

SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on Thursday, 19th June 2008 at Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT: Councillors D.R.W. White (Chairman), R. Aveley, G.M. Green, J.A. Francis, M.B.Hosken, and H. Williams

ALSO PRESENT: Ken Clarke (Head of Audit & Democracy), Sarah Morris (Scrutiny Officer), Chris Corbett (Democratic Services Officer) and Deborah Moseley (Assistant Democratic Services Officer)

SMB-1 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on 30th January 2008 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

SMB-2 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

Councillors A.A. Mackenzie and K.L. Tomlinson.

SMB-3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

None.

SMB-4 REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CO-OPTED SCRUTINY MEMBERS

The Head of Audit and Democracy talked to the report that outlined the outcome of a recruitment campaign for new co-opted scrutiny members. At its meeting on 30 January 2008, the Scrutiny Management Board had agreed a Policy for Co-opting Scrutiny Members which stated that every Scrutiny Commission would seek standing co-opted members, the number of co-opted members not to exceed 50% of the number of elected members on the commission ie no more than 4 co-opted members. The Scrutiny Commission for Children & Young People would differ in that it would, in addition to 4 statutory co-opted members, seek a Headteacher representative, teacher representative and a young person from the Young People's Forum. Scrutiny sub-groups would seek up to 2 co-opted members. Following, a recruitment campaign six applications were received and all six applicants attended an informal discussion with the Scrutiny Management Board Chairman, the Scrutiny Commission for Children & Young People Chairman and the Head of Audit & Democracy.

The interview panel recommend that five of the applicants were appointed to the following Scrutiny Commissions/sub-groups:

Scrutiny Commission for Children & Young People	Dr S. Ali Mrs A. Cox
Scrutiny Commission for Environment & Regeneration	Mrs L. Baker-Oliver
Scrutiny Commission for Health & Care	Mrs A. Cox
Scrutiny Commission for Community & Resources	Mr M. Viney
Value for Money Scrutiny Monitoring Group	Mr R. Williams

The Young People’s Forum (YPF) had been invited to nominate a representative to sit on the Scrutiny Commission for Children & Young People but had requested that they be allowed two seats, nominating Miss P. Lill and Mr D. Greenwood. It was recommended that an additional YPF representative be appointed.

The above appointments to the Scrutiny Commission for Children and Young People would increase the number of co-opted members on the Commission beyond that currently stated in the Policy for Co-opted Scrutiny Members and, should the changes be agreed, the wording of the policy would need to be amended.

RESOLVED - that the appointment of new co-opted members as outlined above be agreed and the Policy for Co-Opted Scrutiny members be amended to reflect the changes to the Commission for Children and Young People

SMB-5 RESULTS OF THE SURVEY OF SCRUTINY MEMBERS

The Scrutiny Officer reported upon the feedback obtained from Members of the Scrutiny Commissions in the survey of scrutiny members. Overall, in comparison to the previous year, the results reflected a general improvement in how members perceive scrutiny, with most of the criterion scoring highly. Scrutiny’s engagement with the public and the scrutiny newsletter were the lowest scoring aspects and these were discussed by the Members.

Members considered that since the usefulness of the newsletter was questionable, there may be merit in ceasing its production. With regard to engaging Members in the scrutiny process, the Members present considered the attraction of shorter reviews in preference to in-depth reviews in an attempt to secure attendance. The Board noted from the Head of Audit and Democracy that setting a regular date for attendance, eg every Monday afternoon, had proved successful in completing the Biodiversity review in a short time.

Members discussed how best to improve engagement with the public and expressed disappointment at the lack of attendance of the press at meetings. The benefits of producing a briefing note to the media detailing the work undertaken by scrutiny in the past was considered but it was noted that the media were likely to be interested in “newsworthy” stories that would attract readers. Members noted the apparent success of recent radio coverage of SMB Minutes 190608

Shropshire County Council Scrutiny meetings concerning school mergers that allowed the public to take an active part in the meetings. It was noted that that approach had been pioneered locally by Telford and Wrekin in the form of the Question Time event, but Members queried if such a model was appropriate for all scrutiny meetings. Developing the point, the Board considered the possibility of holding meetings outside Civic Offices and whilst it was noted that such steps had not increased attendance at Full Council, it was considered that it may help to raise positive engagement at meetings of the Scrutiny Commission for Children and Young People. It was thought that media such as the Insight magazine and internet blogs would not be an effective use of resources.

The Board reflected on the public perception of scrutiny and felt that it may need a more 'user friendly' image, perhaps incorporating humour through the use of a cartoon image of a Detective which could be used in publications and on the Council's website.

RESOLVED – that further thoughts and feedback would be discussed at the planned Away Day.

SMB-6 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Board received an update on the status of the in-depth reviews being undertaken by each Commission.

SMB-7 CHAIRMAN/VICE CHAIRMAN APPRAISALS

The proformas for the appraisal of scrutiny chairman had been previously circulated to members. It was suggested that all Chairmen should take part in the appraisals, not including the Chairman of Scrutiny Commission 2: Environment and Regeneration due to his recent appointment to the role. Vice-Chairmen would not be subject to appraisal.

Should the Board be agreeable with the suggested way forward, questionnaires would be emailed out to Scrutiny members, Cabinet Members and Assistants, and Corporate Directors for return within two weeks so that appraisal sessions could take place from mid-July.

The Board were supportive of the suggested approach to appraisal and

RESOLVED – that questionnaires should be sent out as outlined with a view to holding appraisal sessions for the Chairmen of the Scrutiny Management Board and Scrutiny Commissions 1, 3 and 4 in the week beginning 14 July 2008.

SMB – 8 AWAY DAY

The Head of Audit and Democracy proposed that a half day session should be identified when the Board could meet to discuss the proposed new scrutiny structure and review the Scrutiny Management Board Action Plan. The Scrutiny Manager would approach Professor Steve Leach, of De Montfort University, Leicester to facilitate the session. It was hoped that consultation with all members, through Group meetings, would be completed over the next few weeks so that their views could be brought to the Away Day. A report on the findings and suggested way forward would then be presented to the Council's Constitution Committee on 29 September 2008 and to Full Council on 27 November 2008.

RESOLVED – that the Scrutiny Management Board Away Day should be arranged for a date after 12 August.

SMB-9 DATES OF MEETINGS 2008/09

Members noted that the next meeting of the Board would take place on 2 October 2008 with subsequent dates of 4 December 2008 and 9 March 2009

The meeting ended at 5.56pm.

Chairman:

Date: