

Report of the Journey of Exploration Task and Finish Group

Why was the group formed?

The issue of future management arrangements and service delivery is of such significant importance that effective member engagement was seen as vital.

Scrutiny at South Somerset District Council has a proud tradition of effectively engaging the wider membership in complex issues. In this case, to support the work of the Working Group (as established by Full Council and consisting of Cllrs Ric Pallister, Tim Inglefield, Jo Roundell-Greene and Dave Bulmer and the Interim CEO's), it was decided that a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group involving members from both the main political groups should be established.

It was hoped that this group would allow a wider group of members to familiarise themselves with the details of the Joint working arrangements as they emerged, bringing forward the perspectives of their elected colleagues and providing 'critical friend' challenge to the work of the Working Group and in time, The Joint Leader's Advisory Group (JLAG)

Task and Finish group membership

Councillor Sue Steele – Chair of Task and Finish Group
Councillor Clare AparicioPaul
Councillor Cathy Bakewell
Councillor Mike Beech
Councillor John Clark
Councillor Sarah Dyke-Bracher
Councillor Peter Gubbins
Councillor Val Keitch
Councillor David Norris
Councillor Sue Osborne
Councillor David Recardo
Councillor Dean Ruddle
Councillor Angie Singleton
Councillor Rob Stickland

The membership of the Task and Finish Group is in political balance, the role of the group was to scrutinise and be a critical friend for the Project Board. Therefore members of the Executive were also invited to join the Task and Finish group.

All of the members that joined the group put themselves forward following an invite as part of an all member survey from Councillor Sue Steele – Overview and Scrutiny Chair.

Review Methodology

The group adhered to the principles of effective Scrutiny and sought evidence upon which to base any comments and/or recommendations. The group:

- Held weekly meetings throughout November, December, January and February;
- Reviewed a considerable amount of documentation, namely:

- Shared Services and Management – A guide for Councils – LGA March 2011
This is a document produced by the LGA and covers a whole range of issues relating to shared management arrangements, including:
 - *The context for change;*
 - *Best practice ideas and solutions*
 - *Case studies from successful partnerships*
 - *The rationale for change*

- The Change Game – Centre for Public Scrutiny 2015

This is a document produced by the Centre for Public Scrutiny and supports Scrutiny members in;

- *Understanding the rationale for change*
- *Understanding the nature of any change proposed;*
- *Ensuring that all change is well planned and that the plan is adhered to;*
- *Allowing elected members to 'own' the change; and*
- *Preparing for the reality of change.*

- Aylesbury Vale District Council - Thoughts on Success
Some members of the Task and Finish Group attended a presentation given by Andrew Grant CEO AVDC and other members have requested further information and advice from Aylesbury Vale. Copies of the presentation were circulated to all members of the Task and Finish Group.

- JLAG Communications Plan

- Joint Management and Shared Services Closedown Report – Taunton Deane and West Somerset

This is a comprehensive document produced by the officer team supporting the shared management arrangements for Taunton Deane Borough and West Somerset Councils. The document covers all aspects of the project from scoping through to evaluating the implementation of the first phase of the Joint Management and Shared Services project.

- Reviewed and commented on all JLAG notes.
- Briefing from SSDC s151 Officer on the current financial position of SSDC, the effect of the Spending review and the Autumn Statement and options for future saving.
- Arranged a Learning Event with the CEO and Leaders of the Dorset Tri-Authority Partnership of West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland and North Dorset to which they invited members from Sedgemoor District Council to act as a potential starting point for some joint working across the wider membership.
- Reviewed the outcomes of a short Member Survey and passed this information onto the JLAG. The survey asked members to identify:
 - What members most valued about SSDC and would wish to retain above all else;

- Any suggestions for future savings and/or income generation; and
 - Anything in particular they would like to bring to the attention of Scrutiny and/or those preparing the Business Cases.
- Provided 'critical friend challenge' to Cllr Pallister when he attended to provide weekly updates on the progress of the JLAG.
 - Reviewed and commented on the draft Solo and Joint Business cases as presented the Interim Business Cases.

What has the Task and Finish Group achieved?

As already mentioned, this Journey of Exploration has taken a different direction from that initially anticipated, thus the role of the Task and Finish Group has had to evolve throughout the process. The members of the Task and Finish Group have given many hours of their time to considering the complex issues as they have arisen throughout and have ensured that each key proposal has been subjected to a wider perspective.

Through their efforts, members of the Task and Finish Group have been able to bring to the fore the comments and concerns of their colleagues, which in turn have been taken forward to the JLAG. Through the active engagement of more elected members, the Task and Finish Group has helped to ensure that the 'Journey of Exploration' has developed to reflect the voice and concerns of all elected members of South Somerset District Council.

