

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

2nd August 2013 – COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS

**PRESENT:** County Councillors R.G. Thomas (Chair).  
County Councillors A W Davies, Mrs S Davies, E M Jones and J G Morris

**Officers:**

Nick Philpott (Director – Change and Governance), Peter Jones (Programme Office Manager), Clive Pinney (Council Solicitor), Lisa Richards

**In attendance:** County Councillors D Jones, Miss M Davies and Mrs M R Harris

**1. Vice-Chair**

County Councillor Mrs S Davies was elected Vice Chair for the ensuing year.

**2. Apologies**

County Councillors Maureen Mackenzie and Wynne Jones, Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager), Jeremy Patterson (Chief Executive) and Liz Patterson (Scrutiny Officer).

**3. Notes of Last Meeting**

**Documents Considered:**

- 14 June 2013

**Outcomes:**

- Received

**4. Annual Improvement Report**

**Documents Considered:**

- Evidence Grids (PEGs)

**Issues Discussed:**

- 11 challenge sessions had been held to ensure the Powys Change Plan (PCP) is more robust and address concerns raised by WAO over PCP 2012-15
- 271 challenges – 177 put to Portfolio Holders for response
- The better the Plan the easier to evaluate
- Continuous improvement needed - It was queried whether continuous improvement could be maintained in the current financial climate – realistic plans had to be set. The work which has been carried out recently will feed the preparation of the new Plan in the autumn. It was essential to focus on outcomes and benefits and what is valuable to the organisation. Over ambitious targets could not be set.
- PCP 2013-16 has been more favourably received following previous challenge
- The Programme Office will be proactive in obtaining responses from Portfolio Holders within two weeks
- A Performance Report will be developed from information and challenges contained in the PEGs – a draft will be forwarded to Management Team, Cabinet and Joint Chairs Steering Group during September.

- Lessons learned included briefing Members more clearly at the start of the process to ensure clarity and to link activity to success measures
- The Plan was available electronically and in main council offices and libraries. Only 150 hard copies had been produced – including one copy for every Member. It has been found that including messages in Red Kite is more effective

**Outcomes:**

- The Programme Office Manager's appreciation of the work undertaken by Performance Officers be recorded
- The PEGs be approved for distribution to Portfolio Holders

**5. Draft Powys Change Plan**

**Documents Considered:**

- Challenge and Feedback Tracker (4 April 2013)
- Extract – Notes of Joint Chairs meeting 24 May 2013

**Issues Discussed:**

- Concern had been raised at a previous meeting that not all changes suggested by Joint Chairs had been adopted and it was thought that some key areas had been missed particularly in relation to Adult Social Care and Regeneration
- The Leader acknowledged that there were long standing issues in both service areas. A new Strategic Director and two new Heads of Service were in post and there had been a change in portfolios. The new Strategic Director had demonstrated how Children's Services had been improved to be more responsive to both clients and Regulators whilst managing costs. It was hoped that this same challenge and direction in Adult Social Care will bring forward improvements.
- The Leader had not been convinced that there was a real willingness to deliver savings or restructurings. This was also happening in other areas of the Council. Decisions were being made on the basis that some areas could generate profit, and the Leader was not convinced that this was happening. He felt that these were areas where Scrutiny could be involved to ensure issues were addressed much earlier. A further example given was reablement where there had been a significant cost shift. The Leader hoped that Scrutiny would be able to confirm that the overall budget was the same albeit moved between cost centres. It was not possible for Cabinet members to go into great depth on all the details
- Pre-scrutiny was thought to be beneficial prior to decisions being taken. The Leader hoped to reach this position.
- One comment within the Plan suggested that the biggest cause for concern amongst young people was the lack of public toilets – however in meetings with the Powys Youth Forum, the main issue raised with the Leader was the lack of public transport.
- Another area for Scrutiny to consider would be the moving of day centres to other buildings – scrutiny could assess whether the project was progressing as it should and whether the savings identified would be delivered.
- There were concerns that the new Strategic Director would be overloaded and Children's Services may be affected. A vigorous appointment process had been undertaken and the role of Director would cover both service areas
- Although Scrutiny could point out weaknesses the final decision lay with Cabinet

