

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

11th JANUARY, 2013 – COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS.

PRESENT: County Councillors W.T. Jones (Chair)

County Councillors Mrs K.S. Silk, Mrs M. Mackenzie, Mrs D. Bailey, E. Michael Jones, and A.W. Davies.

Officers:

Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager), Lisa Richards and Liz Patterson (Scrutiny Officers), Clarence Meredith (Strategic Director – Law and Governance), Geoff Petty (Strategic Director – Finance and Infrastructure), Janet Kealey (Head of Legal, Scrutiny and Democratic Services), Peter Jones (Programme Office Manager).

1. Apologies.

County Councillors J.G. Morris and Mrs S. Davies, Jeremy Patterson (Chief Executive).

2. Notes of Last Meeting.

Documents Considered:

- 6th December, 2012.

Issues Discussed:

- Item 3 – Inspection Reports. It would be useful to have a tracker of External Inspection report recommendations and significant internal inspection recommendations for Audit, Scrutiny and the Cabinet. This would provide a wider perspective and review mechanism rather than a focus based on a single service. The tracker should include information as to the responsible Cabinet member, which scrutiny committee was responsible and how recommendations were being addressed. The responsibility for monitoring the tracker would rest with the Cabinet, the Audit Committee and the Joint Chairs.
- As the Internal Audit Manager was now responsible for risk management, it was suggested that he should be invited to meetings of the Joint Chairs.

Outcomes:

- Received.
- That the Programme Office Manager develop a process and tracker for monitoring progress of external inspection recommendations and significant internal inspection recommendations.

3. Cabinet Statement of Intent.

Documents Considered:

- Cabinet Statement of Intent.

Issues Discussed:

- Document is a high level statement of intent which should be reflected in the Powys Change Plan i.e. a political manifesto.
- Document arose from a review of the Powys Change Plan giving consideration to the following subject matters:

- Financial pressures;
- One Powys Plan indicators;
- Powys Change Programme – progress and pipeline projects;
- Performance Measures – Powys Change Plan (PCP) and National Strategic (NS) / Public Accountability Measures (PAM);
- Customers' View;
- Corporate Risk Register;
- Regulators' View;
- Demographics.
- The review led onto consideration of what needs to change from now on e.g. improved working with SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises), job creation etc. The Statement of Intent provides the strategic view that has been given to services to develop in detail in the Powys Change Plan.
- The question for scrutiny is whether this is the appropriate way forward at a strategic level. The Joint Chairs expressed concern that the document lacked detail, and it was acknowledged that scrutiny should be focussing on the detailed policy in the change plan, the revised version of which would be considered by the Joint Chairs.
- Original plan was to submit the revised change plan to the Joint Chairs in late January / early February, but this timescale may have to be delayed due to the required response to budget pressures.
- The Joint Chairs considered that the document did include the right issues at a high level, but the detail would be required as to how those aims would be delivered.
- The document paints far too positive a picture as the Council is in a dire and precarious position.
- At a strategic level, the statement of intent explains what the Council is going to do. The document would improve significantly if there was greater explanation as to why the Council wants to do what it is setting out to do.
- There is some level of detail in the document e.g. £3.8m for social care although it was explained that this reflected the current level of overspend. However there was no justification for the £3.8m figure in the document and further detail would be needed.
- Variances – there will be savings following changes in the processes and could also be staff efficiencies. However there is no correlation between increasing costs and demographic changes with regard to older people.
- The figure of £30m savings required is for a 3 year period with next year's savings being £18m.
- As a strategic document this is not a wholesale change of direction and outcomes remain broadly similar, building on the current plan in light of changing circumstances. On the whole this was welcomed.
- Windfarms are included under the regeneration objectives – however if the Council's current approach does not work what is the fallback position?
- The statement does not include a comment regarding roads arising from the performance report 2011-12 which identifies road condition as an issue in Powys.
- Affordable housing and regeneration are included in the statement.
- Scrutiny will need to make sure that there is the same emphasis on areas identified in the statement of intent in the Powys Change Plan.
- Regulators want the Council to make sure that the Powys Change Plan is clear to the public and that we achieve the outcomes set within it. The Cabinet would

therefore not wish to include anything in the plan which the Council cannot address or achieve in the timescales set.

