult social care.

The Chair reported the recent discussion regarding Scrutiny of the Local Enterprise Partnership. It had been agreed that consideration should be given to joint scrutiny with the other local authorities.

The meeting ended at 12.04pm.

Chairman:

Date: