

NOTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHAIRS AND VICE-CHAIRS OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES AND THE STANDARDS AND AUDIT COMMITTEES HELD AT COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS ON FRIDAY 3RD SEPTEMBER 2010

PRESENT: County Councillor J G Morris. (Chair)
County Councillors D. Price, J. H. Brunt, A W Davies, Mrs S C Davies, G. Morgan, Mrs K Roberts-Jones, Mrs D. G. Thomas and Independent Member P. Swanson.

Officers in Attendance: Jeremy Patterson (Chief Executive), Cliff Shields (Director Performance, Partnerships and Communication), Paul Griffiths (Strategic Director Communities, Skills and Learning), Caroline Byrt (Interim Strategic Director Care and Well-Being), Clarence Meredith (Strategic Director Law and Governance), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Services Manager), Lisa Richards (Senior Committee Clerk) and Liz Patterson (Committee Clerk).

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs J Shearer and L. R. E. Davies.

2. Notes of Last Meeting

The notes of the last meeting held on 14th June 2010 were received

3. To discuss with the Management Team

i) Scrutiny and the Powys Change Programme

The Powys Change Programme sets out the Council's programme of improvement and efficiency priorities for the next four years. There are four improvement priorities and six efficiency priorities to effect the £16million savings the Council will have to make over the next 4 years. The priorities are:-

Improvement Priorities

- Adult Living
- Learning in the Community
- Regeneration
- Climate Change

Efficiency Priorities

- Processes
- ICT
- Workforce
- Support Services
- Assets
- Regulation

Each of these priorities will be led by a Portfolio Holder who will be accountable to fellow Portfolio Holders.

The Welsh Assembly Government has placed a duty on local authorities to produce a Community Strategy. In Powys this is undertaken by the Local Service Board which has set up five thematic partnerships:-

- A Healthy Powys - Health, Social Care and Well Being
- A Learning Powys - Lifelong Learning
- A Prosperous Powys - Regeneration
- A Green Powys - Environment
- A Safe Powys - Community Safety

The Council is in the process of setting up a Shared Services agreement with Ceredigion relating to Engineering, Transport and Property Services. This would involve a Joint Board and would also require a Joint Scrutiny Committee. The Scrutiny Services Manager indicated that his expectation was that any items subject to scrutiny under the Joint Scrutiny arrangement would not be scrutinised at individual authority level.

Scrutiny Issues:

In the past scrutiny has tended to scrutinise officers rather than portfolio holders. Historically apart from the Principal Scrutiny Committee the committees developed from service committees and this has led to some difficulties in undertaking scrutiny. With the current proposals from Council to move to a Leader and Cabinet Model in 2011 (or a requirement by the WAG to cease operating the 4th Option by 2012) it would make sense to introduce changes to the scrutiny committees concurrently with any change in political arrangements implemented in May 2011 or 2012.

Scrutiny Committees will remain politically balanced in a Leader and Cabinet arrangement.

The current workload between the Committees is unbalanced with People Committee covering a huge area including Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Education and Leisure and Recreation.

The matter of Co-opted Members was raised with the imbalance on People Committee of having a potential of 7 co-opted members on a committee of 15. The wide remit of the People Committee meant that the Education Co-opted Members were covering areas other than their intended role.

The Joint Chairs Committee has been an extremely useful forum and could have an extended role in the new structure.

Options for future scrutiny committees include:-

- Scrutinise each of the Powys Change Programme Priorities
- Scrutinise the LSB and each of the 5 Thematic Partnerships
- Include a Joint Chairs Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise cross cutting areas.

