

Title: **Joint overview and scrutiny transition update**

Reporting Member: **Cllr Keith Humphries**

Reporting Officer: **Marie Lindsay, Policy Officer**

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide the Scrutiny Committee with an update on the work of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition Board (JOSTB).

Background

The statutory implementation and commencement order for Wiltshire was given parliamentary approval on 26 February 2008 and the first formal meeting of JOSTB was held on 28 March. Since this date JOSTB has been meeting monthly.

Since West Wiltshire District Council's Scrutiny Committee last met in November the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition Board has met twice, on 21 November and 19 December 2008. The minutes of the meeting on 21 November are attached at Appendix A. The minutes from 19 December are to follow.

Executive summary

This report details the current considerations of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition Board. In summary:

- establishing a task group to continue the review of the Critical Path and Day One Plan
- identifying the need to develop its work programme on a case by case basis
- deciding that during the interregnum period the current arrangements for JOSTB as currently constituted will be realigned as under Wiltshire County Council's Management Committee
- agreeing in principle to a structure for overview and scrutiny in the new council and committing to consult on the proposals in January 2009
- undertaking a review of Electoral Services and Member Support
- reviewing the role and progress of each of its five task groups. No further work is required from the Development Control task group at the present time

Issues previously raised by the Scrutiny Committee for the attention of JOSTB:

- grants for voluntary groups – the Implementation Executive has agreed that all existing commitments will be honoured in 2009/10 pending a full review from April 2010
- migrant workers/houses in multiple occupation – JOSTB has asked the appropriate IE members and Corporate Director, Economic Development, Planning and Housing for information on how the recommendations in the report will be incorporated and taken forward within the new council.

Key issues

The key issues discussed at the two meetings are detailed below.

Managing the Transition to 1 April – Appointments in the New Council

At the meeting on 21 November the Service Director, Policy, Research and Communications introduced the report highlighting the financial implications of the transfer of senior management to Wiltshire County Council from 1 January and the associated risk management for the period January-April 2009.

JOSTB were advised that service standards and performance within the districts remain equal or above the levels achieved in the same period last year and services are being delivered to a comparable standard as previously. An agreement is in place between the five councils that any significant performance issues will be raised as soon as they are identified. Additional management costs for January to March 2009 are estimated to be in the region of £150k and these will be met from the transition budget.

Towards One Council – Progress Report

JOSTB considered an updated progress report at each of its meetings in November and December. Issues discussed included the Parishing of Salisbury, staffing structures, appointments process and the re-launch of the One Council extranet. Any key views expressed by JOSTB are reported directly back to the Programme Office.

Benefit Realisation in Service Areas

On 19 December JOSTB considered a report by the Head of Financial Planning and the Programme Office Manager on the benefits realisation organisational framework. Issues discussed included non cashable benefits such as customer access, local decision making and efficiency as well as financial benefits.

There has been some slippage in benefits realisation due to current workloads. A number of pilot areas will be set up in due course to review the benefits achieved, including design and print and training. It was confirmed the financial savings were on track to be achieved.

Critical Path and Day One Plan

A member group, led by North Wiltshire District Council, was set up to consider the progress of critical transitional tasks with a view to highlighting those issues that are either at risk or not meeting their target deadlines. The group also met to consider the Communications Strategy in particular detail. On 19 December JOSTB adopted the following recommendations:

- to thank the members involved in the initial review of the critical path and day one plan and for the two reports and recommendations contained therein, and in doing so to acknowledge the points set out under item 9 on the agenda sheet.
- on the basis that the members involved in the review having indicated the need to meet on more occasions, to establish a task group for this ongoing work with the following terms of reference:
 - (i) to consider the purpose and application of the critical path and day one plan;
 - (ii) to review periodically the content with particular focus on areas of highest risk;
 - (iii) to report to the Board (or relevant task group) on issues requiring further scrutiny.

- to appoint a non-executive member from each council to the task group (acknowledging the interest of the members who undertook the initial work). These members will have the responsibility of reporting back Critical Path and Day One Plan progress to their respective councils.
- to agree that this task group also takes on the responsibility to review the progress of Communications during transition to One Council.
- to determine the scrutiny officer support for the task group (NWDC having supported the initial work).
- to note that scrutiny of ICT was incorporated in to the work of the Board's Change Management Task Group with expanded membership following initial scrutiny by Keith Humphries WWDC.
- to note that a rapid scrutiny exercise was undertaken on 21 November which included Democratic Services and an update given to the Board today by the Head of Service - see previous agenda item. Overview and Scrutiny, a function of Democratic Services, is specifically considered in the report on the proposed OS arrangements for the New Council (see last item on agenda).
- to note that the Appointments Procedure adopted by the IE on 6 October (and received by JOSTB on 31 October) indicated that harmonisation of staff to common terms and conditions would commence by October 2009 and would be subject to consultation and negotiation and represent best practice. This was confirmed by the Corporate Director, Resources at JOSTB and was fundamental to delivering efficiencies in the new council.
- to request an update to the Board's meeting on 27 February on progress with staff appointments, highlighting any areas of potential staff shortages or shortages of expertise.

