



# Trial Joint Scrutiny Arrangements in West Sussex: Update

## January 2013

### Background

Arun, Chichester, Horsham and Mid Sussex District Councils, Crawley Borough Council and West Sussex County Council (WSSC) agreed in 2010/2011 to establish trial joint scrutiny arrangements, to enable them to work together on specific scrutiny projects. Worthing Borough and Adur District Councils decided not to take part at this stage. A Joint Scrutiny Steering Group oversees the arrangements and is made up of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairmen of the participating councils. This Steering Group has now met three times (July 2011, March 2012 and December 2012). This update focuses on the outcomes of the Steering Group's most third meeting.

### Joint Scrutiny Steering Group Members

As at December 2012, the Joint Scrutiny Steering Group Members were:

- **Chairman** – Mr Duncan Crow – West Sussex County Council (WSSC)
- **Vice Chairman** – Councillor Mrs Clare Apel – Chichester District Council
- **District and Borough Councils:** Councillor Terence Chapman, Arun District Council; Dr Howard Bloom, Crawley Borough Council; Councillor George Cockman, Horsham District Council; Councillor Peter Reed, Mid Sussex District Council
- **WSSC:** Mr David Britton, Mr Richard Burrett and Mrs Margaret Whitehead

Whilst Worthing Borough and Adur District Councils decided not to take part in the joint scrutiny arrangements, the Steering Group has agreed to invite its Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairmen (Councillor Paul Graysmark, Adur District Council and Councillor Paul High, Worthing Borough Council) to attend its meetings as observers.

### Third meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Steering Group

The Joint Scrutiny Steering Group met in Horsham on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2012, attended by all members apart from David Britton and Paul High, and supported by scrutiny staff from WSSC (Helen Kenny) and Chichester District Council (Bambi Jones).

The Steering Group reviewed the issues that different councils have scrutinised during the past year. Members felt that by sharing information on each other's work programmes, scrutiny could act as a catalyst to improve local understanding and joint working around key issues. There was agreement that the Steering Group provided a useful forum for sharing information and best practice, and that it doesn't need to have physical meetings to carry out its work (e.g. information can be shared via e-mail).

The Steering Group discussed the WSCC Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee (HASC), which all district and borough councils have a seat on, as an example of joint scrutiny. Members felt it was important that there should be a two-way exchange of information between HASC and its district and borough council representatives – and that these representatives should make sure they feed issues from their councils into the HASC, as well as reporting back on the work of the Committee.

### **Joint scrutiny project: Community Legal Advice Service**

The Steering Group reviewed the joint scrutiny project into the countywide Community Legal Advice Service, carried out through a task and finish group (TFG), which was set up to:

**Review and consider the performance and outcomes of the current arrangements for generalist legal advice, to consider the needs of the county and to contribute to the development of a specification for a sustainable future generalist legal advice service for the residents of West Sussex.**

The TFG was made up of elected members from all eight authorities within West Sussex and met twice, in June and July 2012. It considered a range of evidence and was impressed by the quality of the current service and the evidence of service improvement through the first two years of the three-year contract. TFG agreed to support continuation of existing contract for two years, varied to take into account the changes to Legal Aid rules, with WSCC letting the contract on behalf of all existing partner authorities. The TFG also recommended that another Joint Scrutiny TFG should be convened (or the existing group reconvened) to examine the revised specification and approach to tendering proposed for the arrangements to be put in place for the period from April 2015.

Click [here](#) to see the TFG report.

In accordance with the agreed protocol on Joint Scrutiny in West Sussex, the TFG recommendations were presented to the relevant executive decision makers within each partner local authority via the relevant overview and scrutiny committees in those authorities. All authorities agreed the primary recommendation from the TFG that the existing contract with the West Sussex Citizens Advice Bureau Consortium for the provision of generalist advice should be extended for a further two years at the current level of funding. The WSCC Cabinet Member for Adult Services approved the decision in December 2012. Work is now in progress to formalise the contract arrangements.

The Steering Group felt that this project had been very successful and an example of constructive and collaborative joint scrutiny on an issue of relevance to all authorities. There was some very positive feedback from participants and some useful learning points to be taken into account for the future, including:

- The Steering Group should aim to identify the chairing arrangements for any project work before it begins
- The chairman and officer support for any project should ideally be from the same council
- It will be important to have clarity in terms of the decision-making processes and relevant timescales relating to any topics under scrutiny

## Topics for joint scrutiny

The Steering Group discussed whether there are any suitable topics for joint scrutiny and considered a proposal put forward by Arun District Council to:

### Review the multi-agency involvement and control of major flooding incidents across West Sussex.

The Steering Group agreed that this was an issue that affected all areas in one way or another (although some had been much more directly affected by the flooding that occurred in June 2012) and where a collective approach may be beneficial. Key issues where joint scrutiny might add value were identified as:

- What might be done collectively to alleviate the risk of flooding?
- How could the immediate response to flooding be improved?
- What more can agencies do to keep people and households safe?

It was reported that WSCC was about to publish a report into the June 2012 flooding and the Steering Group agreed they would need to see this report before deciding how any joint scrutiny of this topic should be taken forward. Members therefore agreed that this report would be circulated (click [here](#) to view the report), and that the West Sussex Scrutiny Officer Network would be asked to produce an outline scope for a possible joint scrutiny project, to be agreed virtually by the Steering Group before any work commences.

The Steering Group also identified an additional topic, to be given further consideration at its next meeting: **the Highways Authority planning process.**

## The future of joint scrutiny arrangements

The Steering Group agreed that the joint scrutiny arrangements provide a useful, flexible mechanism for carrying out joint work that should now be formalised. They also agreed that the Steering Group Chairman should write to Worthing Borough and Adur District Councils asking them to take part in the arrangements. The Steering Group agreed its meetings should not be held in public, as they are very much administrative meetings, but that any TFG-type work should be held in public where appropriate. Also, feedback from the Steering Group should be provided to all councils (overview and scrutiny committees and executives), through this regular update. A report reflecting the Steering Group's discussions will be made to the County Council's Policy and Resources Select Committee in February 2013, for it to decide whether or not the joint scrutiny arrangements should be continued. It will then be for all the district and borough councils to consider their views.

## Future Joint Scrutiny Steering Group meetings

The Steering Group is due to meet twice a year and it is planned that the next meeting will be in summer 2013 (after the County Council Elections in May). This meeting will review progress on any joint scrutiny projects underway, consider any new issues arising and provide an opportunity to share scrutiny work programmes.

## West Sussex Scrutiny Officers Network (WSSON) and Contacts

WSSON is made up of the scrutiny officers for all the County and district/borough councils (i.e. including Worthing and Adur). It supports and co-ordinates the joint scrutiny arrangements. It meets quarterly and the lead contacts for WSSON are:

- **Chichester District Council** – Bambi Jones, Corporate Policy Officer  
Tel: 01243- 01243 53 4685 / e-mail: [bjones@chichester.gov.uk](mailto:bjones@chichester.gov.uk)
- **West Sussex County Council** – Helen Kenny, Scrutiny Officer  
Tel: 033022-22532 / e-mail: [Helen.Kenny@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:Helen.Kenny@westsussex.gov.uk)

Click [here](#) for further information on joint scrutiny arrangements in West Sussex.