AGENDA ITEM NO. 2

JOINT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY TRANSITION BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting Held at KDC Offices – 23 January 2009

In Attendance

Members
Cllr Anthony Molland WCC – in the Chair
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 Mollie Groom WCC
Cllr Ray Parsons KDC

Bridget Downton, Performance Specialist, Audit Commission
Laurie Bell, Service Director, Policy, Research & Communications

Support Officers Scrutiny:
Paul Kelly, Ceri Williams, Janine Gassmann WCC
Marie Lindsay WWDC
Marie Todd NWDC
Karen Scott KDC

1. Apologies and Membership

Apologies were received from Jeff Osborn WCC.

Margaret Taylor WCC substituted for Ricky Rogers WCC.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 19 December 2008

The minutes for the meeting of 19 December 2008 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

3. Chairman's Announcements

a) Budget 2009-10

The Chairman reported that all JOSTB members had received their booklet of reports on the budget 2009-10 and that the IE would consider the budget proposals on 28

January and 11 February, before the budget would be determined at County Council on 24 February. The JOSTB would be hosting a special meeting on 17 February for all non-executive members of the five authorities to consider the IE's budget recommendations.

b) Rapid Scrutiny of Electoral Service and Members' Support

Following the report at the last meeting, the Chairman announced that a second meeting with the Service Director, Legal & Democratic Services would be held on Monday 26 January in order to clarify a number of matters. Jonathon Seed would be leading on this again.

c) Overview & Scrutiny during the Pre-Election Period

The Chairman also reported that the County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee at its meeting on 15 January approved the Board's recommendation for it to be realigned under the Management Committee with the same membership including co-opting the current district members for the pre-election period. Dates scheduled so far were 20 April and 11 May.

4. Audit Commission Joint Direction of Travel Assessment

The Performance Specialist from the Audit Commission, who functioned as the local performance lead for Wiltshire, introduced the report and highlighted that this report was the result of field work and collaboration with the housing inspection service. It was a combined assessment of evidence against the LAA targets and progress and improvements achieved to date by the district councils, using data from 2007-08. This report would not be scored against the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), while the report on the County Council, due to be published on 26 February, would be.

The Audit Commission had identified strong transitional arrangements within Wiltshire's district councils compared to councils undergoing similar changes elsewhere. Members expressed their satisfaction that the district councils had been keeping up their levels of service provision.

Members pointed out that there was room for improvement in some service areas across the districts, such as targets to reduce the use of temporary accommodation within the housing services. The Performance Specialist stressed that services like housing were a complex area and further work on this service might be required in the future but that this was for the new Council to determine. Members also noted that with regard to the Salisbury Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan, the Audit Manager had expressed the view that the potential shortfall in resources would have to be bridged, which was again for the new authority to consider.

The Chairman drew members' attention to the key challenges addressed by the Chief Executive in the covering report to the IE, i.e. private sector housing and planning performance. The Chairman indicated that the IE had noted the report but the findings would inform remaining actions during the transition

Resolved

To note the report and areas of key challenges, and to thank Bridget Downton form the Audit Commission for attending the meeting.

5. O&S Arrangements in the New Council

The Chairman reported that the IE had expressed their general support for the proposals on 13 January, subject to the outcome of the consultation and approval of the new authority.

Members suggested that further work be undertaken to strengthen the ability of O&S to require Cabinet members to attend scrutiny meetings. The Scrutiny Manager WCC stressed that the current WCC Constitution, on which the constitution for the new Council would be based, covered the requirement for Cabinet members and first and second tier officers to attend.

Resolved

To request that further work be undertaken on the relationship between Overview & Scrutiny and members of the Executive, and in particular the requirement for members of the Executive to attend scrutiny meetings.

6. Task Groups

(1) Pilot Area Boards

The Chairman of the Task Group reported that proposed dates for Area Board meetings post April were part of the report on the Constitution for the IE meeting on 28 January, but that the Task Group and the pilot boards had not been consulted on those. The Chairman of the Task Group also reported that it had been difficult to scrutinise some of the activity when information was not provided in time for meetings.