Transformational Priorities

Laurie Bell, Service Director, Policy, Research and Communications introduced a report at the November JOSTB meeting outlining the progress being made towards producing a Corporate Plan for 2009/10. This Plan will contain the vision for the new council, its main goals and the actions required to achieve those goals, and the council's transformational priorities.

A more detailed report on transformational priorities was requested and considered by JOSTB on 19 December.

A chart was circulated at the meeting by Laurie Bell. Transformational work has been initiated in some services but in other areas there is a need for political direction and priorities to be set by Wiltshire Council. This particularly relates to many of the front line services such as waste. In these areas key policy decisions will need to be made early by the new administration.

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

In October 2008 the Vice-Chairman of JOSTB wrote to the Leaders, Chief Executives and Chairmen of the scrutiny functions in each of the five councils asking for their views on pooling resources to further develop the joint scrutiny transitional arrangements. Overall, the importance of effective scrutiny in the transition period was supported but a need to maintain a scrutiny function in the districts was still felt to be equally important.

Having considered the response, JOSTB agreed to further develop its work on a case by case basis and to use the outcome of the review of the Day One Plan and Critical Path to identify further topics for scrutiny. Approaches could then be made to individual councils for specific officer support and member nominations.

Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements in the Interregnum Period

Ian Gibbons, Service Director, Legal and Democratic Services introduced a report setting out the options and provisions regarding overview and scrutiny arrangements in the interregnum period between April and June 2009.

The most practicable way forward, and the option that was approved by JOSTB, is to realign the arrangements as currently constituted under Wiltshire County Council's Management Committee to reflect the demise of the district councils and new reporting arrangements. The terms of reference will be revised to provide as much autonomy as possible and the accepted practice of voting will remain for all members, including co-opted ex-district council members. The issue of payment of allowances for 'co-opted' members will require further consideration as the current scheme only specifies those serving on the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements in the New Council

In May 2008 JOSTB commissioned Local Government Consultant Derek Bishop to assist with devising overview and scrutiny arrangements for the new Wiltshire Council. On 19 December JOSTB considered two reports. The first report was by Derek Bishop setting out the legislative framework, nationally recognised roles and models and an evaluation framework based on the Centre for Public Scrutiny's four principles of effective scrutiny. The second report was written by officers to apply the work of the consultant to the local circumstances and set out a draft structure and arrangements for formal consultation.

JOSTB agreed the draft structure in principle and will be discussing it in further detail at its meetings in January and February 2009. The draft proposals and structure will be the subject of a consultation exercise early in the new year and it is expected that this Scrutiny Committee will be able to consider and agree its response at its meeting on 11 February.

Electoral Services and Member Support – Rapid Scrutiny Exercise

A rapid scrutiny exercise was undertaken to look at capacity issues within these two teams and, in particular, the ability to deliver the June 2009 elections and general support for members. On 19 December the Board considered the recommendations, namely:

- to provide the JOSTB Rapid Scrutiny Group with a copy of the Electoral Services Team Structure once drafted
- to request JOSTB to consider scrutinising the development of the Constitution, especially those areas relevant to Overview & Scrutiny
- to request the JOSTB Customer Access Task Group to review proposals for handling member enquiries within the new council
- to request that the scrutiny arrangements developed from the Derek Bishop consultancy report pay consideration to benchmarking
- 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.

These recommendations were adopted by JOSTB and the detail contained within some of them will be the subject of a further report to members by the Service Director, Legal and Democratic Services.

Leisure services

On 4 July 2008 JOSTB considered a report on Leisure Centres and requested a further report on Leisure Services as a whole. Robin Townsend, Project Manager, Community Initiatives, advised the Board that work was currently focusing on transition and that a subsequent review of contracts and transformational work would be undertaken by the new council.

JOSTB raised concerns about unavoidable pressures on service provision in the current economic climate, energy costs and a shortfall in recreation land resulting in the need to work closely with planning policy in the new council. A further report covering the wider scope of leisure will be considered by the Board at a future meeting.

Finance

JOSTB has considered reports on council tax policy harmonisation and the council tax base for Wiltshire Council as well as regular financial updates. It should be noted that JOSTB will be holding a special meeting on 17 February to consider detailed budget proposals.

