



Joint Scrutiny Arrangements in West Sussex: Update

January 2016

Background

Arun, Chichester, Horsham and Mid Sussex District Councils, Crawley Borough Council and West Sussex County Council (WSCC) agreed in 2010/2011 to establish trial joint scrutiny arrangements, to enable them to work together on specific scrutiny projects. After a review in late 2012 it was agreed to make Joint Scrutiny a permanent arrangement. Worthing Borough and Adur District Councils decided not to take part in the formal arrangements at that stage but joined the group in November 2014. 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 met five times. The Group has also shared information and sought comments via virtual means. This update focuses on the outcomes of the Steering Group's fifth meeting.

Joint Scrutiny Steering Group Members

As at January 2016, the Joint Scrutiny Steering Group Members were:

- **Chairman** – Mrs Deborah Urquhart – West Sussex County Council (WSCC)
- **Vice Chairman** – Councillor Mrs Clare Apel – Chichester District Council
- **District and Borough Councils**: Councillor James Butcher, Adur District Council; Councillor Norman Dingemans, Arun District Council; Councillor Brenda Smith, Crawley Borough Council; Councillor Leonard Crosbie, Horsham District Council; Councillor Colin Trumble, Mid Sussex District Council; Councillor Roy Barraclough, Worthing Borough Council
- **WSCC**: Mr Graham Tyler, Mr Michael Cloake and Mrs Margaret Evans

Fifth meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Steering Group

The Joint Scrutiny Steering Group met in Horsham on 27th January 2016, attended by members and supported by scrutiny staff from West Sussex County Council (Susanne Sanger), Chichester District Council (Bambi Jones) and Adur District and Worthing Borough Councils (Mark Lowe).

Joint scrutiny projects: Community Advice Services (Phase 2)

The Steering Group reviewed the joint scrutiny project on phase 2 of the Community Advice Service, carried out through a task and finish group (TFG), which was set up to:

Review the feedback received from a user survey and the performance of the service provider in order to recommend how the future service should be provided.

The TFG comprised member representatives from the Authorities signed up to the joint scrutiny process. The TFG met twice – in June and July 2014 - to consider evidence and develop recommendations.

The TFG recommended that a single tender process for generalist advice services from the Citizens Advice Bureau should be undertaken in preparation for the contract starting on 1 April 2015 for a three year period. The legal advice given to the TFG was that it is unlikely that there would be any cross-border interest in a contract for these services. This advice was given based on the value of the contract, the nature of the market, any similar service providers and whether the service could be provided remotely. West Sussex County Council will lead the tender process on behalf of partners.

The TFG also reviewed the level of funding provided by each of the Authorities contributing to the contract. The TFG proposed that funding levels should be increased across all participating Authorities.

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.

The evaluation of how the TFG worked identified a number of issues. These included:-

- A lack of Members' understanding of the joint scrutiny arrangements, particularly in relation to the reporting process and the role of TFG Members.
- A lack of continuity of Membership from Phase 1 to Phase 2 meant a considerable amount of work was needed to bring all Members up to speed.

Joint scrutiny projects: Flooding

The Flooding TFG was reconvened to look at the action taken in addressing the recommendations made by the original TFG in December 2013. One meeting was held in Autumn 2015. The final report was agreed by TFG Members and presented to the West Sussex County Council's Environment and Community Services Select Committee in January 2016. The Committee supported the recommendations included within the report.

The TFG was effective as the Members were engaged, understood the issues being discussed and provided valuable input.

Joint scrutiny projects: Recommendations

Evaluation has been undertaken on how the Joint Scrutiny Projects have worked. Recommendations were accepted by the Joint Scrutiny Steering Group to improve the process for future projects:

- That Members are given guidance or pre-meeting clarification when invited to attend a TFG on both their role and the subject matter being reviewed. The guidance should include a briefing on the joint scrutiny arrangements and responsibilities as a TFG Member, particularly in relation to agreeing the report recommendations.

- That a workshop-style approach to evidence-gathering could add value to future joint scrutiny TFGs giving more opportunity to explore the information in smaller groups, perhaps with better pre-planning.

Topics for future joint scrutiny

The Steering Group approved the Membership, Chairman and Terms of Reference for the **Housing for Care Leavers TFG**. This project had been requested by the Chairman of the West Sussex County Council Corporate Parenting Panel and agreed virtually as the next TFG by the Steering Group.

The TFG is being set up to:-

- review and consider the current housing provision for young people leaving local authority care to ensure that accommodation needs and associated support in the community are identified,
- ensure that the joint working protocol which has recently been put in place enables agencies to work in partnership,
- review the proposed changes to the allocation of Housing Benefit/Universal Credit to assess any potential impact on young people under the age of 21 who are leaving local authority care

The TFG had its first meeting in early March and will meet again in April. The Group is due to complete the review by May 2016.

The Steering Group also agreed that the **review of the capacity of community facilities eg schools, medical facilities, roads and the impact of housebuilding on capacity** which had been previously agreed as the next project should be postponed. The Group recognised that considerable work was being undertaken at the moment in relation to Local Growth Plans, therefore the work would be best completed when new procedures/systems had been put in place.

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 continue. 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). They decided that meetings would be scheduled but if no business was necessary that the meetings could be cancelled.

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 scheduled for September 2016. This meeting will review progress on the 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, Principal Scrutiny Officer
Tel: 01243- 01243 53 4685 / e-mail: bjones@chichester.gov.uk
- **West Sussex County Council** – Susanne Sanger, Senior Advisor
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Click [here](#) for further information on joint scrutiny arrangements in West Sussex.