Members felt that the outcome of the consultation should first be awaited and proposals for the Area Boards should be finalised before meeting dates were fixed. The Chairman of the Task Group also reported that consultation timescales had slipped.

Members also enquired about the role of steering groups and expressed the view that a Cabinet member should not be chairing an Area Board due to workloads and a potential conflict of interest. Members suggested that clarification should be sought on this issue.

Members further commented on the amount of work for members serving on a pilot board and the insufficient level of officer support.

Resolved

(1) To note the update.

(2) To request that the dates for future Area Board meetings in the new Council were withdrawn until the proposals for Area Boards were finalised.

(3) To note that the final report of the Task Group was scheduled for the next JOSTB meeting and would address many of the issues raised above.

(2) Customer Access

Members received the update and expressed concern over the proposal to steer members' contact with officers in the new authority via the front desk. Allison Bucknell, one of the IE lead members for HR, would attend the next meeting of the Task Group and be asked to address this matter.

Resolved – To note the update.

(3) Housing

The Task Group had not met since the last meeting and that the Group's final report would be produced in March.

Resolved – To note the update.

(4) Change Management

The Task Group would next meet on 28 January.

Resolved – To note the update.

(5) Waste

The Task Group's next meeting had been cancelled and would be fixed in February as the appointment of the Head of Service was imminent. The Service Director, Amenities & Leisure intended to produce a detailed report on the transition and budget position for the meeting.

Resolved – To note the update.

(6) Critical Path

The Chairman of the Task Group reported that members were concerned about the timescales in relation to the appointments procedure and the policy approach taken towards the harmonisation of terms and conditions. The Board had expressed the view at its last meeting that this should represent best practice.

The Scrutiny Manager WCC reported that this issue had been taken up with the Assistant Director, LGR Staffing Transition, together with requests for reports on the progress with staff appointments and the cost for early departures and redundancies.

The Task Group had also considered the "100-Day-Campaign" and the Corporate Plan at its last meeting and had expressed concern over the reception area at County Hall for the new authority.

Members noted that the views of the Task Group had been incorporated in the first draft of the Corporate Plan which would be considered by IE on 28 January. The Chairman suggested that the Task Group's comments be clearly identified in the report.

Resolved – To note the update.

7. Towards One Council – Progress Report

Resolved – To note the latest report.

8. Implementation Executive Minutes

The JOSTB received the IE minutes of the meeting on 13 January.

9. Outline Work Programmes

(1) JOSTB Work Programme

(i) Cost of Early Departures and Redundancies

In addition to the update given under minute number 6(6), members commented that it was important that an organisational memory should be kept, especially from the former district councils.

(ii) Property Strategy

The Scrutiny Manger WCC reported that the delay in the production of the revised property strategy was due to the outcome of the consultant's report being considered at JIT on 12 February. The revised strategy comprised two parts: office accommodation and a review of operational needs which could not be undertaken until Heads of Services were clear about requirements resulting from transformation. The revised strategy, or an update report, would be available at the next meeting.

(iii) Closure of End of Year Accounts

Christine Reid reported that since the last meeting of the Critical Path Task Group members were satisfied with the response on the closure of accounts.

Resolved

To approve the outline work programme for the Board.

(2) IE Work Programme

The Board noted that two reports on the coterminosity of Area Boards with unitary divisions and on the initial outcome of pilot Area Boards was scheduled for consideration at IE on 26 February. Members questioned if the timescales for these reports had now slipped in the light of the update given under minute number 6(1).

Resolved

To note the IE Work Programme.

12. Next Special Meeting – Tuesday 17 February 2009 at County Hall, Trowbridge

Next Ordinary Meeting – Friday 27 February 2009 at Kennet District Council Offices

(Duration of Meeting: 10:30 – 12:00)

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