Task groups

Each of the five task groups provides JOSTB with a progress report. The current position on the work of each group is detailed below.

- ***Development Control***

Lead Authority – West Wiltshire

West Wiltshire Member – Councillor Bill Parks

On 13 November the Implementation Executive (IE) considered the latest officer report on Development Control and a separate report on Member Selection to the Area Planning Committees. Both reports had been circulated to the task group for information. In summary it was agreed:

- Scheme of delegation adopted except to clarify that householder applications are eligible for call in
- Scheme of delegation to apply also during the interim period of April to June
- A full review of Development Control to take place within 2 years of the new Unitary Council
- During the interim period:
 - the current members of North Wilts, West Wilts and Kennet Planning Committees be asked to serve as co-opted members on the Area Planning Committee for their area with the existing terms of reference

- Salisbury District Council be asked to nominate between 12 and 15 members of their current Area Committees to serve on the Area Planning Committee for the whole Salisbury Area
- The Area Planning Committees of the new council will be politically proportional

The task group has effectively completed its work but is keeping up to date with developments as appropriate.

- **Housing**

Lead Authority – Wiltshire County

West Wiltshire Member – Councillor Pip Ridout

The following provides a summary of the key issues discussed at the task group meeting on 2 December:

2009/10 Budget for Housing

- Despite staffing cost pressures, the Service Director, Housing is optimistic that the housing service revenue budget will comply with the cash freeze requirement and with the 1C4W savings target for 2009-10 of £200,000.
- The new Council's Capital Programme is currently indicating a very significant gap in resources available, compared with those required, and this is likely to result in the housing service being unable to pursue all of the capital projects it had planned to pursue in 2009-10.
- The Salisbury District Council (SDC) Community & Housing Scrutiny Panel, in identifying the anticipated shortfall in the Housing Revenue Account, requested the IE lead members and Service Director to urgently hold discussions with tenants and any other relevant parties to explore all the options available to secure tenants housing standards.

Social Housing – New Schemes

- The task group expressed support for two new schemes, one in Trowbridge and one County-wide, which received IE approval in November, especially as they appeared to have originated from a robust long term strategy for social housing, and a carefully conducted needs analysis. The schemes will see the development of new extra care housing and supported living units for service users with learning disabilities and mental health needs.

Key Risks & Issues Update

- Staff retention and capacity continues to be monitored as a high risk factor in the transition, due to uncertainty caused by the appointments' process and the length of time it could take to populate the housing service's new structure.
- Lack of priority given to capital funding schemes remains a key issue.
- The Task Group has asked to see the report that is to be written on how decision making and reporting arrangements is to be governed in the new council for the Salisbury housing stock.

Housing Services Support for Area Boards

The Service Director, Housing is proposing to ensure strong housing officer representation at area board meetings. The task group is encouraged by these proposals, stressing that it is important to ensure that the area boards do not simply become “talking shops”, but that they hold meetings of real purpose and action.

New Housing Reference Partnership to Oversee the Transition Process

- New partnership arrangements have been agreed to ensure that all lead councillors, officers, partners and stakeholders for housing are given the opportunity to meet together monthly to communicate and consult on housing matters in the transition.
- The task group will be monitoring the discussions and recommendations arising from these new partnership arrangements.

- **Waste**

Lead Authority – Wiltshire County

West Wiltshire Member – Councillor Graham Hedley

The task group will continue its work once information on transformational priorities and the budget 2009-10 is available.

- **Area Boards**

Lead Authority – Wiltshire County

West Wiltshire Member – Councillor Carolyn Walker

On 21 November JOSTB considered the task group's interim report and a copy is attached at Appendix B. Key issues considered by the Board were funding, voting rights, resources and communications. Since then, the task group has considered the role of Area Boards in determining Section 106 Agreements, the level of support available from Democratic Services and the relationship between the Boards and Partnerships. Key challenges have been identified as:

- gauging how busy the Area Boards will be when determining resources
- the need for the planners to have a policy base if Area Boards are to become involved with Section 106 agreements
- the desire to develop close but distinct working relationships between Community Area Partnerships & Area Boards.

- **Customer Access**

Lead Authority – North Wiltshire

West Wiltshire Member – Councillor Geoffrey Carr

The task group last met on 24 November. Jacqui White, Service Director, Shared Services Team & Customer Care, attended the meeting and gave a presentation regarding the new Customer Care service and training arrangements for the new Customer Service Team. John Rogers, Customer Focus Lead, also gave an update on the implementation of the Access Strategy.

