

**JOINT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY TRANSITION BOARD (JOSTB)  
19 DECEMBER 2008**

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**ELECTORAL SERVICES & MEMBERS' SUPPORT –**

**RAPID SCRUTINY EXERCISE (21 NOVEMBER 2008)**

Purpose and Background

1. At the JOSTB meeting on 31 October, members agreed to undertake a rapid scrutiny exercise on proposals for the Democratic Services and Election teams. It was felt that this exercise would be beneficial to address specific issues and gain the necessary assurances with regard to capacity issues within the Democratic Services and Elections teams, in particular the ability to deliver the June 2009 unitary elections and general support for members.
2. JOSTB appointed Jonathon Seed, Mike Hewitt, Keith Humphries, Chris Humphries and Christine Reid to undertake the rapid scrutiny exercise. On 21 November, the members met with Mark Baker and Allison Bucknell, two of the three IE lead members for Human Resources/Democratic & Legal Services, who were supported by the Heads of Elections and Democratic Services WCC. A summary of the concluding views of the rapid scrutiny exercise is set out below. The outcome of the exercise will be reported to the 19 December meeting of JOSTB.

Summary of Concluding Views

**Electoral Services**

3. Members were assured that the Elections Team had the personnel to deliver the elections in June 2009, although their staff structure was not yet defined. This would be completed by the end of 2008.
4. Loss of senior level staff presented the key risk in the run up to June.
5. The register of electors in part had been based on assumption, as the Boundary Review would not be completed until February 2009.
6. Election nominations would not have to be taken to Chippenham in all cases. Options were being explored for additional locations.

**Members' Support**

7. The Senior Scrutiny Officer role would focus on research and policy development. A dedicated Democratic Services Officer would provide scrutiny committee support.

8. Benchmarking had not been used when designing the Scrutiny Team. The Derek Bishop consultancy report on scrutiny arrangements for the new council was expected to show consideration to scrutiny team structures nationally.
9. Development of the Constitution particularly in relation to Scrutiny was discussed and highlighted as an area that JOSTB may wish involvement.
10. Democratic Services would be organised into three teams. These would not work in silos and would be underpinned by a staff ethos of flexibility. Concerns were raised that staff levels would be unable to support 98 members and that the three Cabinet PAs could report directly into the Head of Democratic Services.
11. Members feared that the level of democratic support for Area Boards was insufficient when recognising that officers would undertake casework and follow up work in addition to clerking meetings. However it was acknowledged that it was difficult to precisely gauge how busy the Boards would be at this stage.
12. The Customer Care Unit would potentially be used as first point of call for member queries, although this arrangement would not be prescriptive.

### Recommendations

13.
  - a) To provide the JOSTB Rapid Scrutiny Group with a copy of the Electoral Services Team Structure once drafted.
  - b) To request JOSTB to consider scrutinising the development of the Constitution, especially those areas relevant to Overview & Scrutiny.
  - c) To request the JOSTB Customer Access Task Group to review proposals for handling member enquiries within the new council.
  - d) To request that the scrutiny arrangements developed from the Derek Bishop consultancy report pay consideration to benchmarking.
  - e) To request that the Service Director, Legal & Democratic Services revisits the structure for Democratic Services in the light of the Area Boards meeting circa 170 times per annum, 98 members requiring support and the suggestion from Cabinet that the Cabinet PAs could report directly to the Head of Democratic Service.

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