
CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 26.03.15

Present: Councillor Jason Humphreys (Vice-chairman in the chair).

Councillors:- Aled Evans, Gweno Glyn, Simon Glyn, Siân Gwenllian, Annwen Hughes, June Marshall, Michael Sol Owen, Eirwyn Williams, John Wyn Williams and R.H.Wyn Williams.

Officers present:- Debbie Anne Williams Jones (Members' Manager - Democratic Services) and Eirian Roberts (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

Present for item 3 below:-

Councillor Dyfed Edwards, Council Leader
Arwel E. Jones (Senior Manager – Corporate Commissioning Service)

Present for item 4 below

Councillor Dyfed Edwards, Council Leader
Dilwyn Williams (Chief Executive)

Apologies: Councillors Lesley Day, Elwyn Edwards, Trevor Edwards, Dyfrig Jones and W.Roy Owen.

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received from any members present.

2. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 14 January, 2015 as a true record.

3. CONSULTATION PAPER ON REFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Submitted –

- (1) The report of the Leader and the Head of Strategic and Improvement Department seeking the members' observations on a series of matters arising in the Consultative Document on Reforming Local Government, which outlined several matters that the Government were considering in terms of the arrangement and pattern of local authorities in Wales.
- (2) The observations of the Democratic Services Committee on the matters within its remit.

RESOLVED

- (a) **To accept the observations submitted by the Democratic Services Committee, adding support to the objection to limit councillors' terms of membership.**
- (b) **To propose that the following additional observations are considered by the Council's Cabinet:-**
General – The Committee welcomes the opportunity to offer observations on the document, although concerned about the mixture in the proposals submitted and also eager to highlight the importance of proceeding quickly to set a direction for reorganising local government.

Paragraph 2.5 – We wish to re-emphasise the comments that were sent in response to the Consultation on Re-organising Local Government submitted in October, 2014.

Paragraph 2.7 – We accept what is noted as the Government’s intention.

Paragraph 2.8 – We agree with the emphasis in favour of establishing a ‘general power of competence’, which would enable us to do more for the benefit of our communities.

Paragraph 2.10 – We accept what is noted as the Government’s intention.

Paragraphs 3.11 and 3.12 – We cannot see much benefit in placing the set of specific duties on Chief Executives and there should be no limit on how long a Chief Executive may be in office.

Paragraph 3.13 – While we accept the principle behind the idea of addressing the significant difference in the salaries of chief and senior officers, we feel that it is possible to oversimplify in this field as responsibilities vary. We feel that there is potential for some sort of framework, but there should be freedom for individual councils to respond to local circumstances.

Paragraph 3.14 – We fully object to the suggestion of establishing an independent commission to appoint Chief Executives and other senior public roles. Establishing such a body would be expensive at a time when the public services are all under great financial strain and would also detract from the key relationship between chief and senior officers and the body of local elected members. Also, whatever the procedure will be, steps will need to be taken to ensure that there are clear requirements in terms of the ability to speak Welsh for such posts.

Paragraph 4.4 – The power to review the Community Councils in the area is not welcomed, especially when the brief to reduce them and the timetable to achieve that seems to have already been set.

Paragraph 4.5 – There is doubt regarding the intention to establish a set of standards that town and community councils will be expected to meet “*before they can be deemed capable and competent*” as it would create expectations that could lead to people being reluctant to offer themselves to serve on community councils and, in turn, would lead to two tiers of town and community councils.

Paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2 – The emphasis on empowering local communities and community groups to take responsibility for services or assets is welcomed, as this Council has been discussing in the recent Gwynedd Challenge sessions.

Paragraph 6.1 – We accept what is noted as the Government’s intention.

Paragraph 6.2 – We accept what is noted as the Government’s intention.

Paragraph 6.3 – We accept what is noted as the Government’s intention.

