

<b>NAME OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>	<b>CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>27 MARCH, 2014</b>
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>COLLABORATION / THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC SERVICES</b>
<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>Geraint George, Head of Strategic and Improvement Department</b>
<b>CABINET MEMBER</b>	<b>Councillor Dyfed Edwards</b>
<b>What needs to be scrutinised and why?</b>	<b>The Council's response to the Williams Commission report and the implementation timetable, if known</b>
<b>Is there anything else the Scrutiny Committee needs to do?</b>	<b>No – As we require definite guidance from the Welsh Government on its response to the report</b>
<b>What are the next steps?</b>	<b>No specific steps</b>

1. The Williams Report is a substantial document with the full report (with appendices) being 347 pages long and the summary report 106 pages long. It contains a thematic analysis of the challenges that face the public sector in terms of dealing with the weaknesses of the existing systems and how prepared it is to face the future. It contains 62 recommendations.
2. The main focus in the Press and Media has been on the changes to the number of councils but the report itself stresses that the recommendations should not be implemented selectively. Rather, it is argued that it is a package of recommendations which need to be implemented together.
3. The report is limited to some extent by the remit given to it; however, it offers an analysis of the situation of public services in Wales and the need for change in the future although it does clearly miss one obvious opportunity of considering the integration of Health and Care Services. There is a risk that the discussions around the merger of councils will mean that the other important messages in the document are missed.
4. Appendix 1 of this report offers an initial rough assessment of some of the main messages and recommendations in the report, how they could affect the Council and suggests a possible response that the Council could consider in due course should the recommendations of the Commission report be implemented. However, these are comments on the Commission report and we will have to wait for some guidance from the Government before deciding what will require attention.

5. Two general matters are highlighted. Firstly, are there any initiatives within our work programmes on a strategic or departmental level that we wish to suspend for the time being as they would probably be things that would not bear fruition until after any reorganisation and would therefore be the subject of discussion and co-development with possible partners in order to set the foundation for any new council.
6. Secondly, the new councils would certainly face a huge challenge. The structural change offers an opportunity to improve; however it is only an opportunity. If the opportunity is not taken, by developing new methods of working, the future of the new councils would be very dark with fewer resources and deterioration in the standards of services from the customer's perspective. There is also an opportunity to use the reorganisation as a genuine opportunity to hold a "big conversation" to redefine the role of local government in public services.
7. In terms of the timescale, there is some uncertainty at present but it appears that the key dates are as follows:-
  - Easter 2014 (at the latest) – The Williams Commission's original target for the Welsh Government, Local Authorities and key stakeholders to agree on a proposed programme for the merger of Councils, with a Transformation and Implementation Board set up to co-ordinate everything
  - Summer 2014 – An aim which has recently been announced by the First Minister to agree on the map in order to encourage early voluntary mergers
  - May 2016 – The next Welsh Government Elections – Since no political consensus has been secured in Cardiff Bay to drive this forward, it appears at present that any reorganisation proposals would have to be part of the parties' manifestos in the Assembly elections
  - May 2017 – The likely date of the next proposed elections of Welsh Councils – an opportunity to hold elections for any new shadow council. The elections were planned for May 2016; however, an order has been prepared to postpone them until May 2017. This order has not yet been issued.
8. To date, and despite copious observations and discussions on the matter, the Council has not been called to express a viewpoint. In this current period of uncertainty, I suggest that the Council's viewpoint is that it is open to discussions with the Welsh Government and any partners regarding the reorganisation of services in a way which offers results, efficiency and value for money for residents.