

**JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TRANSITION BOARD
29 AUGUST 2008**

Waste Task Group

Interim Report

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To update the JOSTB on the work of its Waste Task Group.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

2. In respect of the municipal waste collection and recycling services provided in Wiltshire:

- a) To identify current service provision, standards and performance;
- b) To identify desired service provision, standards and performance for the new Wiltshire Council;
- c) To identify any anticipated issues or problems associated with the transition to the new Wiltshire Council;
- d) To identify and recommend to the Implementation Executive preferred service delivery arrangements for the new Wiltshire Council.

MEETINGS

3. The following members and officers were present at the Task Group's meetings:

May 12 – Alan Hill (Chairman) NWDC, Dennis Brown SDC, Graham Hedley WWDC, Jonathon Seed KDC, Tracy Carter (Assistant Director Operations WCC), Mark Smith (Director KDC), Ceri Williams (Scrutiny Support Officer)

June 10 – Alan Hill (Chairman) NWDC, Dennis Brown SDC, Graham Hedley WWDC, Jonathon Seed KDC, Tony Deane WCC, Tracy Carter (Assistant Director Operations WCC), Ceri Williams (Scrutiny Officer)

July 28 – Alan Hill (Chairman) NWDC, Dennis Brown SDC, Graham Hedley WWDC, Paula Winchcombe (substitute for Jonathon Seed) KDC, Tony Deane WCC, Mark Smith (Director Amenities and Leisure), Adrian Hampton (Head of Operations KDC), Ceri Williams (Scrutiny Officer)

August 26 – to follow

EVIDENCE

4. The key goals of the Transitional Waste Board are:

- a) Remove inefficiencies in the two tier structure;
- b) Increase capacity to cope with change;
- c) Increase public trust in municipal waste management.

5. The Board created five groups to realise these goals, each with a Project Initiation Document, with the overarching PID to be completed in early April. The fact that the five councils already had an effective joint working relationship through the Wiltshire Waste Partnership had provided the programme with a head-start. Members were told that the project was being delivered effectively within existing resources and there were no plans at this stage to draft in additional staff. These PIDs are still ongoing.

6. In its first interim report dated 25 April 2008, the Waste Task Group stated that it was satisfied that milestones have been set for the short term, reflecting progress towards transition. The Board asked that we try to find evidence that sufficient action is being taken to ensure a seamless transition of the service without any deterioration in standards; regrettably, we have been unable to discover such evidence.

7. By June 2008 the Transitional Waste Board was expected to identify waste related expenditure by the five authorities to feed into the budget setting process for 2009-10. This process is not yet complete; we understand that is expected by the end of September.

8. Harmonisation of the service has been scheduled for April 2011, with the new Council determining its waste service for the county. The Task Group feels that this is unrealistic; if planning is not started until after Wiltshire Council comes into being, it is thought that at least two years will be required for the necessary planning process and a further year for implementation of the new service. The whole process is complicated further by the fact that West Wilts domestic waste service is completely provided by an independent contractor (FOCSA) who have a contract until 2014.

9. The Task Group anticipates that the public would expect service provision across the county to be equalised as soon as possible after Vesting Day, with the public being dissatisfied with parts of the county receiving a weekly service and other parts receiving an alternate weekly service of one form or another. It was felt that these arrangements would generate complaints as people would be paying the same council tax bills but receiving different levels of service. The Task Group feels that the public might be content with Wiltshire Council stating that it takes time to implement the changes for a short period of time after Vesting Day, but questions will then be asked and the fact that no forward planning had been done due to lack of officer resources is not likely to be well-received by the public.

10. Whilst Members understand that the decision regarding service provision will be for the Wiltshire Council to make, the Task Group feels that work should start now so that a report has been prepared for the new portfolio holder immediately after Vesting Day so that she/he has an analysis of current levels of service provision, options

regarding changes to the level of service in accordance with best practise, costing and recommendations.

11. Members have also expressed concerns regarding operatives being paid a different rate for doing the same job in different districts. No doubt that will apply to the various layers of management too. Again, the comment relating to forward planning not having been done due to lack of officer resources will not be well-received. The Task Group feels that staff would want equality of remuneration to be introduced quickly, and with potential union support, industrial action should not be ruled out.

12. Members raised questions about the savings for the service, questioning if the £240k they had been told previously was still relevant. The recently appointed Director for Amenities and Leisure told the Task Group he would be working towards a cash-freeze budget, which was extremely challenging when considering pressures such as rising fuel costs.

13. The Task Group had been advised previously that there would be savings during the first years of the WC, although these would be modest until transformation was well advanced. It had been suggested that savings would be about £240k the first year, £340k the second year and £2.95 million for the third year. Members expressed their disappointment at being told that even these comparatively modest savings would not be achieved. Members voiced their concern that the concept of Unitary was 'sold' to the public on the grounds of savings and it seemed that this new information contradicted this message. A considerable amount of information in the foyer area at County Hall informs the public that savings of £15million per annum are available through Unitary; it will not be long before the public starts asking where those savings are.

14. The key risks identified were:

- 1) Public expectations are higher than can be afforded;
- 2) Savings are not achievable with the planned levels of service;
- 3) Possible industrial action by employees due to pay differentials and working arrangements not being addressed;
- 4) Reduction in performance during transition;
- 5) Resources not being allocated to plan for transformation in order to meet customer expectations of the new council.

CONCLUSION

15. The working relationships developed through the Wiltshire Waste Partnership has provided the Transitional Waste Board with a strong platform to deliver transition and transformation of its service.

16. PIDs are still being developed and are now overdue. There is recognition of the risks and it appears that attempts are being made to manage those risks.

17. The Task Group has been advised that the project is adequately resourced, although evidence of that has still not been provided.

18. At the end of the meeting on 28 July, Mark Smith, recently appointed Director of Amenities and Leisure, expressed his lack of understanding as to the role of this Task Group. The Task Group agrees with him. The Task Group has been unable to gather the evidence on the adequacy of the transition plans, and especially on funding. Although the original stance was that savings were possible in the transformation phase; now it seems that even the comparatively modest savings originally predicted will not be forthcoming. The Members of the Task Group have expressed their concerns on several occasions regarding the lack of planning for transformation to no avail. The Task Group therefore feels they are unable to comply with either items (b) or (d) of their Terms of Reference.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the JOSTB:

(a) endorses this interim report of the Waste Task Group;

(b) redefines the role of this Task Group and provides new Terms of Reference if the Board considers that the continuing services of the Task Group would be beneficial.

AUTHOR: Alan Hill, Chairman of the Waste Task Group