

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

21 MARCH 2014 – THE CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS

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

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

Officers:

David Powell (Strategic Director – Resources), Paul Griffiths (Strategic Director – Place), Nick Philpott (Director – Change and Governance), Clive Pinney (Solicitor to the Council), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager), Lisa Richards (Scrutiny Officer), Dominique Jones (Senior Manager, Organisational Development and Partnership Support), John Evans (Communications Manager).

1. Apologies

County Councillors - County Councillor T. Turner.

Officers – Jeremy Patterson (Chief Executive), Liz Patterson (Scrutiny Officer).

2. Notes of Last Meeting

Documents Considered:

- 14th February, 2014
- Feedback report on the Joint Chairs Comments relating to the draft One Powys Plan.

Issues Discussed:

- Feedback report by Dominique Jones and Peter Jones on the Joint Chairs comments relating to the One Powys Plan.
- Of the 36 challenges made by the Joint Chairs, 67% had been accepted and changes made to the document which was an improvement on the previous year. 14% related to issues which had now been withdrawn from the Plan and the challenges referred back to Heads of Service for consideration in developing their Service Improvement Plans. 11% had been rejected and the reasons why given. 8% were outstanding for consideration.
- Recommendation 1 – The Council is ambitious in what it is trying to achieve and the language in the Plan has been changed to reflect more of a Local Service Board (LSB) plan but also showing what the Council is seeking to achieve. There is a sign up from other partners to move their own corporate plans to a single integrated plan.
- The move to single integrated plans is the direction of travel across Wales, with Powys being ahead of the requirements of the Local Government Measure. Wales Audit Office will continue to want to see an audit of the Council's performance rather than the LSB.
- Other partners on the LSB continue to have their own corporate plans. However the current One Powys Plan still has to communicate the Council's priorities. In future years it will be more of a joint vision. Powys Local Health Board has indicated that it would be content for the integrated elements of its 3 year plan to be governed under the LSB arrangements.
- An accountability framework will be produced for the One Powys Plan and 5 Programme Boards established to monitor the implementation of the Plan.

- A further version of the Plan including baseline data and targets to be emailed to the Joint Chairs for further comments prior to the draft Plan being considered by the Cabinet.

Outcomes:

- **Received.**
- **A revised version of the Plan to be emailed to the Joint Chairs for any further comments to be made to the Cabinet.**

3. Draft Scrutiny Development Action Plan arising from the Wales Audit Office Review of Scrutiny in Wales.

Documents Considered:

- Draft Action Plan from the Scrutiny Manager.

Issues Discussed:

- Outcomes and Characteristics previously agreed by Joint Chairs. Indicators being revised by the Wales Scrutiny Officers' Network.
- Question regarding whether there was too much to deliver and did the actions need prioritisation.
- Was there a need for a pilot to look at multi agency scrutiny and scrutiny of the Local Service Board (LSB) and how public services were delivering their services?
- Need for an element regarding communications e.g. press releases and better communications with other Members.
- Resourcing of scrutiny – need to revisit the support being provided to scrutiny.
- Possible Scrutiny Development Fund bid for the training of officers / research.
- Improved researching of information for Members – how does scrutiny take account of the public's views when undertaking scrutiny work.
- Scrutiny of last year's budget consultation process and how this could be improved.
- Joint Chairs would undertake the monitoring of the implementation of the Action Plan.

Outcomes:

- **Draft Action Plan Received.**
- **Action Plan to be revisited – prioritisation of actions.**

4. Issues Referred from the Environment, Infrastructure and Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee.

Documents Considered:

- Revised Media Scrutiny Protocol

Issues Discussed:

- Need for scrutiny of major developments such as the withdrawal of the Red Kite magazine. Concern that moving to different ways of providing information may not be as effective as the Red Kite magazine was. No guarantee that 100% of the press release issued being printed.
- Wales Improvement Measure requires a Council to demonstrate that it communicates and consults with the public on a regular basis which was why

Red Kite was started. Other authorities generally do house to house delivery of papers on a monthly or annual basis. Only Powys and Ceredigion do not produce their own papers.

