

# NOTES OF A MEETING OF THE JOINT CHAIRS AND VICE-CHAIRS STEERING GROUP – SCRUTINY, AUDIT AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEES.

22<sup>nd</sup> FEBRUARY, 2013 – COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS.

**PRESENT:** County Councillors W.T. Jones (Chair)  
County Councillors Mrs K.S. Silk, Mrs M. Mackenzie, and J.G. Morris.

## **Officers:**

Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager), Lisa Richards (Scrutiny Officer), Clarence Meredith (Strategic Director – Law and Governance), Geoff Petty (Strategic Director – Finance and Infrastructure), Ian Halstead (Internal Audit Manager), Dominique Jones (Partnership Support Manager).

The Chair welcomed Ian Halstead to his first meeting as a member of the Steering Group.

## **1. Apologies.**

County Councillors E. Michael Jones, A.W. Davies, Mrs D. Bailey and Mrs S. Davies, Jeremy Patterson (Chief Executive), Liz Patterson (Scrutiny Officer), Janet Kealey (Head of Legal, Scrutiny and Democratic Services).

## **2. Notes of Last Meeting.**

### **Documents Considered:**

- 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2013.

### **Outcomes:**

- Received.

## **3. Partnership Rationalisation and the Role of Scrutiny.**

### **Documents Considered:**

- Presentation.

### **Issues Discussed:**

- Council currently at phase 1 of the rationalisation project – developing the concept.
- A neighbourhood management pilot has been agreed for Newtown and a neighbourhood manager appointed to start on 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2013.
- One Powys Plan – the strategic needs assessment is being revisited with a need to identify data and to build in a quick response to the intelligence received. There will be a consultation on the changes to the Plan between November 2013 and February 2014.
- The Directors / Chief Officers who form the LSB intend to work with front line staff in Newtown as part of the pilot.
- The locality models comprising 7 areas is likely to be the configuration for the Neighbourhood Management project.
- In guidance / Sustainability Bill / Local Government Measure – scrutiny has an important role and there is a need to consider a scrutiny model which will work with LSB partners.

- New guidance around Shared Responsibility including the UN Convention on the rights of the child. It was suggested whether there was a role for the Youth Forum in scrutinising the LSB.
- The regionalisation agenda would need to be included in any scrutiny arrangements for scrutinising the LSB as well as other provisions such as joint scrutiny.
- Question – can scrutiny use others to undertake scrutiny or some part of the work on behalf of the Council. There is also a need for others such as portfolio holders to act as scrutineers. It was suggested that part of the problem was that the Council did not set clear objectives which could then be evaluated – if these clearer objectives existed then self evaluation would be easier.
- A question was raised regarding how the organisations comprising the LSB were scrutinised or undertook self evaluation. It was suggested that the LSB should not just be a “top table” of organisations but should involve other agencies, which is the intention of Neighbourhood Management. However there was concern regarding the commitment of other agencies to the LSB. There is a project plan which should lead to performance improvements. It was suggested that the current arrangements were tokenism and collaboration between agencies was not seen as part of normal day to day activity.
- It was suggested that scrutiny should evaluate the Newtown pilot once completed, with periodic reports to the Joint Chairs regarding progress.

**Outcomes:**

- Partnership Support Manager and Neighbourhood Management Manager to provide progress reports to the Joint Chairs Steering Group.
- Scrutiny to evaluate the Newtown pilot once completed.

**4. Annual Governance Statement.**

**Documents Considered:**

- Draft Annual Governance Statement 2012.

**Issues Discussed:**

- County Council is required to prepare this statement annually. The Annual Governance Statement was prepared in this format last year. The Wales Audit Office agreed last year’s statement following its consideration by the Audit Committee.
- The current draft statement once agreed by scrutiny would be considered by the audit Committee in June with the Statement of Accounts.
- This year more people will be involved in its production in order to improve the way that it is scrutinised internally. The scrutiny of the documents will need to consider how the Council is meeting the 6 principles set out in the document.
- Scrutiny comment will be required once more information has been added to the document. Previous comments by scrutiny and the Wales Audit Office is that the Council is too optimistic in its self evaluation with a need for a balanced approach.
- Principles:
  - Principle 1 – Powys is good at writing strategies but not so good at knowing if the Council is joined up with service delivery or in delivery with partners. If the Council receives feedback does the Council check this with others such as comments from the Citizen’s Panel. The understanding by the public of the Council’s vision and setting of outcomes is not good. Scrutiny would be

easier is the Council had clearer outcomes, and would also assist self evaluation.

