

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

Reporting Member: **Cllr Keith Humphries**

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

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### **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.

A special meeting of JOSTB was held on 17 February 2009 to consider the 2009-10 budget proposals. The minutes are attached at Appendix A. The last ordinary JOSTB meeting was held on 27 February 2009 and the minutes of the meeting are to follow.

### **Executive summary**

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

- Raising issues with Wiltshire County Council on the 2009-10 budget proposals (see appendix A for full details)
- Considering the latest position on the appointments procedure and requesting a report on the cost of redundancies to its meeting on 20 April
- Addressing issues around Electoral and Member Support Services including levels of support available to members, interregnum allowances, clarity of proceedings for prospective councillors, and solutions to ICT access for members
- Agreeing a protocol for Executive/Overview and Scrutiny arrangements which will place a duty on Cabinet Members to attend scrutiny meetings when requested to do so
- Agreeing the arrangements for the overview and scrutiny function in the new council following consideration of the responses received to its consultation exercise in January 2009
- Considering final reports from the task groups on Area Boards and Customer Access (the full reports can be found at appendices B and C).

### **Key issues**

The key issues discussed at the meetings are detailed below.

### ***2009-10 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme***

On 17 February 2009 JOSTB held a special meeting to discuss the 2009-10 budget proposals. All non-executive members were invited to attend the meeting and almost one third of members who attended were representatives of West Wiltshire District Council.

A number of issues were raised including school funding, Supporting People and Community Safety budgets, arrangements for the harmonisation of waste, affordable housing projects and the effects of the economic downturn. The comments of JOSTB were taken into account by Wiltshire County Council when it determined the final 2009-10 Budget and Council Tax on 24 February 2009.

### ***Property Strategy***

At a previous meeting in August 2008 JOSTB considered a report on the proposed Property Strategy. Members requested that the Strategy, when developed, should include consideration of backlog maintenance issues, a property disposal plan and details of cost savings and investment proposals. On 27 February 2009 officers and representatives of MACE, the external consultants appointed to assist in the development of the project, presented JOSTB with a report on the Office Rationalisation Programme. Members were advised of a £53m revenue saving over 25 years with net savings being realised from year eight.

The report had also been presented to Cabinet and Chief Officers and it was agreed that implementation and consultation will now begin on the proposals.

### ***Application of the Appointments Procedure***

Richard Woodroffe, Assistant Director LGR Staffing Transition presented a report to JOSTB on the latest position with regard to staffing issues. He advised Members that all District employees had been formally notified that their employment will become transferred to Wiltshire Council on 1 April with TUPE rights. With regard to individual staff notifications across the county, the current position is:

- not known – 408 (13%)
- ownership – 2700 (85%)
- ringfenced - 3
- not matched - 75 (2%)

A breakdown of the figures by authority will be provided to JOSTB members in early March. The information will also be posted on Wiltshire County Council's extranet and updated every 2 weeks.

Approximately half of those 'not known' are within the Department of Resources and this is a result of the delay in appointing service directors. Across the county a total of seven staff have appealed against a notification of ownership/non-ownership. For those staff who are 'not matched' the redeployment process will take six months and overall a very small number of redundancies is expected. Some of the five councils are now in the process of terminating the employment of a small number of senior managers who would not have been appointed to a long term role in the Wiltshire Council. This is being done through the early adoption of the severance arrangements agreed by the Implementation Executive in October 2008.

A report on the cost of redundancies will be considered by JOSTB in April.

### ***Electoral Services and Member Support – Rapid Scrutiny Exercise***

An initial rapid scrutiny exercise was undertaken in December 2008 and members met again with the Service Director, Legal and Democratic Services on 26 January and 27 February to consider a number of outstanding matters.

As a result, it has been agreed that a timeline aide memoire will be produced for prospective councillors, elected members will be able to continue to use the office hubs, an acceptable solution to ICT access at County Hall will be provided and officer/member protocols are to be developed for consideration by JOSTB at a future date. Members are satisfied that the issues of interregnum allowances and officer support for members appear to have been satisfactorily addressed.

Members did however express concern about the need for flexibility in ICT support, provision for members who don't want the County Council's hardware and security issues. Councillor Keith Humphries has agreed to take up, through the Change Management task group, the issue of safeguarding sensitive information including the forwarding of emails to home computers.

### ***Executive Member Attendance at Overview and Scrutiny Committees in the New Council***

JOSTB asked for this particular issue to be considered as part of the final overview and scrutiny (OS) arrangements for the new council. It was also raised by West Wiltshire's Scrutiny Committee when it considered the proposed arrangements at its meeting on 11 February.

JOSTB were informed on 27 February that an Executive/OS protocol is being established and that it will set out the operational relationships and responsibilities between the two functions. JOSTB is satisfied that the following extract from the protocol will meet its requirements:

*'A standing invitation exists for Cabinet members to attend OS committees however where a specific invitation has been made then it is the duty of those persons to attend if so required. This requirement extends to any sub-committees, task groups or rapid scrutiny exercises established by an OS committee'.*

JOSTB will be considering the procedural rules proposed for the new constitution as a whole at its next meeting on 27 March.

### ***Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements in the New Council***

JOSTB considered the responses received to its recent consultation on the proposed overview and scrutiny arrangements for the new Council. As mentioned above, West Wiltshire's Scrutiny Committee had considered the proposals on 11 February. Concerns had been raised by this Scrutiny Committee about the level of resources required to support the proposals and the need to ensure public engagement. JOSTB is satisfied that officer resources will be sufficient and were advised that whilst task groups do usually meet in public this will be addressed in the task group protocol.

