

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.

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition Board last met on 23 January 2009. The minutes of the meeting are attached at Appendix A.

Executive summary

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

- Considering the key challenges identified in the Audit Commission's Direction of Travel Assessment and acknowledging that the Service Directors for Development Control and Housing are aware of the issues raised
- The need to ensure that the arrangements for overview and scrutiny in the new council provide for holding Cabinet Members and first and second tier officers to account
- Task group updates – the final reports of the Area Boards and Housing Task Groups will be presented to JOSTB on 27 February and 27 March respectively.

Key issues

The key issues discussed at the meeting are detailed below.

Audit Commission Joint Direction of Travel Assessment

JOSTB considered the draft report of the Audit Commission setting out its findings with regard to the Direction of Travel of the four Wiltshire District Councils. The Audit Commission carried out a 'light touch' assessment, identifying areas of strength and positive contributions to the Local Area Agreement as well as highlighting key challenges.

The Board were reassured by the Audit Committee representative that the Service Directors for Development Control and Housing are fully aware of the issues highlighted in the report and are working hard to remedy the identified weaknesses.

Wiltshire County Council has been subject to a fuller assessment and scoring and the draft Audit Commission report is expected on 26 February. The report will then be considered by the County Council's Audit Committee.

Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements in the New Council

JOSTB discussed the draft proposals which are currently out for consultation and are being considered as a separate item on this Scrutiny Committee agenda. The Board noted that the Implementation Executive has agreed with the proposals in principle.

JOSTB members expressed concern over the accountability to the Committee of executive members and the need to compel both members and first and second tier officers to attend meetings where necessary.

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.

- ***Housing***

Lead Authority – Wiltshire County
West Wiltshire Member – Councillor Pip Ridout

The task group is due to meet on 13 February to consider update reports on the:

- a) development of the Housing Service 2009-10 Budget
- b) key issues and risks associated with the transition
- c) work of the new Housing Partnership, and
- d) decision(s) of the IE in relation to Salisbury's Housing Revenue Account 30 Year Business Plan which it considered on 13 January (the task group has discussed this business plan on two occasions previously).

The final report of the task group will be presented to JOSTB on 27 March.

- ***Waste***

Lead Authority – Wiltshire County
West Wiltshire Member – Councillor Graham Hedley

Contact has been made with the Service Director, Amenities & Leisure and the task group will meet in late February following the release of budget information.

- ***Area Boards***

Lead Authority – Wiltshire County
West Wiltshire Member – Councillor Carolyn Walker

The task group met on 9 January and considered in detail the draft Area Board Handbook. Highlights of the debate included:

- a) language of the document and who the audience is
- b) how the performance of the Area Boards will be measured
- c) the relationship between scrutiny and the Area Boards
- d) the level of funding for the boards
- e) the process for electing the Chairman.

The task group also met on 22 January and welcomed representatives from Southampton University, who are evaluating the project. It also considered the issues around the Area Board boundaries.

In response to concerns raised by JOSTB the final report of the task group, which will be presented on 27 February, will identify areas recognised as requiring further development. Additionally, the relevant Cabinet member and Service Director will be invited to attend the meeting.

- **Customer Access**

Lead Authority – North Wiltshire

West Wiltshire Member – Councillor Geoffrey Carr

The task group will meet again on 26 January to discuss the Communications Strategy, particularly the methods by which the public will be informed of the changes they can expect to see from April. Sally Hendry, Campaigns Manager WCC, has been invited to present the Strategy.

Allison Bucknell, IE lead member for Democratic Services, will also be attending the next meeting to answer questions on the methods by which member enquiries will be signposted in the new council. This was requested by JOSTB after the issue had been raised during the Elections and Members Support Rapid Scrutiny exercise.

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

Lead Authority – Wiltshire County

West Wiltshire Member – Councillor Keith Humphries

The task group will meet on 28 January and members reviewed the extension of the Steria contract, as considered by the IE on 13 January. Other items for consideration included the return of existing IT equipment and facilities during the interregnum period and a regular update on BMP and Shared Services.

- **Critical Path**

Lead Authority – Wiltshire County

West Wiltshire Member – Councillor Bill Parks

The task group met on 21 January. Issues discussed and concerns raised include the speed of the appointments procedure, the need to harmonise terms and conditions at a favourable rate and the County Council's reception area which is considered to be unwelcoming and unfriendly. The task group also commented on the draft Corporate Plan.

- **Development Control**

Lead Authority – West Wiltshire

West Wiltshire Member – Councillor Bill Parks

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

Electoral Services and Member Support – Rapid Scrutiny Exercise

An initial rapid scrutiny exercise was undertaken in December 2008 and members met again on 26 January to consider a number of outstanding matters. Issues discussed included the time-table to elections, member-officer protocol, members accommodation in the new council, ICT support, structure and staffing for Democratic Services and members first point of contact .

Councillor Keith Humphries will provide a verbal update highlighting the key considerations.

Issues raised by West Wiltshire Scrutiny Committee

West Wiltshire District Council's Scrutiny Committee has previously raised the following issue for the attention of JOSTB:

- ***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 27 February, 10.30am at Kennet District Council. The agenda items include the Corporate Plan, early departures and redundancies and the Property Strategy.

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. All non-executive members are invited to attend.

Recommendations

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- Consider the information contained within this report and raise any specific issues

Background papers

Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition Board agenda and papers, 23 January 2009