

# **Minutes of a Meeting of the Joint East Devon and South Somerset Scrutiny Panel held at East Devon Business Centre, Honiton on 24 June 2010**

**Present:** Councillors:  
Sue Steele (Chairman)  
Ray Bloxham (Vice-Chairman)

Bob Buxton  
Carol Goodall  
Roger Giles  
Pat Martin

Helen Parr  
Paul Robathan  
Steve Wragg

Officers:  
Lyn Lockyer  
Emily McGuinness – Scrutiny Manager  
Debbie Meakin – Democratic Services Officer  
Mark Williams – Chief Executive

**Apologies:** Angie Singleton

The meeting started at 10.00am and ended at 12.00noon.

## **1 Chairman's Opening Remarks**

Sue Steele welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Panel. She briefed Members on the meeting between officers and Members on the 16 June 2010 to discuss how to approach a joint scrutiny of the Joint Integration Committee (JIC), resulting in agreement to form the Panel.

## **2 Role of the Joint Scrutiny Panel**

The Chairman brought this item forward to assist the Panel in deciding its role before embarking on the main item of the agenda on the JIC progress to date.

Emily circulated a draft one page strategy encapsulating the terms of the Panel, covering the broad area of topic, specific topic, ambitions, who to consult with and who to get help from, and timeframe.

The Panel discussed the operation of the Panel in line with a Task and Finish Forum, with reporting lines back to each respective Scrutiny committee, which would feed recommendations up to each respective Executive. Future meetings would be open for any Member to attend to observe, offer debate but not to vote on proposed recommendations. Encouraging other Members to attend future Panel meetings would be beneficial in utilising the different skill sets that other Members possess for the debate; and in engaging Members so that the process of joint integration at each stage is fully understood. The Panel would drive the agenda of their meetings based on the JIC progress and, if practical, time meetings of the Panel between that of the JIC and the respective Executives.

The Panel were keen to stress that the work of the Panel is not a service sharing of scrutiny across the two authorities; the sovereignty of each Council and their own scrutiny arrangements are retained.

The Panel discussed the wording of the one page strategy and agreed on the version as set out below:

2

## **Role of the Joint Scrutiny Panel (continued)**

- **What is the broad topic area**  
Is the Joint Integration Committee working within the remit as initially agreed or modified?
- **The specific topic**  
The specific topics to be reviewed by the Joint Scrutiny Panel will depend on the work programme of the JIC, for example the initial meeting of the panel will look at the process used to agree priority work streams.
- **What are our ambitions for the review/outcomes**  
The Members of the panel are satisfied that the JIC is working within their agreed remit;  
Improvement in transparency and clarity around the processes used;  
Improved Member involvement
- **Who (and how we) should consult**  
Chief Executive  
Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the JIC  
Executive and non-Executive Members  
Scrutiny Committee Members
- **Who we need to help us (experts/partners)**  
This will depend on the issue being considered but where appropriate other authorities who have adopted joint working arrangements to see what lessons can be learnt at various stages of the process.
- **What other help we need (resource/training)**  
As above, the type and level of help needed will depend on the topic being considered, but administrative support will be provided on a shared basis by both SSDC and EDDC.
- **How long will it take?**  
Aligned with the JIC Communication Plan  
Some urgency in scrutinising the first stages of the process in line with budget setting in autumn of 2010;  
Lifespan of the Panel would be likely to cover the lifespan of the JIC.

In terms of administrative arrangement for the Panel:

- Future panel meetings will be open to all Members to attend;
- The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee of SSDC, Sue Steele, to act as Chairman for the first three months, with the Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee of EDDC, Ray Bloxham, as Vice-Chairman; then alternating roles for the next three months as a rolling pattern;
- The work of the Panel will be published via the reporting mechanism to each Scrutiny Committee;
- Members of the Panel will be on the mailing list for JIC agendas and minutes distribution via e-mail, with adequate time to read and digest;
- Resource in terms of officer support would be shared between Emily and Debbie; with meetings alternating, subject to room availability, between the East Devon Business Centre and the Stringfellow Room at Chard;
- Meeting dates would, if practical, be arranged to fall after JIC meetings but before each Council's Scrutiny and Executive meetings, to allow the opportunity of feeding any concerns about the JIC process back to each respective Council.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made by Members for this meeting.

