

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

7th OCTOBER 2013 – THE PAVILION, LLANDRINDOD WELLS

PRESENT: County Councillors R.G. Thomas (Chair).

County Councillors W.T. Jones, Mrs M Mackenzie, A W Davies, J.G. Morris, and Mrs S Davies.

Also In Attendance: County Councillor D.R. Jones (Leader)

Officers:

Jeremy Patterson (Chief Executive), David Powell (Strategic Director – Resources), Peter Jones (Programme Office Manager), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager) Liz Patterson and Lisa Richards (Scrutiny Officers).

1. Apologies

County Councillor E.M Jones, Clive Pinney (Council Solicitor), Nick Philpott (Director – Change and Governance), Sue Simpson (Partnership and Policy Manager)

2. Notes of Last Meeting

Documents Considered:

- 2nd August, 2013

Issues Discussed:

- Question from the Portfolio Holder for Care regarding the accuracy of the comment which was recorded in the notes. Members provided the context of the discussion which led to the comment which was felt to be accurately recorded.
- County Farms Estate – a Working Group comprising Members of the Audit Working Group and the Environment, Infrastructure and Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee should undertake the review.

Outcomes:

- Notes Received
- Joint Review Group to be established to review the County Farms Estate.

3. Annual Improvement Report

Documents Considered:

- Annual Performance Report (version 9)
- Response to scrutiny comments arising from consideration of the Information Grids by scrutiny Members.

Issues Discussed:

- The comments provided by scrutiny had in the main been accepted by services and portfolio holders, and had been included in the next version of the report. Scrutiny had been far more involved in this part of the process than previously involving a wider number of Members.

- It was anticipated that regulators would continue to be critical that there were no baselines in the report against which services would be able to demonstrate improvement.
- Where performance data had been removed in the report the revised report indicated where data was not included.
- Some comments related to formatting. There were 108 other comments and 80% of these had been positively received. Some of the comments were not included but would influence the development of the next One Powys Plan.

Outcomes:

- **That a copy of version 10 of the report be circulated to the Joint Chairs for members to comment by 10th October at the latest.**

4. Wales Scrutiny Officers' Network.

Documents Considered:

- None.

Outcomes:

- **The Joint Chairs asked that their congratulations to Wyn Richards on being elected as Chair of the Scrutiny Officers' Network be recorded.**

5. Welsh Government Consultation Document – Designated Persons Order.

Documents Considered:

- Report of the Interim Head of Democratic Services to the Democratic Services Committee.
- Welsh Government Consultation Document – Designated Persons Order (Number 1)

Issues Discussed:

- Local Service Board will need to be scrutinised, a process which has started in Powys.
- The National Park should be included in the first order as there are links between the Council and the National Park e.g. in relation to regeneration.
- Registered Social Landlords should be included due to Welfare Reforms / Affordable Housing.
- Support for Members undertaking such scrutiny was a concern. The Council should use other organisations such as Community Health Councils to assist in the scrutiny of health.
- Need to ensure that organisations are not overburdened by scrutiny.
- The non designation of Town and Community Councils was supported.
- The provisions for Local Health Boards does not take account of cross border links to other Health Boards in England even though Powys Health Board contract with these other Health Boards in England and Powys receive these services over the border.
- The question was raised whether One Voice Wales should be designated rather than Town and Community Councils.
- Need to take regional working into account in these arrangements and probably will need greater joint working between councils.

Outcomes:

- **Draft response to be prepared and circulated to the Joint Chairs and Vice-Chairs for comment prior to submission.**

6. Powys County Council Improvement Assessment Letter..**Documents Considered:**

- Letter from Wales Audit Office 27th September, 2013 – Improvement Assessment.

Issues Discussed:

- This was more positive than previous comments. However there were some challenges ahead.
- Targets and Objectives – Wales Audit Office wanted targets and objectives changed as time moves on, but then critical if the Council kept changing targets and could not measure those objectives. However targets do change as matters develop – however the Council is aware that targets need to be measurable which is a subject on which scrutiny has commented previously.
- New Operating Model – difficult times are ahead and the Council will need to work through this.
- The challenge now is for the Council to maintain the improvement.
- The Council needs to be more honest about how things develop and scrutiny is assisting this process. It also needs to be recognised that when changes happen not all of it will work and there is a need to focus on learning points rather than being negative.