### ***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 last met on 13 February when the following matters were considered and discussed with the IE Member for Housing / Community Services and lead officers:

- (i) 2009-10 budget update, including information on revenue budget levels and capital funding for the new housing service next year, and regarding the rent levels for the Salisbury housing tenants.
- (ii) A series of policies which need to be harmonised by 1 April 2009, including the rent arrears for council managed temporary accommodation, the rent deposit guarantee scheme and removals and storage; these are to be approved by the IE on 26 February.
- (iii) A key issues and risks update, which listed the majority of risks to housing services in moving to one council (and as identified for 2009-10) as of medium likelihood/business impact. These risks mainly concern:
  - the maintenance of service performance
  - compliance with new IT requirements, i.e. SAP
  - staffing pressures
  - the homelessness strategy not being ready in time for the anticipated Comprehensive Area Assessment in October 2009
  - the economic downturn
- (iv) A quarter three performance update which illustrated good performance, with the exception of 23 people currently registered as homeless, which the IE member stated he was actively pursuing as an area for improvement.
- (v) Feedback on the separate scrutiny exercise to consider a new Accommodation Strategy for Older People. A consultation phase for which will be launched at the end of February.

The task group's next meeting is due to take place on 12 March, when members will discuss further updates in relation to the housing project plan, risk register, policy harmonisation and options for affordable housing projects in 2009-10.

The task group's final report will be submitted to the JOSTB on 27 March 2009.

- **Waste**

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

The task group will next meet on 5 March.

- **Area Boards**

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

The task group' presented its final report to JOSTB on 27 February and a copy is attached at Appendix B. Discussions centered around the number of members required to sit on an area board and the key recommendations accepted by JOSTB are summarised below:

- a) Each of the frontline services to produce a detailed plan outlining how they will work with Area Boards
- b) Area Boards to have a minimum of three members in attendance for a 12 month trial period, to be reviewed
- c) To recommend that, one completed, secondary versions of the Area Board Handbook are produced specifically for elected members and the public
- d) To develop a consistent approach towards publicising and marketing to ensure maximum public participation
- e) The Statement of Community Involvement should provide a policy base for the Area Boards to influence some section 106 agreements
- f) To develop a performance framework for measuring the effectiveness of the Area Boards

JOSTB agreed to consider the outcome of the evaluation phase of the project at its meeting on 20 April.

- **Customer Access**

Lead Authority – North Wiltshire

West Wiltshire Member – Councillor Geoffrey Carr

The task group presented its final report to JOSTB on 27 February and a copy is attached at Appendix C. Members were advised that the website for Wiltshire Council will be postcode driven and that this should make Councillor information easier to access. Officers agreed to report back to JOSTB Members on the contingency plans in place in the event of problems with band width due to high volume levels. JOSTB noted that the Access to Service Strategy will be in place by 1 April 2009 with the aim of providing a consistent face-to-face service covering both district and county services at each of the main locations. JOSTB agreed to consider as a future scrutiny topic the transformational aims of the *Customer Access to Services Strategy*

In summary, JOSTB agreed the following recommendations which will be considered by the IE on 11 March:

- The implementation of high quality interface software to enable smooth loading of customer addresses from the property gazetteer NPLG to LAGAN
- The investigation, as a transformational aim, of alternative methods of Customer Access via technological means located at area hubs
- The redesign of the County Hall reception area in Trowbridge to present a more customer-friendly image in its provision of services
- The review of opening hours for service by both face-to-face and telephony channels to better match customer preference and demand
- The provision of a plan for providing face-to-face services to the Council's most vulnerable service users, from 1 April 2009.

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

Lead Authority – Wiltshire County

West Wiltshire Member – Councillor Keith Humphries

The Change Management Task Group met on 28 January to consider progress against BMP, ICT and Shared Services.

The message from the Executive in relation to BMP was that the project would go live on 1 April and predicted savings would be delivered. The payroll element of BMP was the only area of concern but contingency arrangements were in place to manage this risk.

The ICT project was on track and the Head of ICT plus the three team leaders had been appointed. The WAN was live between the County Council, North Wiltshire and Kennet. Salisbury would be linked by 5 or 6 February and West Wiltshire the following week. The link between Salisbury and Devizes would shortly be completed by BT, two months ahead of schedule. The new web site was ready and would be available to view and comment by the end of February. Members were reassured that all co-opted members would retain equipment and existing e-mail accounts during the pre-election period.

The Shared Services project was seen as low risk. 700 staff had been trained on SAP and the chief financial officer was providing support whilst the Shared Services Head of Finance role was being evaluated for appointment.

- **Critical Path**

Lead Authority – Wiltshire County

West Wiltshire Member – Councillor Bill Parks

The task group last met on 23 February. Discussions included the introduction of uniforms for all front line staff, including libraries, and the need to make staff visible and easily identifiable. The 100 day campaign is progressing well and the leaflets are considered to be clear and helpful. A DVD has been produced to demonstrate the benefits of moving to One Council and it is proposed to show this at all pilot Area Board meetings and other events/venues. The reception at County Hall will be rebranded prior to 1 April.

The task group will present its final report to JOSTB on 27 March.

- **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. At the JOSTB meeting on 27 February Members decided to review the Development Control protocols currently being drafted as part of the work for the new Constitution. These protocols will be considered by JOSTB at its next meeting on 27 March.

**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.

**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 final meeting of JOSTB will take place on 27 March 2009, 10.30am at Kennet District Council. The agenda items include the final reports of the Housing and Critical Path Task Groups and to agree the terms of reference for the re-aligned JOSTB during the interregnum period.

JOSTB will meet under its new terms of reference on 20 April and 11 May 2009 and Councillor Keith Humphries will continue to sit on the Board.

**Recommendations**

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the report.

**Background papers**

JOSTB agenda and papers, 17 February 2009

JOSTB agenda and papers, 27 February 2009