



JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TRANSITION BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting Held at NWDC Offices – 21 November 2008

In Attendance

Members
Cllr Anthony Molland WCC – in the Chair
Cllr Jeff Osborn WCC
Cllr Ian West WCC
Cllr Chris Humphries WCC
Cllr Margaret Taylor WCC
Cllr Christine Reid NWDC
Cllr Jonathon Seed KDC
Cllr Mike Hewitt SDC
Cllr Keith Humphries WWDC

Also in attendance:

Cllr Ross Henning WCC

Cllr Janet Giles KDC

Cllr John Thomson WCC

Laurie Bell, Service Director, Policy, Research & Communications

Mark Smith, Service Director, Amenities & Leisure

Robin Townsend, Project Manager, Community Initiatives (SDC)

Support Officers Scrutiny:

Paul Kelly, Ceri Williams, Janine Gassmann WCC

Paul Mountford WWDC

1. Apologies and Membership

Margaret Taylor WCC substituted for Ricky Rogers WCC.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 31 October 2008

The minutes for the meeting of 31 October were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

3. Managing the Transition to 1 April – Appointments to the New Council

The Service Director, Policy, Research & Communications introduced the report and highlighted that service directors were already currently balancing new structures and budgets while maintaining existing service delivery levels, which had remained equal or improved in some areas over the same period last year.

The Director also reported that on 22 December a new external communications campaign would be launched to mark the 100 days countdown to 1 April. The campaign would address areas of uncertainty which had previously been identified at the One Council road shows.

Members noted that the Corporate Risk Manager WCC was currently developing risk registers for each of the key front-line service (FLS) areas in conjunction with Service Directors. Members were particularly concerned about the FLS areas in the districts.

Resolved

- (1) To note that the Board's task groups and the members scrutinising the Critical Path and Day One Plan documents would be considering the risks as part of their work.**
- (2) To receive a report on the communications campaign at the next meeting of the JOSTB.**

4. Transformational Priorities

The report by the Service Director, Policy, Research and Communications had been circulated electronically to members prior to the meeting and was also tabled. The Director reported that she was currently developing the Corporate Plan for 2009-10 which would contain transformational priorities.

Members expressed their disappointment with the report as they originally requested specific information on transformational priorities at the Board meeting on 26 September. In particular, this was crucial for the work of the Waste Task Group which would only continue its work once more information on the transformation and the budget was available.

The Service Director, Policy, Research and Communications reported that the ELT would meet in the following week to consider transformational priorities tied in with the budgets in greater detail. She also reported that although the Corporate Plan 2009-10 would contain transformational priorities, the new council would set its longer-term priorities.

In connection with this, members commented that the aspiration of improving services from Day One should clearly be addressed in the Corporate Plan to reflect customers' expectations.

John Thomson, Deputy Leader WCC, stressed that the development of services and subsequent identification of priorities was a time-consuming process as information might not be easily accessible and was being collated from five authorities as well as partners, and teams were being created under new management.

Resolved

- (1) To note the report on the Corporate Plan 2009-10;**
- (2) To request an update report on transformational priorities to the next meeting of the JOSTB.**

5. Leisure Services

The report of the Service Director, Amenities & Leisure had been circulated electronically to members prior to the meeting and was also tabled. The Project Manager, Community Initiatives (SDC) introduced the report and highlighted that work focussed on the seamless transition of services. A review of the current mixed contractual arrangements would provide the opportunity to transform the service in the new authority.

Members emphasised that the high quality of services as well as the co-operation with partners should be the driving forces in the amalgamation of services and expressed confidence in the Director to achieve this. Members also recognised that leisure services were discretionary and therefore pressure on service provision might be unavoidable, especially in the light of the current economic climate.

Energy consumption was identified as a key cost and members enquired about utilising the current OGCS contract including specifying renewable energy. This had been taken into consideration as a long-term investment and was subject to the finance plans of the new authority.