A “super spreadsheet” is in use to ensure that all necessary tasks are covered in the lead up to 1 April. This will be available on the Extranet. The focus for Day One lies on

high volume, high impact services such as waste and amenities, revenues and benefits, housing and development control. The essentials for operation on Day One are:

- one consistent service merging all front desk services;
- one main telephone number plus golden numbers;
- one new website with all current web transactions brought forward.

The plans for these operations are currently on track. Existing Council telephone numbers will still work on Day One but new direct dial numbers and golden numbers will be promoted to enable customers to call direct.

A new “clean” version of Lagan will be used by all customer services from February 2009. Separate Lagan archives will be available in each Council for past enquiries.

A large number of scripts will be available for training purposes by the end of December. The main focus currently lies on scripts for the most common enquiries and transactions. Progress is being made on consistency of scripts, putting scripts in the best places and linking them to the web pages (500 out of 2,500 have been completed).

Plans for Customer Services Officer training are underway and training will take place, in the main, between mid-January and mid-March. The task group will next meet on 26 January where the Communications process, the proposals for handling member enquiries and any tasks shown as amber or red in the Critical Path document will be considered. The task group will also give consideration to the contents of its final report.

- **Change Management (Incl. ICT Transition)**

Lead Authority – Wiltshire County

West Wiltshire Member – Councillor Keith Humphries

The task group last met on 11 December and considered the following issues:

BMP

The Critical Path deadline of 17 October 2008 to freeze structures into SAP down to the lowest managerial levels was not achieved. Work was continuing and was expected to be completed by mid-January 2009. Contingency arrangements were in place but if this slipped further, staff would not be in paid post by 1 April.

Members were concerned about the timing of the appointments process. Staff would know if they had ownership of a role by end of December, but for those ring-fenced or unknown they would be appointed to positions between January and 31 March.

ICT Workstream

Work towards completing the final link of the Wide Area Network (WAN) started on 8 December. There was now less concern about the support contract. A report was scheduled to go the IE on 13 January with proposals for supporting ICT across the county after 1 April. The Task Group would see this in advance and comment accordingly.

Shared Services

The Service Director was busy populating the senior positions within the structure. The Task Group would receive an update on the SAP competency centre at its next meeting.

Issues raised by West Wiltshire Scrutiny Committee

West Wiltshire District Council's Scrutiny Committee has raised a number of issues for the attention of JOSTB. An updated position in respect of each is as follows:

- ***Grants for voluntary groups***

On 17 September the Scrutiny Committee recommended that JOSTB monitors arrangements made for the provision of grants for voluntary groups in the new Wiltshire Council. On 21 October WCC Cabinet made a recommendation to the IE that all existing commitments by the five councils to the Voluntary and Community Sector are honoured in the financial year 2009/10, pending full implementation of the review from April 2010. The IE resolved to adopt this recommendation on 13 November.

- ***Migrant Workers and Houses in Multiple Occupation***

On 17 September the Scrutiny Committee recommended that work is done to ensure that the recommendations in the report concerning migrant workers and HMOs are taken forward by the new Wiltshire Council. Cabinet then resolved to refer the matter to JOSTB. On 21 November JOSTB considered this issue and decided that it would be best taken forward by the appropriate IE members and the Corporate Director for Economic Development, Planning and Housing. The report has been forwarded accordingly with a request for information on how this will be incorporated and taken forward within the new council.

Effect on strategies and codes

An effective JOSTB could have a considerable impact on the strategies and codes during transition and in the new unitary authority.

Finance and performance implications

The pooling of scrutiny officer support across the five councils will have an impact on the level of resources available to support this Committee. As highlighted previously, it will mean the forward work plan will need to be reduced and tailored to essential scrutiny areas only.

Risk management implications

The five scrutiny functions working together could help to minimise the risks to customers, services and future delivery which the transition to unitary status inevitably involves. It would also reduce the possibility of individual scrutiny functions undertaking unnecessary work that would not be taken forward during the transition or by the new authority.

Legal and human rights implications

There are no direct legal or human rights implications.

Next Steps

The next meeting of JOSTB will take place on 23 January, 10.30am at Kennet District Council. The agenda items include the Corporate Plan, early departures and redundancies, Property Strategy and the revenue budget and capital programme.

A special meeting of JOSTB will be held on Tuesday 17 February 2009 at 10.30am at Wiltshire County Council to consider the 2009-10 budget proposals.

Recommendations

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- Consider the information contained within this report and raise any specific issues
- Add the following item to its forward work plan for 11 February 2009: to consider the Committee's response to the consultation by JOSTB on the overview and scrutiny arrangements in the new council.

Background papers

Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition Board agenda and papers, 21 November and 19 December 2008