

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 MONDAY 6TH DECEMBER 2010

PRESENT: County Councillor J G Morris. (Chair)
County Councillors J. H. Brunt, A W Davies, D. Price, Mrs K Roberts-Jones, and Independent Members R. Miller and P. Swanson.

Officers in Attendance: Janet Kealey (Interim Head of Legal and Democratic Services), Steve Holdaway (Head of Local and Environmental Services), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Services Manager), Lisa Richards (Senior Committee Clerk), Liz Patterson (Committee Clerk).

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G. Morgan, Mrs J.G. Shearer, Mrs S C Davies, L. R. E. Davies and Mrs D. G. Thomas.

2. Notes of Last Meeting

The notes of the last meeting held on 28th October 2010 were received.

3. Joint Working between Councils.

The Head of Local and Environmental Services outlined the background to the current Joint Working with Ceredigion.

About two and a half years ago there had been concern regarding the capacity and capability to deliver the Council's asset management function especially with regard to the forthcoming school modernisation programme. Discussions were entered into with Gwynedd and Ceredigion exploring the possibility of setting up a Joint Venture Company with the private sector which would give an opportunity to move work around within the three authorities. Gwynedd were keen on this proposal whereas Ceredigion were reluctant to work with the private sector. A grant of £200,000 was given by WAG to progress the project and Deloitte and Bevan Brittan were commissioned to investigate the viability of such a proposal. However, circumstances changed with the Credit Crunch and it was deemed that a joint venture with the private sector would not be viable. The three Councils then looked to undertake a joint public sector venture but Gwynedd did not pursue this as they were looking to access external markets. An inter-authority agreement was signed between Ceredigion and Powys in November and the first Joint meeting was recently held. The two authorities are looking to deliver services on a regional basis and make joint appointments where possible. There are five areas being examined under the new committee namely Waste, Property, Transport, Engineering Operations and Engineering Strategy.

It will be necessary to set up a Joint Scrutiny Committee which will examine matters the responsibility of the Joint Committee. These will then not be matters which are the responsibility of the home scrutiny committees. Joint

Scrutiny Committees can only be constituted after the Local Measure has been implemented.

Whilst the original consideration of Shared Services had been led by capacity and capability issues (ie to share resources between Councils preventing the necessity of using consultants) the savings produced by joint working was a by product which is now the driver.

4. Scrutiny Structures.

It was confirmed that the Constitution Working Group is examining the potential structures and will report to Principal Scrutiny Committee. The paper will then go to the Political Group Leaders before being considered by Full Council.

The details of the allocation of Chairs and Joint Chairs on scrutiny committees across Wales was made available. Members were of the opinion that Chairs should be appointed on a political balance basis. Members were also asked for comments on the suggested names and remits of the four scrutiny committees, post May 2011.

Members were advised that there are at present spaces for 7 co-optees on the People Scrutiny Committee (2 Faith representatives and 5 Parent Governor Representatives). On a Committee of 15 this was felt to be over representation of co-optees. No other Welsh authority had 5 Parent Governor Representatives and the most common number was 2. The Constitution Working Group would also be examining the number of co-optees. The suggestion to reduced the number of Parent Governor Representatives to 3 based on 1 per Shire was supported.

5. Allocation of Work/Work Programmes

(i) Board

The Schools Modernisation Paper would be discussed at Board on 7th December. A request had been made for Principal Scrutiny Committee to examine the paper but this request had been rejected on the basis that no decisions had been made at this time.

(ii) Scrutiny Committees

Principal Scrutiny and Crime and Disorder Committee

The Committee had received information on the Catering Service confirming that they had started to make a profit. The Strategic Director – Finance and Infrastructure had explained that this did not include the subsidy for Schools Meals made by the Council in the region of £1million. The Committee would respond to the Board with pointes for the Board to consider in undertaking a review of the Catering Service.

It was confirmed that Job Evaluation was continuing and the expected end date was late 2012.

Corporate Governance Scrutiny Committee

The Committee are undertaking a review of Contract Management and had been concerned to receive a bill for the cost of providing the information required from the service under review. This position was being investigated.

People Scrutiny Committee

The Chair commented that there was a continuing difficulty in getting Members to stay for the afternoon session on Committee days. At the end of the last meeting the Committee was barely quorate. The Committee has a wide ranging work load and it may be necessary to include an extra date to avoid having such a lengthy agenda again.

Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee

The same problem in retaining Members for the whole meeting as experienced by the People Committee affected this Committee. It appears to be a reflection of the regard in which Members hold scrutiny.

The Committee has a number of ongoing working groups which the Chair hopes will conclude by May as the next Chair may not wish to continue with the current issues under consideration.

Concern was expressed that Legal Officers were able to determine that Scrutiny Reviews should not contain certain statements. It was explained that the Scrutiny Services Manager and Legal Officers considered reports on the grounds of confidentiality. However, there was also a role to ensure that reports would not cause challenges against the Council. It was suggested that the stages a scrutiny report goes through is clearly outlined to include the involvement of other Officers.

Audit Committee

Neither the Chair nor the Vice-Chair were available.

(iii) Chairs and Vice Chairs

The dates for next years meeting were outlined.

(iv) Standards

No comment.

7. Powys Teaching Local Health Board Merger update

Further update to be provided at the next meeting regarding the appointment of a new Chief Executive for the Powys Teaching Local Health Board.

8. Items for the next meeting 28th January 2010 – 10.00am

Training for Members on Ffynnon was requested.

Discussion by Members regarding Performance Management Reports, the Constitution and scrutiny of Shared Services.

Meeting finished 11.30am.