

West of England Partnership – Joint Scrutiny Committee

13 February 2009, Agenda item number 5: Proposals for Dedicated Scrutiny Support to the Committee

Please find below the response from the B&NES Panel (as part of the Joint Scrutiny Committee) to the above paper, after consultation with Councillors and Officers.

Although the Council is supportive of the principle of ensuring scrutiny is properly supported, the Panel will not support this paper/proposal at the meeting on Friday, for the following reasons:

- The development of the paper has not gone through the appropriate process, including full discussions with Chief Executives of the four Councils, to agree options;
- The Joint Scrutiny Committee has no role in its Terms of Reference for deciding or committing expenditure of this type;
- Budgets for the 2009/10 financial year are now close to finalisation, and there is no clear indication of where the increased resources should come from;
- Until a clearer identification of the longer-term workload for the committee is developed, is not possible to identify resource requirements to make an informed decision;
- There are concerns about developing a single permanent source of expertise/knowledge, as this approach does not promote a full ethos of working together. This could also be a high risk to the other councils in terms of access to and retention of data/information, and loss of knowledge to all four Councils should the post-holder have duties re-aligned or move on.
- The Terms of Reference state that the Chair of the meeting is to be agreed annually, and this could then rotate the role of Chair amongst the four Councils – in order to achieve the best support in these circumstances, other options for ensuring officer support is flexible rather than fixed should be considered.
- There needs to be a clear objective and understanding about the committee's role and workload
 - in taking a strategic overview rather than detailed analysis of data;
 - about the role of the committee and its fit/separation from the scrutiny role at individual Councils (there is currently felt to be duplication and re-work).

A review of how the committee is currently operating would be helpful, ensuring that the Overview and Scrutiny is adding value, before moving forward with new initiatives/support proposals

Other feedback:

On a factual note, the second paragraph in the "Policy" section of the report refers to the Committee carrying out joint scrutiny of "governance arrangements" – this does not reflect the role set out in the committee's Terms of Reference.