



City and County of Swansea

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

Committee Room 4, Guildhall, Swansea

Monday, 13 November 2017 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor L R Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

J A Hale
T M White

Councillor(s)

C A Holley

Councillor(s)

M Sykes

Officer(s)

Martin Nicholls
Michelle Roberts

Director Place
Scrutiny Officer

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): M H Jones and B J Rowlands

5 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

None

6 Answers received to questions asked at the previous meeting

The following questions were sent and a response what received for the Panel from the Head of Financial Services:

- The panel wanted to find out if there has been an assessment of the financial cost of the officer time spent on regional working activities?* There is no systematic recording of officer time on regional working and we do not keep time sheets for projects, and to some extent we just accept the regional agenda as part of the 'local job'. The legal section used to do such work based on assignment timing. Some officers could be spending routinely 10% and often up to 20% of each with on reginal /national work.
- How are the different regional working partnerships financial arrangements audited?*
 - Western Bay – Pooling stuff is audited at each local authority by each external auditor as part of each Council audit grant claims but that Swansea is the lead partner and host for finance so we get and extra look at.
 - ERW – Internal certification by each constituent authority's internal auditors. External audit and published accounts by external auditors of host authority, Pembrokeshire. It also has its own scrutiny arrangements.

- City Deal – In shadow form only, but will plan to have arrangements that involve similar to ERW – albeit with external auditors to Carmarthenshire as lead. It will have its own scrutiny arrangements.
- Swansea Bay Port Health Authority – internal audit provided by Swansea, external audit by our external auditors as we host but formally the audit is to the SBPHA itself as a separate legal entity.

7 Regional Working : Place Directorate

Martin Nicholls the Director of Place attended the meeting to outline the regional working position within the Place Directorate.

- There are many regional and collaborative working arrangements in existence across the Directorates whole range of services and these are reflected within 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
- The [report](#) provided summarising the existing regional and collaborative working which are a mix of formal and informal arrangements. Some examples include:
 - City Deal delivery
 - South West Wales Regional Transport
 - Economic Regeneration
- The panel noted that there are currently 51 different activities listed and recognised that could potentially involve a lot of officer time. They recognise that some are much less time intensive than others. The Panel felt it important that our commitments to different activities should be reviewed regularly to ensure they are essential and provided value for the officer time spent (recognising that some we must participate in).
- The Welsh Government reform agenda is giving a clear indication of the direction of travel with more 'formalised' areas of collaboration in a great number of service areas. The panel agreed that this presents opportunities but also risks.
 - Regional Delivery, some areas can only be delivered regionally, such as strategic transport planning or economic development strategies and these are already delivered on this basis.
 - Efficiency, some areas may give rise to opportunities for greater efficiency by delivering on a regional footprint. However, until this have been scoped and clear opportunities for rationalisation identified, it is dangerous to assume that bigger is always best.
 - Future Prevention, whilst more relevant to people services, 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 wider collaborations.
 - Resilience, as budgets shrink, there are increasing concerns that some services particularly in smaller councils are unsustainable by and individual authority in isolation and greater collaboration is one way to address this.

- The Director explained that whilst the debate about further regional working is inevitable, it is important for the Council to be active in whatever the emerging picture should look like and to share its future. It will need to understand the benefits of local delivery but be mindful of the national and regional picture and where the benefits exist.
- The panel recognise and were pleased to hear that this is not just an officer debate agreeing that there will be a need for local knowledge and local accountability to deliver the best outcomes for local communities.
- Currently regional scrutiny arrangements are not in place for any of these partnerships but it is envisaged that the larger City Deal will have this build into their governance arrangements.

The Panel asked for further information to supplement the information provided that details an approximation of officer time spent on the regional activities and some examples of outcomes arising from some of those partnerships listed. The Scrutiny Officer will contact the Chief Education and Chief Social Services Officers to ensure that this is also included in their reports to the Panel.

8 Project Plan Work Programme

The next meeting of the Panel is scheduled for the 1 December 2017 at 10.30pm where the Panel will speak to the Chief Education Officer about the picture within Education Services.

The meeting ended at 3.00 pm