Members also commented on the shortfall in recreation land particularly in West Wiltshire and highlighted the need to work closely with planning policy in the new authority.

Resolved

(1) To note the report.

(2) To request a further report on the wider scope of leisure including the issues raised above to a future meeting of the Board.

6. Task Groups

(1) Development Control

Paul Mountford, support officer from WWDC, reported that on 13 November the IE had considered two reports on the future Development Control service and member representation on planning committees both in the interregnum period and after the elections in June 2009. As part of this the IE agreed the Scheme of Delegations.

Members commented on the importance of communicating information on the new service to town and parish councils shortly and on the need to widely publicise information on planning applications in the future as only County Councillors during the interim and unitary councillors in the future would be able to call applications in.

Resolved – To note the update.

(2) Waste

The Task Group's current position remained as previously reported and would be subject to the outcome of resolution 4 (2).

Resolved – To note the position.

(3) Area Boards

Mike Hewitt, Chairman of the Task Group, introduced the second interim report and highlighted a number of challenges in relation to the draft hand book (formerly rule book) and the need for consistent communications. He also reported that the Boundary Committee's Final Recommendations had been published.

Members subsequently commented on the following issues:

- Funding: Funding through alternative channels such as section 106 developer distributions were being considered. The Scrutiny Support Officer WCC reported that the Service Director, Development was scheduled to attend the Task Group's next meeting on 28 November to discuss this issue. The Vice Chairman of the Board reported that the anticipated budget allocation for individual boards had caused negative reactions in his area.
- Voting Rights: Members commented on the level of influence town and parish councils could exercise if not possessing voting rights.
- Resources: An adequate level of support would have to be ensured for areas not included in the pilot scheme but which had been active as community areas.
- Communications: The information on area boards which had been communicated externally set very high expectations.

In his response to the issues raised, John Thomson, the IE lead member for Community Leadership & Support, highlighted that the development phase of the area boards provided all members and partners with a chance to assess various approaches which worked in the respective areas. In particular, he made the following comments:

- Hand Book: The consultation draft had been considered by members and partners and contained guidance as well as a constitutional part. A smaller hand book would provide guidance for everyday use. The hand book was now being rewritten to allow more flexibility.
- Funding: Area boards would be funded by streams made available by Wiltshire Council and additional funds through the Community Area Partnerships (CAPs). A report on the latter was scheduled to be considered by the IE on 10 December. Some control over support levels and coordination should be ensured. The new authority could look at the funding model in more detail.
- Voting rights: Only unitary councillors would possess voting rights as they are ultimately accountable. The Chairman of an area board could take a preliminary vote among the attendants before a decision was made if appropriate in certain circumstances.
- Resources: Work was currently being undertaken to provide additional resources where needed.

Resolved – To note the interim report and response of the IE lead member.

(4) Customer Access

The update on the Task Group's activity was reported.

Resolved – To note the update.

(5) Housing

Janet Giles, Chairman of the Task Group, updated the Board on the Task Group's current position. She highlighted concerns over staffing levels and that there were small capital reserves in the districts for affordable housing.

Resolved – To note the update.

(6) Change Management (Incl. ICT Transition) – WCC

Keith Humphries reported that the contract for IT support was currently being revised and additional challenges in the budget were being identified as requirements from services became known. Work on the WAN link between Devizes and Salisbury was due to start in January.

Resolved – To note the update.

7. Electoral Services and Members' Support – Rapid Scrutiny Exercise

Jonathon Seed, member who led the Rapid Scrutiny Exercise group, reported that the meeting had taken place immediately prior to this Board meeting. A report would now be produced for endorsement at the next Board meeting although he was able to confirm that, in general, the group was confident that sufficient officer capacity was in place to deliver the elections in 2009 and members' support.