Paragraph 6.4 – We welcome the proposal to clean up the powers of Welsh Ministers to undertake an independent review of concerns regarding council arrangements and to intervene specifically in the operation of any council, following such a review.

Paragraph 7.2 – We accept what is noted as the Government’s intention.

Paragraph 7.3 – We welcome any movement to make councils more accountable digitally through webcasting and facilitating the offering of comments through social media amongst others, but we are concerned that there are financial implications involved with this proposal at a time when councils are under great financial pressure.

Paragraph 7.4 – We accept what is noted as the Government’s intention.

Paragraphs 8.1 and 8.2 – The fact that the Government wishes to further strengthen the scrutiny function within councils is welcomed, which will have sufficient resources to support it and also for the public to be able to

participate in scrutiny processes, but there is concern again regarding the cost implications.

Paragraph 8.3 – The Government's proposal to see councils collaborating to scrutinise services that are provided regionally is welcomed, but emphasising that this should include scrutinising unelected bodies that provide services.

Paragraph 8.4 – The Government's wish to see better collaboration between the external audit bodies is welcomed, and indeed it is suggested that we should aim towards having only one auditing body.

Paragraph 9 – As the need to reform and simplify the procedure of funding local government is mentioned in the document, it is very disappointing that there are no proposals on the table for it as of yet. There is a real need to look at the way finance is allocated and the failure in the existing arrangements to identify the needs of rural areas.

4. DEMAND MANAGEMENT

Cabinet Member: Councillor Dyfed Edwards

Submitted – a progress report by the Leader and Chief Executive at the committee's request outlining the relevant background, providing an update and specifically responding to questions that had arisen in the Preparatory Meeting on 12 February, 2015.

Members were given an opportunity to ask further questions and offer their observations. During the discussion, the Leader and the Chief Executive responded to questions / observations regarding:-

- Concern that the Council was doing away with some services and establishing new services in their place that would not come to fruition for some years. The Leader noted that he and the relevant Cabinet Members would be glad to hear of any examples of this.
- Calculating the financial savings and the importance of identifying unsuccessful plans, bring them to a close and moving on to alternative plans. It was noted that the findings of implementing the change to the residual waste collection procedure in the Dwyfor area had been submitted to the Communities Scrutiny Committee, and that this was a clear example of managing demand which had worked for several reasons, including the fact that the local population had been consulted beforehand regarding the change to procedures. It was noted that the report of the Scrutiny Committee could be sent to any member who wished to receive a copy.
- The challenge of coupling saving money with managing demand in the older people field due to the increase in the demand.
- The need for everyone to be aware of the need to manage demand.
- The need to change culture amongst the staff, as well as people outside.
- Concern that mainstreaming some fields could mean that other fields would be lost in the process of changing culture.
- The tendency to respond to the current emergency each time rather than looking further ahead, and, as resources were diminishing, there was a need to invest in the services in a way that would save in the long term and give the citizen a better quality of life.

5. PROPOSED SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS OF THE JOINT LOCAL SERVICES BOARD – A FURTHER REPORT ON THE OPTIONS

Submitted – the further report of the Democratic Services Manager on the options for establishing the scrutiny arrangements of the Local Services Board (LSB), in light of a

discussion in the Scrutiny Forum on specific fields of concern that had been raised by members of this committee at their last meeting regarding clear political accountability, undemocratic bodies being part of the scrutiny work, the membership of the panel and a clear reporting procedure for the Council.

It was noted that it was important to ensure that the members of the new scrutiny panel received specific training on the role of the LSB and the Democratic Services Manager agreed to report that to the Senior Partnerships Manager who was leading on the work of the Board.

RESOLVED

- (a) To support Option B, ensuring that the reporting procedure noted in paragraph 2.2. of the report is incorporated.**
- (b) To report to the group which is drawing up the more detailed arrangements on the recommendation regarding membership noted in paragraph 2.3(i) of the report.**
- (c) To trial the arrangements for a period of a year prior to further assessment.**

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 12.35pm.