

HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19 MARCH 2009

HEALTH SCRUTINY – TRANSITION TO ONE COUNCIL

Purpose

1. To inform the Committee of a number of issues relating to its work as a result of the transition to one council, during the election period and beyond.

Background

2. The Overview and Scrutiny (OS) functions of the County Council and 4 district councils came together at the beginning of 2008 in order to hold the Implementation Executive to public account for the actions and decisions it was taking during the transition to one council. This was delivered through the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition Board (JOSTB) on which all 5 councils were represented and which in turn established a number of task groups to review the amalgamation of the main frontline services that would form the cornerstone of the new council.
3. One important role for the Board was to propose suitable OS arrangements for the new council. It did this with the support of a consultant who was also an associate of the Centre for Public Scrutiny. Extensive consultation took place across the 5 councils on the proposals that were finally agreed on 27 February for recommendation to the new council in June.

Issues

4. Co-option - The new council comes into being on 1 April and sees the demise of the district councils at the same time. The Health Scrutiny Committee currently has 4 co-opted voting members from the district councils. Their appointments will automatically fall at that time. Both the IE through statute and JOSTB through local agreement will continue to operate during the pre-election (interregnum) period. This local agreement included provision for the ex-district council members to continue after 1 April as named co-opted voting members until the elections on 4 June. This was on the basis of providing expertise and continuity.

5. A question has been asked about the position of the following district council members on the Health Scrutiny Committee:

Mr B Mudge – West Wilts District Council
Mrs S Parker – North Wilts District Council
Mrs P Winchcombe – Kennet District Council
Mr M Hewitt – Salisbury District Council

It is open to the Committee to invite them to continue as individual named co-opted members until the elections as is the case on JOSTB if it so wishes. In reality this may only be for the one remaining meeting scheduled for 14 May.

6. On the subject of member allowances, the Independent Remuneration Panel recently considered allowances applicable during the pre-election period and made a number of recommendations to Council. These included the co-opted appointment of ex-district council members. In the case of the Health Scrutiny representatives if they were to be co-opted then the duty would attract an allowance of £70 per meeting. This was approved by Council on 26 February.
7. New Committee – The proposed new OS arrangements includes provision for 4 main OS committees, one of which is a Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee. This will combine the statutory requirement to have a health scrutiny committee with a dedicated forum for adult social care because of the increasing joint nature of the commissioning of services. It also provides the opportunity to widen its scope to include the Public Health agenda. The benefits this approach would provide have been sought for sometime and the creation of the new council enables this to now happen.
8. The main committees have the term “select” added to their title. This is intended to create enhanced transparency and accountability between the executive decision-makers and those undertaking scrutiny of them. It will take its lead from the parliamentary system of select committees but applied with a lighter touch.
9. Local Challenge – The creation of the area boards was an important element of the bid for one council. It was intended to show that a large unitary council could remain close to its citizens by bringing governance and influence at a community level. These area boards also have the support of the other major public services including Health. It is therefore likely that local service provision will be debated and challenged at the area boards in the first instance. This will also include the initial consideration of the new power of Councillor Call for Action recently enacted by Government. Only should resolution not be achieved or it represents a cross-boundary, budget or policy issue then the matter may require consideration by a main OS committee. Although the principle is established, the operational interface between

local challenge of service and the statutory function of OS is under continuing discussion with appropriate guidance to follow. The outcome hopefully will mean that the new Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee will be able to more effectively focus on strategic, policy and significant variations across the three main areas of responsibility.

10. Joint Committees - It is known that in the near future, there may be a requirement for Joint Committees to be formed with other local authorities to consider changes to Health Services that have cross-boundary implications, as was the case with Great Western Ambulance Service. There are two clinical networks at present working with Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees in the South West.

- South West Health Scrutiny Network - Commissioning of Specialised Health Services
- Avon, Somerset and Wiltshire Cancer Services Network.

It is possible that more than one Joint committee will be in existence at the same time and therefore appropriate arrangements will need to be approved in the future.

Matters for Decision

11. To decide whether to seek the co-option of the ex-district council members during the pre-election period, (with the allowances already determined).
12. To note the proposal to create a new Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Select Committee in the new council.
13. To note the role of local challenge by the area boards and the potential implications and benefits for the work of health scrutiny
14. To note the potential requirement for members to form Joint Committees with other Local Authorities and that appropriate arrangements will need to be approved in the future.

IAN GIBBONS
SERVICE DIRECTOR, LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Report author: Paul Kelly, WCC Scrutiny Manager