4 **Terms of reference of the JIC and financial background on the savings required**

Mark Williams highlighted the primary role of the JIC within the terms of reference, which is to ensure that a joint integration strategy and work plan is produced, alongside an action plan on how the integration will take place and the timescale for each step. Each activity will also be costed and tasks assigned.

The Panel debated the clarity of the document, with particular concern about the recommendation arrangements to each Council. The current wording was subject to interpretation and therefore unclear if recommendations made by the JIC went to both each Executive and full Council, or one or the other.

The issue of achieving savings to help towards a balanced budget for both authorities was not included in the terms of reference presented to the Panel and Members felt that this should be updated to reflect the budget requirements.

The financial situation was re-iterated to Members, with a gap in the region of 1.7million for EDDC and around 2.3million for SSDC, put into stark context by equating 1 million to 40 staff redundancies. Mark explained that there was an assumption that Council Tax is frozen following the emergency budget published by the Government.

There are three strands of work looking for savings:

1. SSDC strand, where directors working with the portfolio holders are looking for 7% efficiency savings;
2. EDDC Rationalisation Panel looking at services to find scope for redundancies and efficiency savings;
3. JIC strand independently scoping savings of combining services and management.

**RECOMMENDED** that the JIC amend their terms of reference to clarify the route for JIC recommendations, and be updated to reflect the balanced budget requirements for both Councils.

5 **Project Workstreams and JIC update**

The JIC had met on three occasions so far, and were starting to move from an exploratory stage to a preparatory stage. Workstreams identified for phase one are now being assessed for feasibility and costed business plans prepared, to take to each Council in September, alongside a shared management structure report. Savings identified in the workstream listing document related to savings if an element of the service was shared across Councils; each Council could also consider savings locally. Phase two related to services that would need further input and exploration by both Members and officers; and phase three were those services affected by long term contracts or other Council differences which in the short term would not be viable for sharing, but may be considered in the longer term.

5 **Project Workstreams and JIC update (continued)**

Issues raised by Members included:

- the consideration of using an independent team for preparation of the business plans. Mark assured the Panel that he had not taken any of the savings offered so far at face value and that the Finance teams were involved in costing; use of an independent team would involve a budget cost;
- Clarity needed in the communications plan of the JIC so that there could be no misinterpretation by Members. This was raised in light of the example of some misinterpretation of SSDC members as to the brief of EDDC's Rationalisation Panel;
- Selection of directors/heads of service - a selection panel would consist of members from both Councils and would look for positive attitude towards shared working;
- Work will progress to look further down through the management structure as selection progresses;
- ICT – key to finding best solution for a system that works for both authorities, which could mean one Council adopting the system of the other, or a new system for both – the key being it is the right and most efficient system;
- Risk assessment – this would be considered in the September reports on the shared services under phase one;
- Referral to Audit & Governance – costed business plans and risk assessments could be put to each Audit Committee of each Council to assess and would again help to engage Members in the process;
- Clear communication to all members, was required. Related reports to date due to their size and complexity could prove to be a barrier for some Members, so clear and concise information needed to be communicated to all Members. Suggestions included promotion of this Panel, a JIC newsletter, and e-mails to Members with updates;
- Was there a “plan B” if the savings needed could not be realised, which should form part of the risk assessment;
- Careful consideration of staff morale was key, as they were crucial to the success of each Council in continuing to deliver services

6 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the JIC was scheduled for 12 August 2010; dates will be circulated to the Panel for the next meetings to be following JIC meetings but precede Executive meetings, with the venue of the next meeting to be at Chard.

Chairman ..... Date.....