

Title	Towards One Council - Member engagement and involvement in the Transition to One Council
Audience	Implementation Executive
Date	16th January 2008
Owner	Tim Gregory – Programme Director
Author/s	Tim Gregory/John Quinton

Purpose

1. To identify the arrangements for members' involvement and engagement in the transition process to establish the new council.

Current position

2. *The Wiltshire (Structural Change) Order 2008* is now before parliament awaiting approval. Its content contains significant provision relating to councillors and their ability to control and influence the transitional process.
3. The **Implementation Executive** required to be formed by Article 6 has full delegated authority to organise and implement the transition arrangements. There will be 17 councillors who will form this principal decision making body (9 county councillors and 2 councillors from each of the district councils).
4. The **Joint Transition Scrutiny Board** (envisaged by Article 8(6)) has already been agreed and established to review and scrutinise decisions taken or contemplated by the Implementation Executive. This is an effective mechanism for ensuring that councillors wishing to involve themselves in the process have the opportunity to do so. This Board has 9 Members representing all 5 councils and the main political groups, meeting on a monthly basis. It will conduct the majority of its work through member task groups, established from interested members, from across the authorities, for specific purposes. These will be established primarily to help develop, as well as to scrutinise, options and proposals for the development of front line, governance, customer access and support services at individual workstream and project level within the one council programme.

A comment from West Wiltshire District has indicated that they would wish a review of the composition of the Joint Transition Scrutiny Board to increase the numbers on the group. This is clearly a topic for the Joint Transition Scrutiny Board to consider. They have also suggested a change of name to Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board.

5. This method of operating – an empowered executive with a strong overview and scrutiny function – mirrors the current management arrangements within each of the five councils (with the exception that Kennet operates a committee system for decision making).
6. In addition to the arrangements above, the relevant officers leading the workstreams are to ensure that the appropriate portfolio holders and committee chairs from the districts and the county are consulted and involved as options are developed, to test their viability and desirability.
7. As indicated above, non-executive councillors will also have the opportunity, in areas that interest them, to work within the scrutiny process and become members of the relevant task groups that will be established.

8. On areas of particular interest members seminars will be arranged, to discuss issues and options for service change and transformation. The first of these is to be held on 21 January at Devizes Corn Exchange on Community area engagement. Subsequent seminars, to be arranged from February onwards, will cover, amongst other topics: planning policy and development control; Wiltshire Council vision and values; customer access strategy; Wiltshire Council corporate plan and MTFS for 2009 onwards; elections and boundary commission work.
9. Finally all meetings of the Implementation Executive will be open to any member of any of the 5 councils to attend and speak on issues before it.

Reference Groups

10. The Community Leadership and Governance workstream board has established a reference group to act as a critical friend to the work of the Board. This external reference group, chaired by the WCC portfolio holder consists of stakeholders (including councillors from each district) from across the spectrum of local bodies such as police, health and voluntary groups.
11. Other workstream boards may identify a similar requirement, particularly to deal with complex service areas where a range of options and opportunities may exist. The groups could involve portfolio holders and other key stakeholders and would act as a sounding board to assess options and guide officers. Caution needs to be exercised in the creation of such groups, as there would be a risk of overlap with scrutiny task groups. These groups would need to be supported through the workstream process, rather than through democratic services.
12. West Wiltshire District has raised concerns regarding the establishment of 'Reference Groups' in that they may be seen to overlap, or possibly supplant the role of scrutiny. Of particular concern would be the potential duplication of effort associated with the establishment of a joint scrutiny task group, which could be working alongside and developing similar issues as a reference group, such as that established for Community Leadership and Governance.
13. To address these concerns further work will be conducted with the Joint Transition Scrutiny Board and with the workstream boards to define the potential scrutiny task group areas and the delineation and definition of any possible reference group that might be considered necessary.

Updates

14. Keeping the wider membership of the 5 councils up to date on the progress of the transition plan is absolutely essential. Regular fortnightly member newsletters are being generated in addition to the other internal communications that is available to all on the intranet. Within the overall communications plan, there will also be arrangements for regular seminars on specific topics and for more general discussion and officers from within the programme and workstream office will be available to brief members.

Recommendations

15. The Implementation Executive is recommended
 - To accept this report as the basis for ensuring that the wider membership of all 5 councils can be involved and engaged in the process

- To require the Joint Implementation Team to ensure a regular update of progress is provided for all councillors and a programme of seminars is arranged.