Outcomes:

- **Letter received and positive comments welcomed.**

7. Improving Governance.**Documents Considered:**

- Presentation – Progressing Transformation and Cost Improvement.
- National Welsh Scrutiny Officers Network – Outcomes and Characteristics of effective local government scrutiny.
- WLGA – Welsh Local Leadership Academy – Scrutiny of Finance.
- WLGA – Scrutiny of Budgets and the Budget Setting Process.

Issues Discussed:

- The 4 projects will replace the Council element of the change plan. It will also take forward the move to the new operational model with a flatter structure. The projects will be led by a Director / Strategic Director as follows:
 - Strategic Planning and Performance Improvement Framework – Nick Philpott.
 - Service Commissioning Design and Rollout – Amanda Lewis
 - Operating Model Implementation – Paul Griffiths
 - Cost Improvement – David Powell
- The council is currently at Step 2 i.e. preparation of the Statement of Intent. The Council will have a better picture about its situation by the end of October and the Statement of Intent will be prepared by the end of November which Joint Chairs can consider at its meeting on 29th November.

- PAVO is involved in the development of the One Powys Plan as a member of the Local Service Board.
- Members need to have a greater involvement in scrutinising the Annual Governance Statement. This was to be the case for the next version in 2014. In 2013 due to staffing changes there were difficulties in preparing the statement in sufficient time for scrutiny to have the required involvement in the process.
- In relation to the budget the potential financial reduction for the Council could be up to 5%. The Census showed that the population of Powys had reduced by 6000 people which will affect the Council's baseline financial figure. In addition there was a reduction in numbers of pupils attending high schools which would also affect the Council's baseline. There was a likelihood that Social Care and Education budgets would be protected.
- Scrutiny needs to look at the implications of the cutbacks from a global perspective. There would be a need to ensure that equalities impact assessments were undertaken of budget proposals.
- In scrutinising budgets and the budget setting process, scrutiny would need to work at a strategic level i.e. on what basis had the budget been drawn up, what was the impact on other services of proposed cutbacks. The political groups would look at the specific detail in the budgets and make proposals for alternatives.
- Characteristics of effective scrutiny considered to be appropriate. These would be used as the basis for the preparation of the action plan to improve scrutiny following the review of scrutiny in Wales by the Wales Audit Office. There would be a need to discuss the characteristics with the Scrutiny and Audit Committees, the Cabinet and the management Team to ensure that there was sign up to the way forward.
- Public Engagement by scrutiny was an area of weakness which would need to be addressed by the Council.

Outcomes:

- **Scrutiny Manager and Programme Office manager to draw up timelines for key scrutiny involvement in the business planning cycle.**
- **Information from the Joint Needs Assessment and factors which will determine the basis on which the Statement of Intent is prepared to be presented to the Joint Chairs on 25th October.**
- **The Draft Statement of Intent to be discussed at the Joint Chairs meeting on 29th November, prior to consideration by the Cabinet on 3rd December.**
- **Joint Chairs to take a strategic overview of the budget and budget setting process rather than the detail of individual budgets.**
- **That the characteristics of effective scrutiny be used as the basis for developing the action plan for improving scrutiny.**
- **That the characteristics of effective scrutiny be discussed with the Scrutiny and Audit Committees, the Cabinet and the Management Team.**

8. Centre for Public Scrutiny Events.

Documents Considered:

- None

Issues Discussed:

- Regional Scrutiny Seminar 2 – Evidence based budget scrutiny – Friday 6th December, 2013 – Diplomat Hotel, Llanelli

Outcomes:

- **County Councillors Aled Davies, Wynne Jones and Maureen Mackenzie attend.**

9. Dates of future meetings

- 25 October 2013
- 29 November 2013
- 24 January 2014
- 21 March 2014
- 16 May 2014
- 18 July 2014
- 19 September 2014
- 14 November 2014

10. LSB Meeting Dates

- 16 January, 2014
- 13 February, 2014
- 13 March, 2014
- 12 June 2014
- 25 September 2014
- 11 December 2014

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