TOWARDS ONE COUNCIL   **APPENDIX B**

JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TRANSITION BOARD
21 NOVEMBER 2008

AREA BOARD TASK GROUP

INTERIM REPORT

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.   To update JOSTB on the work of its Pilot Area Board/Partnership Scrutiny
Task Group.

BACKGROUND

2.   At its meeting on 31 October 2008, JOSTB expressed a lack of confidence
towards the successful delivery of the Area Boards project, when
considering existing difficulties and time pressures.

3.   A number of specific concerns were raised:

- Insufficient Officer Support in some parts of the County
- Inconsistency across the County
- Difficulties for areas not taking part in the pilot scheme
- Lack of clear definition between the Area Partnerships and Boards.

FINDINGS

4.   This report will initially provide a Task Group response to the concerns raised
by JOSTB. A series of further risks will then be highlighted followed by a
discussion around the Task Group's future work.

5.   <u>INSUFFICIENT OFFICER SUPPORT IN SOME PARTS OF THE COUNTY</u> –
The Task Group is aware that the Wotton Basset pilot manager has resigned
and that the Amesbury Area is being temporarily covered by the Team Leader,
Area Boards Development Phase. In response internal interviews took place
on 3 November and one appointment has been made. External recruitment
has already commenced for the remaining vacancy and interviews will take
place shortly.

The Task Group is satisfied that the Project Team has reacted quickly and
effectively when faced with the vacancies, accelerating the recruitment
process markedly from earlier in the transitional period.

6.   <u>INCONSISTENCY ACROSS THE COUNTY</u> – The project team views this
period of transition very much as a testing phase. Lessons are being learned
both positive and negative, with different components of the Area Board
model being tested in specific areas, e.g. Participatory Budgeting in Calne.
Recognising this approach and the uniqueness of the pilot areas,
development in each of the areas is different.

The key challenge for the Project Team is to draw out the elements which are working well to build the model to be used in the new Council. The Project Team intends to report with their proposals in February 2009, in part this document will demonstrate how successful the pilot phase has been.

7.   DIFFICULTIES FOR AREAS NOT TAKING PART IN THE PILOT SCHEME – The key Task Group concern towards this issue is the need to ensure that staff who join the team post April have sufficient training to enable consistent service delivery across the county.

8.   LACK OF CLEAR DEFINITION BETWEEN THE AREA PARTNERSHIPS AND BOARDS – The Task Group has identified this as an area that they would like to explore in more detail. Theoretical evidence has been supplied by the Project Team but members felt it important to invite witnesses from WCAP to a future meeting to get a Partnership perspective.

FURTHER ISSUES

9.   In addition to the concerns raised by JOSTB, the Task Group has identified the following issues:

10.   FRONT LINE SERVICES BUY-IN –The Area Boards ultimately will provide a platform for decisions to be made within the locality. For this to be successful Front Line Services need to embrace the model and configure themselves to support it. This cultural and organisational change is the key risk to the project and an area the Task Group intends to pursue in more detail.

11.   BOUNDARIES –The Implementation Executive approved on 23 September 2008 that the Boards should have a minimum of four members. However, consultation is still taking place in the East of the County to discuss how this impacts on existing areas such as Pewsey. The Task Group has asked to be included before any further proposals are submitted to the IE.

12.   TRAINING – The Task Group has recognised that a number of members will require training, especially if elected to the role of Chair. Additionally, staff with limited experience of attending member meetings will be expected to attend the Boards. These officers will also need adequate training and support.

13.   PLANNING – The Task Group has strongly supported the Project Team in identifying funds to underpin the Boards. For example members asked the Project Team to meet with the Service Director, Development to discuss the practicalities of the Area Boards playing an active role in influencing elements of section 106 agreements. This issue has yet to be resolved and the Task Group will be inviting the Service Director, Development to a future meeting to help move this forward.

14.   AREA BOARD HANDBOOK (FORMERLY RULE BOOK) – The Task Group has had an opportunity to influence the formation of the Handbook (formerly Rule Book). For example members played an active part in defining the role of the Cabinet Member at Board meetings. However, the Task Group has not

seen an updated version for a number of months and recognises that this requires additional scrutiny.

CONCLUSION

15.   Since the Task Group reported in May 2008 the focus of the review has been towards the following areas:

   a)   Governance Arrangements
   b)   Implementation of Pilot Area Boards
   c)   Delegation of services
   d)   Area Board Budgets

16.   The evidence supplied whilst reviewing these areas has satisfied members that the project is being project managed effectively, through clear planning and detailed risk analysis. However, the Task Group recognises the challenge of building an effective area model in such a short period of time and has requested to be consulted on the final report before its February 2009 deadline.

17.   The review is now at a turning point. The focus of the Task Group to date has been towards understanding the goals of the project team, their organisation and their progress to date. The Task Group now accepts that it needs to extend its work to look at the Partners, Partnerships and Front Line Services, which ultimately will determine the success of the Area Boards.

 RECOMMENDATION

18.   JOSTB is asked to:

   a) note the report;

   b) request the Task Group to continue its work as it moves into a new phase of the review as outlined in paragraph 17 above.

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