- The Cabinet statement should also recognise those areas where Powys is not doing very well such as those highlighted in the 2011-12 performance report, even though the performance report was issued after the statement of intent had been prepared. There should be recognition of the issues and the way that the Council intends to deal with it or an explanation as to why it cannot deal with it.
- Affordable housing – and where development was taking place. It was suggested that a Cabinet report in December 2012 included this information.

Outcomes:

- The Joint Chairs' view of the document was:
 - Correct issues included in the statement of intent which is a high level document.
 - The Joint Chairs look forward to the detail as set out in the Powys Change Plan and how those outcomes will be delivered.
 - The statement is too positive in its tone and not realistic of the current position in which the Council finds itself.
 - An explanation as to why the Council has selected its priorities and broad activities would improve the statement.
 - The document needs to reflect other areas where the Council is not doing very well e.g. areas identified in the performance report 2011-12.
 - The continued emphasis on previously set priorities is welcomed.

4. WAO – Annual Improvement Letter.

Documents Considered:

- WAO – Improvement Assessment Letter.

Issues Discussed:

- Cabinet considered the letter at its meeting on 8th January.
- The letter is a reflection of the annual performance report considered by the Council in October 2011 which the Joint Chairs commented on in detail.
- Discussion at Joint Chairs should be in relation to issues which need to be picked up at scrutiny committees.
- The Cabinet discussion was far too positive and not painting a realistic picture bearing in mind the position in which the Council currently finds itself.
- There is a need for scrutiny to look back at this letter on a regular basis when considering the Powys Change Plan and assessment reports.
- Concern that there is no sense of urgency in the Council. There is also a need for earlier intervention to turn issues around e.g. why are schools whose banding has dropped not been called in and held to account.
- Generally there is a need for Council documents to be more outcome based, more realistic and seen by scrutiny earlier.
- Need for the Council to take greater account of the Local Government Measure 2009 and its requirements.
- Annual Improvement Letter from the WAO will be published in February / March 2013 which will be considered by the Joint Chairs.

Outcomes:

- Noted.

5. Assessment of Work Programme Items.

Documents Considered:

- Overview.
- Feedback on current reviews in progress.

Issues Discussed:

- Scoring amended following discussion at previous meeting.
- Car Parking issue should be redefined as Brecon Car Parking and rescored.
- Welfare Reforms – should this work be started alongside the work currently being undertaken on Adult Social Care.
- School security – there are problems particularly with community schools or where sites are shared with leisure centres and securing those sites. Estyn criticises schools frequently on the basis of security without taking account of school sites which were multi purpose. Need to score this subject.
- Section 106 – issue in Montgomeryshire. Section 106 agreements for housing for local people are being challenged successfully on a regular basis leading to a loss of affordable housing. An internal review is being undertaken in the Planning Service but it has been suggested that scrutiny involvement could assist the process. It was suggested that initially the Portfolio Holder be invited to attend a scrutiny committee to explain the issues, and if the committee was not satisfied with the response then the item could be scored for a review.
- Audit Committee – there could be a need for the Finance and Performance Review Group to receive monthly finance reports to improve the monitoring of financial information.
- It was noted that more could be done to identify potential work areas by analysing the Council's annual performance reports and regulators' reports and letters.

Outcomes:

- Car Parking – Redefine as Car Parking in Brecon and rescore.
- School security – score item.
- Section 106 – Portfolio Holder to be invited to the Environment, Infrastructure and Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee.

6. Discussion with Chief Executive regarding Potential Scrutiny Items.

As the Chief Executive had presented his apologies this item was deferred.

7. Good Scrutiny? Good Question! – Wales Audit Office Scrutiny Improvement Study.

Issues Discussed:

- Arrangements being made for the Peer Review Learning Teams to visit authorities – Powys' Peer Review Learning Team will visit and assess scrutiny arrangements in Rhondda Cynon Taff Council and Carmarthenshire's team will review Powys.

Outcomes:

- Noted.

8. Local Service Board – feedback from Scrutiny Chair(s) attending meeting.

There had been no recent meetings of the LSB.

9. Dates for next meetings.

- 22nd February, 2013
- 22nd March, 2013
- 26th April, 2013
- 24th May, 2013
- 14th June, 2013
- 2nd August, 2013
- 13th September, 2013
- 23rd October, 2013
- 29th November, 2013

10. LSB Meeting Dates.

- 14th March, 2013
- 15th May, 2013
- 10th July, 2013
- 8th October, 2013

**County Councillor W.T. Jones
Chair**