- At the most recent Cabinet meeting an item had been included on the agenda regarding the new campus in Brecon. The Cabinet had not seen the strategic outline case for the project which was worth £75M. The Leader had sight of the document the day before the Cabinet and found it lacking. Furthermore the County Farms Estate had been highlighted for another scrutiny review but a Consultant had been appointed to carry forward a Welsh Government pilot study. There were serious concerns regarding some aspects of the running of the Estate and a review should not wait 2 years. It was now too late to inform the appointment process. The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration would like to attend the Internal Audit Working Group and asked that the information currently available be forwarded to her for information. The project was a Wales wide project and the Portfolio Holder intended to establish a Board to monitor progress. It was not practical that scrutiny members could attend all Programme Boards and strong governance was required.
- Pre scrutiny must not become policy making as this responsibility lay with the Cabinet. Scrutiny must assess the impacts of policies but should not be relied upon to address operational matters
- Further concerns were raised that scrutiny should not become involved in operational matters or become too close to the service and restrict their objectivity or impinge on the level of challenge.
- The Portfolio Holder for Care reported on the positive feedback from the ACRF framework and suggested that this could be used as a way forward in other areas to benefit both scrutiny and the service. She expressed concern that many of the challenges were in fact typing errors, and whilst welcome to correct the final document, were not helpful in the process. Pre scrutiny would be useful but training was required for both Cabinet and Scrutiny to set parameters and expectations to ensure lines are not blurred. It was the duty of a Portfolio Holder to be assured that areas are accountable. It was acknowledged that better systems needed to be in place in some cases. She expressed concern that some areas may be over-scrutinized and there may be a tendency to 'policy make' rather than scrutinize
- The Director of Change and Governance was satisfied that the meeting demonstrated that scrutiny was improving. He accepted that not all challenges would be included but was satisfied that the challenge was being made. There were three areas– the Plan itself, Implementation and Result. It was thought Scrutiny could usefully challenge the Plan and Result but the value of scrutinizing the implementation was questionable. Work must be targeted to address the most valuable areas. Plans need to be progressed more rapidly and innovation should not be stifled. It was impossible to get everything right and it would be unhelpful if the Authority became too risk averse.
- There was a need for more honesty in setting targets and it must be clear what the indicator is reporting. This was also a cultural issue where officers may not be able to admit to difficulties. The system must identify these areas. There must also be a distance maintained between scrutiny and management

#### **Outcomes:**

- Information gathered by Internal Audit Working Group to be forwarded to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration
- Future challenge should be separated into substantive items and typographical errors.
- The Cabinet will request pre scrutiny on items
- Training for Cabinet and Scrutiny members on pre scrutiny
- ACRF format to be adopted

- Plan to be issued earlier for comment/challenge to enable greater interaction

## **6. Joint Scrutiny Committees**

### **Issues Discussed:**

- Growing requirement for collaboration with lack of control or direction
- Many collaborative meetings held at all levels with a variety of different arrangements
- No overview
- Role for scrutiny in developing governance for such meetings
- Clear understanding needed of where collaboration would work best
- A Wales wide approach would be helpful

### **Outcomes:**

- A mapping exercise of existing partnerships would be undertaken and reported back to Joint Chairs

## **7. Environment, Infrastructure and Crime and Disorder Committee.**

This item was taken in conjunction with item 5 above and reiterated some of the comments made above. Scrutiny should not just attend to 'tick boxes'. There needed to be further debate regarding the level of involvement of scrutiny in some areas. Further work need to be undertaking on accessing project documentation and information should be obtained that way. Scrutiny should not become involved in operational issues and must be sufficiently removed to remain objective.

### **Outcomes:**

- A presentation would be made to a future meeting on the system for accessing Programme Board information
- Appropriate levels of scrutiny to be discussed at a future meeting

## **8. Potential Items for Assessment of Reviews**

### **Issues Discussed:**

- Buildings and land declared surplus
- A strategic overview required rather than leave it to individual departments
- Review of office accommodation to assess whether there is a reduction in allocation of office accommodation/space and the impact this might have on sickness and absence. A review of office accommodation is underway on a geographic basis and any consideration of a review should be deferred

### **Outcomes:**

- The issue of a Policy on Disposals be referred to Environment Infrastructure and Crime and Disorder Committee for review

## **9. CfPS Regional Scrutiny Seminars**

### **Issues Discussed:**

- CfPS Regional Scrutiny Seminar, LSB Conference and Joint Chairs are all scheduled for 20 September 2013

**Outcomes:**

- Joint Chairs to be rearranged
- Councillors R G Thomas and W T Jones to attend the LSB Conference
- Councillors A W Davies, Mrs S Davies and E M Jones to attend the CfPS Scrutiny Seminar in Llanelli

**10. Dates of future meetings**

- 20 September 2013 (to be changed)
- 23 October 2013
- 29 November 2013
- 24<sup>th</sup> January, 2014
- 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2014
- 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2014
- 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2014
- 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2014.
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**11. LSB Meeting Dates**

- 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2013 (Conference)
- 8<sup>th</sup> October, 2013
- 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2013
- 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2013

**County Councillor R.G. Thomas  
Chair**