Note there is no requirement under amended political arrangements to have a Principal Scrutiny Committee.

ii) Identification and Prioritisation of Scrutiny Work/Reviews

The Management Team suggested how they saw scrutiny assisting in the aims of Powys County Council:

- By scrutinising the Powys Change Programme resources will be focussed on what Powys is trying to achieve and this will support the organisation when subject to Wales Audit Office reviews looking at achievement of objectives.
- Scrutiny needs to be appropriate and sufficiently timely to be of assistance to the process. It should not just block decisions which are unpopular.
- There will be insufficient capacity to be able to undertake reviews which are not directly relating to the aims of the Council.
- The critical friend element is valuable challenging the way problems are intended to be solved
- Scrutiny has a role examining the balance between efficiencies and improvement.
- It is necessary to ensure that the balance between scrutiny and the Board was correct with the Board being the decision makers.
- Some form of benefits analysis was needed when prioritising matters for scrutiny.
- Scrutiny Members working with officers in the Change Programmes.

iii) Structure of Scrutiny Committees

A meeting was arranged for 17th September 2010 for the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Committees to examine potential options for the structure of scrutiny committees.

iv) Lead Officers

Chairs expressed concern that their requests for Lead Officers were being rejected. The Strategic Director confirmed that those who had undertaken the role had enjoyed the experience but that it was necessary to target reviews to ensure that they related to the Council's aims.

4. Allocation of Work/Work Programmes

(i) Board

Since the Chair had written to the Board Chair there had been an improvement in the range of items identified on the Board Work Programme. Some areas were still not showing because the decisions were taken in a different forum. For example, Children's Services and Adult Services decisions are taken at the Social Services Steering Group and therefore scrutiny have no method of identifying the work programme for these areas.

Action

The Chair to write to the Chair of Board asking for a meeting to discuss the Board Work Programme.

(ii) Scrutiny Committees

Principal Scrutiny and Crime and Disorder Committee

No issues raised.

Corporate Governance Scrutiny Committee

There are problems with getting the new performance information. This matter to be discussed at the meeting on 17th September.

People Scrutiny Committee

Ty Gwyn is ongoing. Some items might slip due to late receipt of Inspection Reports.

Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee

The Committee is at saturation point. Four reviews were being undertaken. Members were sending problems to the Scrutiny Chairs and expecting them to be addressed.

Audit Committee

No issues raised.

(iii) Chairs and Vice Chairs

The attendance of Management Team had been valuable and it was requested that this could become a regular event.

(iv) Standards

No issues raised.

Members commented on the need to review the timetable of scrutiny meetings as they were currently scheduled too close together.

5. Powys Teaching Local Health Board Merger update

At Council on 2nd September 2010 it was agreed to bring together the post of Chief Executive of the Local Health Board with the post of Strategic Director Care and Well-Being at Powys County Council. Much of the work undertaken in the area of social care was duplicated to a greater or lesser extent between the two bodies and there were clear advantages in bring the two areas together. This is a pilot project and work is ongoing producing the Service Level Agreement, Memorandum of understanding and financial arrangements to ensure that if this project does not deliver the expected benefits it will be possible to extricate Powys from the pilot with limited financial or political fallout. Work had commenced on shadow working with an expectation the pilot would formally commence in November with a 9 month review.

It would be necessary to agree governance arrangements including scrutiny arrangements and it may be appropriate for joint scrutiny to work with an existing Health Board equivalent for example the Clinical Governance Committee.

The Joint Project Board was also likely to be reconfigured to include Board Members rather than Scrutiny Members.

6. Paperless Committees

The Chair of Regeneration advised that the last two Committees had been run electronically accessing the agenda via the Members' Portal. An email was sent to Committee Members with a link to the Members' Portal which when Members log in will allow access to confidential documents. Two Members had requested paper copies of the agenda which had been provided. Additionally the agenda and documents were projected onto a screen in committee. This was undertaken by a volunteer Member as neither the Clerk or Chair could undertake this role.

A number of issues were raised including that co-opted Members on Standards and People Committees do not have laptops to access electronic papers and the difficulty of Chairs managing a meeting with only an electronic agenda. This could be overcome by printing the agenda but viewing the papers electronically. Planning Committee had found that the issues that they dealt with were not suitable for viewing electronically. Some Members will always wish to receive paper copies but accessing agendas through the Members' portal would produce substantial savings.

7. Items for the next meeting 28th October 2010 – 10.00am

A Joint Scrutiny Chairs meeting to be held on 17th September 2010 to discuss potential structures for Scrutiny Committees from May 2011.