- Good pre-decision scrutiny needs co-operation with the Cabinet. An example was the withdrawal of funding for theatres which would be subject to scrutiny to assess the impact of the proposals.
- Cabinet needs more resources of its own for pre-decision scrutiny e.g. for budget proposals.
- Need for the Cabinet to be more proactive in relation to pre-decision scrutiny.
- Concern regarding the volume of work and the need for better work programming of items e.g. work identified by the Audit Committee to come to scrutiny.
- Protocol for attendance of Portfolio Holders at scrutiny committees – protocol is that if there is a relevant item on an agenda the Portfolio Holder can be invited to the meeting. It is for the Chair to decide who attends the meeting.
- Revised Media Protocol considered.
 - Page 3 – “Who speaks on behalf of scrutiny?” – Paragraph 3 – amend last sentence to read “They will not be subject to vetting or veto by Cabinet Members.”
 - Page 3 – “Who speaks on behalf of scrutiny?” – Paragraph 4 – amend sentence to read “News releases or media statements may include a cabinet member comment with the knowledge of the Scrutiny Chair and...”.
 - Page 3 – “Scrutiny meetings and media” – Paragraph 2 – delete “significant” in second line of sentence.

Outcomes:

- **Revised Media Protocol agreed subject to the inclusion of the amendments outlined above.**

5. Assessments of Work Programme Items.

Documents Considered:

- Overview Report.
- Assessment Form – National Estate Agents Enforcement Function.
- Assessment Form – Council Procurement and Commissioning Process.

Issues Discussed:

- Need to add further information in relation to the Audit Committee’s Working Groups.
- National Estate Agents Enforcement Function – no need for a review. The People Scrutiny Committee will be receiving an information briefing regarding the service.
- Council Procurement and Commissioning Process – the Environment, Infrastructure and Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee decided not to take part in this review. It was suggested that representatives from the Audit Committee should be invited to take part in the review. The Chair of the Environment, Infrastructure and Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee could be invited onto the review group as a member of the Audit Committee.
- Financial viability of schools – the People Scrutiny Committee’s Education Review Group would continue to look at this, but could invite members of the Audit Committee to participate in this element of its work.

- The Strategic Director – Resources was to commission work to look at the Council’s risks.

Outcomes:

- **Audit Committee to identify representatives to take part in the review of the Council Procurement and Commissioning Process.**
- **National Estate Agents Enforcement Function – no need for a review**

6. Discussion with the Chief Executive, Strategic Directors / Director regarding Potential Scrutiny Items.

Documents Considered:

- None.

Issues Discussed:

- The Audit Committee would be considering the Medium Term Financial Plan, its underlying assumptions and the way in which it had been constructed.

Outcomes:

- **Noted.**

7. Public Participation.

Documents Considered:

- None.

Issues Discussed:

- Resource is an issue. However scrutiny needs to start to do this.
- A People Scrutiny Committee Review Group is currently undertaking a review of the EBooks service and asking the public’s views on their use of EBooks could be used as a test for public participation in scrutiny.
- Should there be a website for scrutiny?
- A sub-group of the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees, the Scrutiny Manager and Sue Glenn from the Communications Section to meet to discuss the way forward.
- The question was raised as to how to reach the hard to reach groups and it was suggested that perhaps PAVO could undertake such consultations on behalf of the Council.
- Constitution – it was suggested that scrutiny chairs should have the right to speak at Cabinet meetings on items relevant to scrutiny.

Outcomes:

- **The sub-group referred to above to meet to discuss the way forward.**
- **The Working Group revising the Constitution to consider an amendment so that scrutiny chairs would have the right to speak at Cabinet meetings where items relevant to scrutiny were considered.**

8. Local Service Board.

Documents Considered:

- None.

Issues Discussed:

- Last meeting was to discuss the One Powys Plan.
- Need to look at the outcomes as to why the scrutiny chairs attend these meetings.
- Future joint work with the Powys Local Health Board – the Chief Executive and Strategic Director – Resources were in discussion with the Powys Local Health Board about future joint working.

Outcomes:

- **Noted.**

9. Dates of future meetings

- 16th May, 2014
- 18th July, 2014
- 19th September, 2014
- 14th November, 2014

10. LSB Meeting Dates

- 12th June, 2014
- 25th September, 2014
- 11th December, 2014

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