

Scrutiny Committee Report – Request For Further Information On Newly Created Boards

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Purpose of report

At the June Scrutiny Committee meeting, members discussed how the committee can effectively engage with and contribute to the work of the boards to aid the change process. Members agreed to request a report or presentation from the Interim Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council explaining:

- The terms of reference and governance for each board
- The approach/process each board is planning to adopt
- How the work programme and progress of the boards will be shared with Scrutiny Committee and all members
- How processes enable 'critical friend' challenge
- How priorities and the allocation of resource will be agreed across the boards
- If social return on investment is going to be used as a measure to help make decisions, if not what method will be used with regard to Social Value?

Unfortunately the Interim Chief Executive and Leader of the Council are unable to attend this meeting. Recognising the value of the debate, the Leader requested this item is deferred until August when he and the other portfolio holders can participate.

Cllr Ric Pallister – Leader, has prepared a statement explaining the make-up of the boards.

The governance, terms of reference and communication programme are attached in the appendices.

Action Required

- That Scrutiny Committee considers:
 - The Transformation Programme Governance included in the Transformation Programme Full Council report 17 March 2016
 - The terms of reference for each of the boards as published internally for staff
 - The statement from the Leader with regard to the make-up of the boards
 - Transformation Communication Programme
- Prepares questions for the Interim Chief Executive, Leader and Portfolio Holders for August.

Detailed response

Set out below is the statement received from the Leader of the Council:

“In constructing the Boards in the way I did, I deliberately put non-executive members at the heart of Transformation and Income Generation, as the first step. I wanted to ensure that we had a cross section of members meaningfully engaged in shaping SSDC’s future so that

they really felt part of it and not just commenting from the outside. At the same time I sought an element of political balance as far as I was able. In pressing ahead with this model I was conscious from observing other Authorities who had gone or are going down a similar route, that our new arrangement looked somewhat unwieldy and that we were in danger of perhaps creating too many seats at the table. Swift decision making will be a critical factor in moving at the right pace and the larger the Board the more chance there is of slowing down the process unnecessarily. Nevertheless I felt we should at least try this approach of greater direct member involvement. If we are to achieve our financial targets we will need to be much more fleet of foot and change our practices to align with the new approach that Full Council endorsed. That needs members to also play their part in streamlining the way we function and avoiding duplication.

As far as the other two arrangements are concerned, the Joint Leaders Advisory Group with Sedgemoor and the Regeneration Board, I see these as being different. The JLAG is what it says on the tin; an advisory group made up of an agreed cross section of members from each Authority drawn from across the political groups. Progress and outcomes will be reported back to the Executive and thus Scrutiny can comment on any report coming forward. The new Regeneration Board arrangements are designed to achieve greater integration with our Area Committees and enable an easy route for pushing issues down to the areas and up from the areas to a new strategic level. By having all 4 Area Chairs on the new arrangement I have tried to ensure a consistency of approach in exactly the same way as the LDS Board also brings all 4 Area Chairs to a higher level strategic table. I am unclear as to where Scrutiny might fit into this arrangement any more than say the Area Committees but happy to have a discussion.

We have always prided ourselves on the way in which, through effective Scrutiny, members are engaged at South Somerset when compared to other Councils. We really do get our heads around the issues but equally we cannot afford to find ourselves being hamstrung by "process overload" through adding extra layers of examination that buy up valuable specialist officer time with reports and presentations. Somehow or another we have to find the right balance and I had hoped I was achieving that with the Boards. The alternative in achieving meaningful member engagement is to disestablish the Boards and use Scrutiny as the route to member engagement. I don't believe that is the right way. In my simple mind I had thought that by involving non-executive members in the way I had, that I was building Scrutiny into the process and in a way that would not then require yet further routine Scrutiny.

In trying to get meaningful and informed debate I have quite deliberately brought items to Full Council where that was not technically necessary (Broadband) and brought some Full Council items via the Executive so that members could have some time to consider issues through Scrutiny before a decision was taken in Full Council. Again, our constitution did not require such a route but it felt more inclusive and ensured that at least a core of members would have gained greater understanding of key issues.

These are early days and the new arrangements need to be given time to properly bed in, however a debate about the role of Scrutiny seems sensible with the key Portfolio Holders present if that can be achieved."
