



City and County of Swansea

Notes of the **Scrutiny Inquiry Panel – Regional Working**

Committee Room 5, Guildhall, Swansea

Monday, 2 October 2017 at 4.00 pm

Present: Councillor L R Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

J A Hale
B J Rowlands

Councillor(s)

C A Holley
R C Stewart

Councillor(s)

M H Jones
T M White

Officer(s)

Phil Roberts
Sarah Caulkin

Chief Executive
Director Resources

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): M Sykes

1 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

Cllr Joe Hale and Cllr Mary Jones declared a personal interest for the Regional Working Overview.

2 Overview of Regional Working Report and Q&A

Cllr Rob Stewart (Leader), Phil Roberts (Chief Executive) and Sarah Caulkin (Director Resources) attended the panel and presented [an overview of Regional Working](#) in order to inform and support this Inquiry. The following points were noted:

- Why do we need to reform was discussed including: austerity and affordability of council services; there is currently a confusing pattern of footprints; limitations on collaboration and importantly ensuring the focus is on citizen outcomes.
- Significant change is underway Regional level following the announcements and subsequent Welsh Government meeting around Local government Reform (LGR) in Wales. The Welsh Government set out its proposal for mandatory regional working and Joint governance Committees (JGC) emerging from the White Paper Consultation process:
- The mandated service areas for Regional Working include:
 - Economic development
 - Transport
 - Strategic land use planning and building control
 - Social Services
 - Education improvement and additional learning needs

- Public protection
- JGCs would be responsible for the effective planning and delivery of these. There will be two types of JGCs: Governance and Service. Governance JGC for each region will be made up of elected members. They will be decision making bodies with consistent levels of delegation from each LA. New legislation will set out their duties and powers.
- Existing partnership structures will be maintained within the new framework and will co-exist.
- It is proposed that there are three large regions
 - North Wales, Mid and West Wales and South East Wales.
 - Swansea would be part of Mid and West Wales along with Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Neath Port Talbot.
- There is likely to be many service JGCs under these proposals on both regional and sub-regional footprints. These will oversee planning, budgeting, funding etc. The panel did have concerns about the potential of another layer of bureaucracy.
- The panel were informed that there is a move away from merger to more of a framework model.
- The panel highlighted the need for the panel to consider Scrutiny arrangements within these partnership models as this remains unclear at present.
- A summary of Swansea council's responses to the White Paper was attached to the report for awareness and information.
- A review of the current partnerships highlights that the council is currently involved in around 100 partnership/collaboration areas but the big three are: ERW, the City Region and Western Bay.
- Excluding the big three the Council also makes an annual cash contribution of around £150 to partnerships. Council Officer time equates to just under 600 days per year (excluding those posts that are specifically grant funded for regional work)
- The Panel agreed that it is important to understand what is working well in current arrangements, what needs improvement and what collaborations add no value. The panel plan to consider this when speaking to officers and partners throughout this inquiry,
- The key benefits and disadvantages to collaborative working were discussed including:
 - *Benefits include:* sharing of good practice, ideas and innovation; pooling of resources to enable greater capacity; sharing of information and business intelligence; joint planning and performance management at regional level; joint management of major/high risk project/s; training and development and networking opportunities.
 - *Disadvantages* can include: often meeting are in Llandrindod Wells, which involves significant travel for all partners. The Panel agreed that better use of new and remote working technology needed; staff time; diverse groups with different priorities and drivers can make decision making and progress slow; little formal financial contribution so may operate on existing stretched resources; some groups meet rarely so it is difficult to drive a meaningful agenda.
- Firm arrangement for scrutiny have not been discussed yet, however the White Paper summary highlighted that the JGC approach should be coupled with a joint regional scrutiny committee. Work should not be duplicated between

regional and local authority scrutiny committees and one authority should be the lead for an individual scrutiny committee.

- It was also suggested that scrutiny function should be based upon good practice at a regional and national level. Local elected members must have a voice and be able to hold regional bodies to account on behalf of local citizens. There is also suggestion of public and stakeholder groups being part of the scrutiny process.
- Issues around harmonisation were highlighted for example: the co-existence of JGCs and Public Service Boards; harmonisation across different regional clusters that are already in place like city regions.
- There is a risk that Welsh Government may introduce a framework which is either not aligned to or has detrimental effect on those current partnerships which are proving highly beneficial. The Panel heard that the WLGA is urging Welsh Government to work with local authorities to review current arrangements and make improvement where needed; review current binding agreements between councils; consider regional variations and not take 'one size fits all' approach; consider regional framework agreements early in the process before everything is formalised.
- There is also a risk the regional decisions will require LA decision making process which could take time and making change slow to implement.
- The panel agreed that we must learn lessons from experience including local government reorganisations and attempts at shared services, for example:
 - The need to have a guiding coalition and shared vision.
 - The Council and partners need to be able to commit time and resources to progress ideas
 - Need for clear leadership, time, priority and focus
 - Need to harmonise training and skills of staff
 - Need to harmonise terms and conditions and other workforce related policies as they vary significantly and this takes time
 - Harmonisation between different teams working together as culture in different organisations can be very different

3 Discuss and Plan Scrutiny Inquiry into Regional Working

The following was agreed:

- a) A set of dates for the agreed work programme
- b) Scrutiny activities as per the circulated draft work programme
- c) To publish a 'call for evidence' blog and send via twitter
- d) Scrutiny Team to complete some desk based research looking at the different mechanisms of scrutiny used in various partnerships
- e) That next meeting will take place on 30 October and will look at the financial picture in relation to regional working

The meeting ended at 5.00 pm