A team structure for the elections team was yet to be agreed and would be available by the end of December. Members were concerned about the potential loss of staff at senior level. The unitary divisions would not be implemented until early in the new year so the team were currently working on the basis of the Boundary Committee's Final Recommendations.

A revised structure for the Democratic Services unit had been issued which would provide flexibility within the structure. With regard to the area support, members commented that sufficient officer support would have to be ensured to administer potentially 8-12 meetings per year per area board.

Members were also concerned by the proposal to channel members' contact with the new authority through the customer care unit.

Follow-up was being made by the Scrutiny Support Officer WCC in respect of a number of issues identified by members resulting from the exercise.

Resolved – To note the oral report made at the meeting and that a written report on the outcome of the Rapid Scrutiny Exercise would be circulated for endorsement at the next meeting of the JOSTB.

8. Co-ordination and Development of Joint Transitional O&S Activities

The Scrutiny Manager WCC introduced his report and highlighted that future scrutiny topics would be examined on a case by case basis and each of the five authorities in Wiltshire would contribute on individual areas as their resources allowed.

Members noted that the scrutiny of the Critical Path and Day One Plan documents had not commenced yet. However, the Scrutiny Support Officer WCC drew potential areas of interest to the Board's attention, including IT, Customer Focus, Housing and the Corporate Plan which were marked amber or red. It was suggested that this be fed back to the individual task groups.

The Service Director, Policy, Research & Communications confirmed that she would be leading on responding to the scrutiny of the Critical Path and Day One Plan documents from now.

Resolved

(1) To note the position.

(2) To advise the task groups of the areas of risk in the Critical Path and Day One Plan documents as appropriate, and to receive a report on the scrutiny of these documents at the next meeting.

9. O&S Arrangements in the Interregnum Period

A report by the Head of Legal & Democratic Services WCC, as requested at the last meeting, was circulated.

Members expressed their support for the third option as outlined in paragraphs 10 and 12 of the report which provided for realigning the JOSTB under the WCC O&S Management Committee as currently constituted.

Resolved – To realigning the JOSTB as currently constituted under the WCC O&S Management Committee during the interregnum period.

10. O&S Arrangements in the New Council – Update

The JOSTB noted the update on the work of the consultant and officers within the five authorities to redesign the scrutiny function and support service in the new authority.

Resolved – To note the update.

11. Towards One Council – Progress Report

Board members received the most recent Progress Report.

Resolved – To note the Progress Report.

12. Financial Update

The Chairman of the JOSTB reported that at the last meeting of the WCC Budget Scrutiny Task Group, he had raised with the Chief Financial Officer and the Corporate Director, Resources that more substantial reports including figures were needed to effectively scrutinise the budget setting process.

Members noted that a report on benefit realisation was scheduled on the Board's work plan for 19 December.

Resolved – To note the position.

13. Implementation Executive Minutes

The minutes of the IE meeting on 29 October 2008 were circulated, and the minutes of the IE meeting on 13 November tabled.

Resolved – To receive the minutes of the IE meetings on 29 October and 13 November.

14. Outline Work Programmes

The Board received its outline work programme and the future work programme of the IE.

Keith Humphries reported that WWDC Scrutiny Committee had considered a report on Migrant Workers and Houses in Multiple Occupation in September 2008. After considering the same report, WWDC Cabinet recommended in November that the JOSTB consider the report and identify where and how the work around migrant workers should be taken forward and that this future work should address the key issues, recommendations and list of future tasks identified within the report.

The Chairman advised that this would be best taken forward by sending this direct to the appropriate IE lead members and the Corporate Director seeking information on how this will be incorporated and taken forward within the new Council.

Resolved

(1) To approve the outline work programme for the Board.

(2) To note the IE Work Programme.

15. Next ordinary meeting – 19 December at Kennet District Council Offices

(Duration of Meeting: 10.30am – 12.55pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Janine Gassmann, Democratic & Members' Services, Wiltshire County Council. Direct line: (01225) 713597.