- Principle 2 – Should the document be included as part of Member and officer induction as it spells out the governance and relationships between officers and Members. This section does not explain the cultural relationship between members and officers. The question was raised as to whether this was the section where the role of Members should be raised so that members could understand that role, not only the local member role but also other roles such as corporate member role, school governor role. There can be a blurring of roles both for Members and officers and the developing role between the Cabinet and officers.
- Principle 3 – The question was asked as to whether this section should include numbers of instances of audit irregularities and the way that issues are dealt with e.g. disciplinary / police intervention. Concern was expressed regarding the length of time taken to deal with individual cases, and that Human Resources processes were too long.
- Principle 4 – It would be difficult to quantify that decisions are informed and transparent – how do Members know what they do not know?
- Principle 5 – This section is generally about training and development. Capacity and capability of officers is something which has been the subject of previous comment. Officer induction needs strengthening. Member induction and training is good but not all members engage in the process.
- Principle 6 – This section needs to include detail relating to the Local Service Board, The Citizen's Panel, consultation on local school closures, the Local Development Plan.

**Outcomes:**

- Noted.

**5. Assessment of Work Programme Items.**

**Documents Considered:**

- Overview.
- New items to be considered for inclusion in the work programme – 5 items.
- Feedback on current reviews in progress.

**Issues Discussed:**

- New items for inclusion in the work programme:
  - Car Parking in Brecon – rescore to 46 / 87.
  - Dyslexia Provision – report to be presented to the People Scrutiny Committee.
  - County Council as a Landlord – Rescore to 34 / 87 and report to be presented to Environment, Infrastructure and Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee.
  - Security in Schools – Internal Audit Manager to include this in audit work for shared campuses – to be undertaken on an individual school basis. Rescore to 27 / 87. Significant issues to be reported back to Joint Chairs Steering Group.
  - Support Services – ICT – rescore to 52 / 87.
- Overview – need to reposition items following the rescoring exercise.
- Section 106 agreements – this was to be discussed with the Portfolio Holder at the Environment, Infrastructure and Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair has subsequently spoken to the Head of Planning and there are wider issues which could affect future policies. It was questioned as to whether scrutiny should be looking at affordable housing as part of the Council's LDP process which might assist the Council in relation to affordable housing provision. The Affordable Housing Partnership was working on the strategy for affordable housing. There was concern that poorly drafted S106 agreements were affecting smaller properties.

- Updates:
  - The Steering Group was disappointed that the review group relating to Job Evaluation had not commenced, and it was questioned as to whether the review was necessary or not.
  - Audit and Adult Social Care Reviews of the budget – there was concern that this could lead to the potential duplication of work. It was therefore agreed that the Adult Social Care Working Group would deal with the Adult Social Care Budget issues and that the Audit Committee be invited to send 2 representatives to the Adult Social Care Working Group meeting which would be considering the issue.
  - Estyn Review Group – to be called the Education Working Group from March, 2013 – will be monitoring the delivery of the business plan.
  - Adult Social Care Review – interim report to be prepared in March.
  - CRB – to be completed in March.
  - Community Pooled Equipment – report to be presented to Cabinet in March.
  - Cultural Services Working Group – will be considering the Youth Strategy.
  - Corporate Parenting – report has been prepared – group will become the Children's Services Review Group.
  - Internal Audit Working Group – a number of reports have been considered by the Working Group. Officers and Portfolio Holders to be invited to the next meeting to respond to questions. The Group has agreed to follow through previous recommendations until matters have been resolved.

**Outcomes:**

- Scores to be amended as indicated.
- Overview report to be amended.

**6. Discussion with Chief Executive regarding Potential Scrutiny Items.**

As the Chief Executive had presented his apologies this item was deferred.

**7. Good Scrutiny? Good Question! – Wales Audit Office Scrutiny Improvement Study.**

**Issues Discussed:**

- The Council's Peer Review Learning Team had undertaken 1 visit to Rhondda Cynon Taff Council and would visit again on 11<sup>th</sup> March to meet their scrutiny chairs and view another scrutiny committee meeting. Carmarthenshire's Peer Review Learning Team would be viewing the People Scrutiny Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> March.

**Outcomes:**

- Noted.

**8. Local Service Board – feedback from Scrutiny Chair(s) attending meeting.**

There had been no recent meetings of the LSB.

**9. Dates for next meetings.**

- 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 2013
- 26<sup>th</sup> April, 2013
- 24<sup>th</sup> May, 2013
- 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2013
- 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2013
- 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2013
- 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2013
- 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2013

**Outcomes:**

- Officers to consider rearranging the 22<sup>nd</sup> March meeting date.

**10. LSB Meeting Dates.**

- 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2013
- 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2013
- 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2013
- 8<sup>th</sup> October, 2013

**County Councillor W.T. Jones  
Chair**