

Regional Working Scrutiny Enquiry Panel

13th November 2017 - Place Directorate

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Due to the size and varied nature of the Directorate, there are many existing “Regional” and “Collaborative” working arrangements in existence across the whole range of Directorate services. Just for clarity, this covers the following service areas:-

- Corporate Building and Property Services
- Housing and Public Protection
- Culture and Leisure Services
- Planning and City Regeneration
- Waste, Parks and Cleansing
- Highways and Transportation

2.0 EXTENT OF REGIONAL WORKING

Appendix A summarises the existing regional and collaborative working, which are a mixture of “formal” and “informal arrangements depending on the area and subject matter. Outlined below are some examples:-

2.1 City Deal Delivery

A relatively recent development following the successful attainment of the Swansea Bay City Region deal with a range of officer and member groups culminating in the emerging Joint Committee. This will ultimately become a formal decision making body for the City Deal projects including City’s Digital District, Homes as Power Stations and Learning and Skills Partnership.

2.2 South West Wales Regional Transport

This formal arrangement, previously constituted, agrees the forward programme and prioritisation of various funding opportunities linked to Local Transport Plan.

2.3 Economic Regeneration

Set up on a South West Wales footprint but also in collaboration with Mid Wales Authorities, the regional approach to Economic Development and prioritisation of projects and funding bids enables the delivery of a joined up strategy on a regional basis.

3.0 PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS

Various Regional and All Wales Networks exist, which can be either officer or officer / member arrangements. These cover a wide range of activities with the opportunities to collaborate and share best practice, some of which are summarised as follows:

- Waste Management
- Highway and Transportation Regional arrangements
- Property and Building Services such as Consortium of Local Authorities in Wales (CLAW), Constructing Excellence (CE) and Local Property Board.
- Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE)
- Planning and Building Regulations
- Energy
- Housing

Many of the groups generally have direct access to Welsh Government and in many cases UK government, which is critical when developing new or changing existing policies.

4.0 FUTURE PICTURE

Whilst the above summarises, at a very high level, the existing regional working, Welsh Government's reform agenda is giving clear indication of the direction of travel with more "formalised" areas of collaboration in a greater number of service areas. Whilst this presents opportunities, it also raises some important risks:

4.1 Regional delivery

Some areas can only be delivered regionally, such as strategic transport planning or regional economic development strategies and these are already delivered on this basis although in a non-constituted manner. Whether mandating these services, via a formal joint committee or new Council structure, will lead to any further improvements is in doubt.

4.2 Efficiency

Some areas may give rise to opportunities for greater efficiency by delivering on a regional footprint. However, until this has been scoped and clear opportunities for rationalisation identified, it is dangerous to assume that "bigger is always best".

4.3 Future Prevention

Whilst more relevant to "People" services such as Social Care, consideration has to be given to the Future Prevention agenda and the Future Generations act whereby Councils individually or even collectively cannot solve some of

the most difficult challenges without having a wider collaboration with other bodies such as Health Boards.

4.4 Resilience

As budgets shrink, there are increasing concerns that some services, particularly in smaller Councils are unsustainable by individual Authorities in isolation and greater collaboration is one way to address such challenges.

5.0 **SUMMARY**

As such, whilst the debate about further regional working is inevitable, it's important for the Council to be active in whatever the emerging picture should look like and to share in its future. It needs to understand the benefits of local delivery but also be mindful of the National and Regional picture and where benefits exist.

This isn't just an officer debate as the need for local knowledge and local accountability extends to members who are elected by local people and are accountable to the electorate to deliver better outcomes.

If regions are too large or the footprint differs across various sectors, this could lead to confusion and a loss of democratic accountability. Whilst given the current unsustainable nature of public finances, such debates are inevitable and it is important to understand the implication of any decisions that are likely to be made.

Appendix A: Existing Collaborative Arrangements



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