

Wales Audit Office Report - Review of Public Service Boards
Discussion paper

General Overview

- Public Bodies have not taken the opportunity to effectively organise, resource and integrate the work of the PSBs

Governance review and new structure helps improve this, focus on key result areas being developed through the dash board reports

- PBs' are not being consistently scrutinised or held to account
 - Need to tell people what we are doing
 - Shared view of what needs to improve

Swansea PSB regularly attends Scrutiny throughout the year with each workstream being scrutinised.

Develop a communications strategy and at each meeting identify what we can promote areas of work

- Despite public bodies valuing PSB's there is no agreement on how their role should operate now or in the future

Governance review and new structure addresses this

- Challenge to participate in a number of PSB's
 - Overlap between PSB's and regional partnership Boards etc.
 - Merging of PSB's could limit focus and make decision making to distant from citizens

Discussion have been held with other PSB's and identification of joint working areas e.g. Community safety

- Welsh Government should enable PSBs to develop flexible models of working, including merging, reducing and integrating their work with other forums, such as Regional Partnership Boards and giving them flexibility to receive, manage and spend grant monies.

Awaiting information from Welsh Government on their view, but we can utilise the structure of the FGA to be flexible and collaborate.

- Improving transparency and accountability by making PSB meetings, agendas, papers and minutes accessible and available to the public.

PSB already makes PSB meetings, agendas, papers and minutes accessible to the public and has a public questions as part of the agenda

- PSBs and public bodies should use the findings of an earlier Auditor General [discussion paper on effective scrutiny](#) to strengthen oversight arrangements and activity.

The discussion paper highlights six key areas that many councils could reflect on in light of current and future challenges.

- In some councils there remains some fundamental confusion and misunderstanding around roles and responsibilities in practice.
- Many councils still say they need to improve the way they engage with the public.
- Improvements are needed to the way councils prioritise and then plan their scrutiny activity to improve its impact.
- Some councils may need to consider reviewing support and training for scrutiny committee members.
- Most councils do not routinely evaluate the effectiveness of their scrutiny functions.
- Welsh Government and Councils need to consider how these themes impact on local governance arrangements role.

In response to these issues, and to support councils to improve, six steps have been identified to help make scrutiny ‘fit for the future.’ It’s designed to be a checklist for councillors:

1. Know your role
2. Know your powers and what’s ‘possible’ in scrutiny
3. Know what you are trying to achieve
4. Plan your scrutiny work to achieve your aims
5. Design support arrangements to achieve your aims
6. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of scrutiny activity and make changes based on feedback

Swansea PSB regularly attends Scrutiny throughout the year with each workstream being scrutinised.

The role of scrutiny, the powers etc. are well defined and administered as part of the Council

The work of scrutiny is reviewed and evaluated.

RECOMMENDATION 1

In Part 1 of the report we set out that understanding the impact of choices and decisions requires public bodies to fully involve citizens and stakeholders and undertake comprehensive Impact Assessments.

However, we found that current practice is insufficient to provide assurance that the needs of people with protected characteristics are fully considered when reviewing choices and the voice of citizens is not sufficiently influencing decisions.

We recommend that PSBs:

- conduct formal assessments to identify the potential impact on people with protected characteristics and the Welsh language and review agreed actions to ensure any adverse impacts are addressed;

Equality impact Assessments need to be completed as part of projects and workstreams

- improve transparency and accountability by making PSB meetings, agendas, papers and minutes accessible and available to the public;

Already in place

- strengthen involvement by working to the guidance in the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales;

Already in place

- feedback the outcome of involvement activity identifying where changes are made as a result of the input of citizens and stakeholders.

Need to consider as part of each workstream

RECOMMENDATION 2

In Part 2 of the report we review arrangements for PSB scrutiny and conclude that there are shortcomings and weaknesses in current performance and practice.

To improve scrutiny, we recommend that:

- PSBs and public bodies use the findings of the Auditor General for Wales' Discussion
- Paper: Six themes to help make scrutiny 'Fit for the Future' to review their current performance and identify where they need to strengthen oversight arrangements and activity;
- PSBs ensure scrutiny committees have adequate engagement with a wider range of relevant stakeholders who can help hold PSBs to account.

Already in place

RECOMMENDATION 3

In Part 3 of the report we summarise the difficulty of developing, implementing and resourcing PSBs and the challenges of managing multiple partnerships that can often have overlap and duplication.

To help build capacity, consistency and resourcing of activity we recommend that:

- PSBs take the opportunity to discharge other plan and strategy obligations through the Local Wellbeing Plan;
 - The Welsh Government enables PSBs to develop flexible models of working including: –
 - merging, reducing and integrating their work with other forums such as Regional Partnership Boards;
 - Giving PSBs flexibility to receive, manage and spend grant monies subject to PSBs ensuring they have adequate safeguards and appropriate systems in place for management of funding; effective budget and grant programme controls;
 - Public reporting, scrutiny and oversight systems to manage expenditure.

Discussion have been held with other PSB's, RPB and identification of joint working areas e.g. Community safety

RECOMMENDATION 4

To help build capacity, consistency and resourcing of activity we recommend that the Welsh Government and Welsh Local Government Association in their review of strategic partnerships take account of, and explore, the findings of this review.

Awaiting Welsh Government feedback

SUMMARY – ACTION POINTS

Overview

Develop a communications strategy and at each meeting identify what we can promote areas of work

Recommendation 1

Feedback the outcome of involvement activity identifying where changes are made as a result of the input of citizens and stakeholders

Recommendation 2

None

Recommendation 3

None

Recommendation 4

None