When members of the Task and Finish Group commenced this piece of work, as their Terms of Reference show (attached at Appendix A), their priority was to ensure that when all members of South Somerset were asked to make a decision about future management options, they had sufficient information available to do so. This has remained the aim of the Task and Finish Group as the process has evolved.

This report provides a brief summary of the work and comments of the Task and Finish Group and is included in the final report to Council to provide a level of reassurance to members that a robust as possible process has been followed by the Task and Finish Group in order to reach this point.

In preparing this report, members have made the informed assumption that both the Joint and the Solo Business cases are in effect 'concept' papers – documents that set out the general parameters but do not provide an actual 'blue print' for implementation and in addition, a more detailed 'issues' document has been produced for the attention of the Working Group. This additional document contains more detailed comments on the process to date that members hope the Working Group will find useful in moving the project forward.

Conclusions

When comparing the outcomes against the original aims and ambitions of the review, members of the Task and Finish Group noted that:

- Due to the timescales and volume of information, they have not fulfilled an original ambition to keep all members informed. This to some extent reflects the complex nature of working with another authority and the inevitable delays that can arise in the release of information.

- An invitation was made to Sedgemoor District Council Scrutiny and 6 of their members did attend the Learning Event with West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland and North Dorset.
- They produced a detailed Risk Register reflecting their concerns, this was circulated to the Working Group. (Attached at Appendix B)
- They provided timely feedback on their own research to the JLAG;
- Through their involvement in this process, 14 members of the authority now have a better awareness of the options available to SSDC to better manage council services with fewer resources. It is hoped that this knowledge will be effectively utilised in the delivery phase of this project.

Next Steps

The group recognise that the original aims and objectives went beyond this initial headline Business Case phase and are perhaps more relevant to the following phase leading to the production of more detailed Business cases. Members anticipate that they will have continued involvement thus ensuring that sound evidenced based decisions are made in the interest of the community.

Terms of Reference for the Journey of Exploration Task and Finish group.

Constitution and aims

The Task and Finish group will be made of elected members across all political parties and may include Portfolio Holders, as the task and finish group will be working as a critical friend to the Project Board not to the Executive.

The Task and Finish group will seek to aid the process of preparing separate business cases for:

- Sharing a Management Team (Tiers 1-3 or 1-4?) and potential service delivery with Sedgemoor District Council, and
- Maintaining our own management team (managing the reduction in government grants without sharing)

As well as undertaking the formal role of scrutiny of the Project Board, the Task and Finish group will aim to ensure full Member awareness and involvement in all stages of the Business Plan process, right up to the decision at Full Council in the New Year.

Specific tasks

The Task and Finish group will aid the process by undertaking the following:

1. The group will engage all SSDC members (and where appropriate Sedgemoor members also) to help determine:
 - a. What the council priorities are/will be:
 - i. what members want to protect and to what degree
 - ii. what are members vision/aspirations for the Council and South Somerset
 - b. Members views on what risks and opportunities and other matters should be investigated in the Business Cases
 - c. What extra information in terms of context Members feel they need, for example external pressures, timing, best practice, improvements in technology
 - d. What information members require in the business plans and/or accompanying report in terms of information, data, evidence, research, context, to enable them to make an informed decision.
2. The Task and Finish group will collect and collate this information and will provide timely analysis to the Project Board.
3. The group will review the information, data, evidence, research and analysis used to help compile the business plans when it becomes available from the Project Board in a critical friend capacity and with appropriate Member involvement will provide timely feedback.
4. The group will look to see how the business plans have taken members ideas, concerns and requests into account.

5. The group will check that the business cases provide all the necessary information to enable members to make an informed decision in terms of how SSDC can best provide to SSDC tax payers the priority services that Members have identified, in a way that meets the criteria of being sustainable, efficient, and good value
6. The group will provide direct feedback throughout to the project board and will compile a statement with regard to the business plans that will be considered by Scrutiny Committee in advance of Full Council.

To prevent delays, the Task and Finish group will work in parallel with the Project Board as has been done previously when there has been a time pressure which should help ensure that there is a wider group of members who understand the process and the business plans.

Journey of Exploration Task and Finish Group

Risk Register

Members of the Task and Finish Group have asked from the outset for a robust approach to managing the risk associated with the 'Journey of Exploration'. At this stage, we have not had sight of the risk register that is being used by the JLAG and officer project team, so in the meantime, as members of the Task and Finish Group have specifically asked for their thoughts/ comments on their perception of the risks associated with the **business case preparation phase** of the project, we have used the same Risk Register template produced by Taunton Deane / West Somerset in preparing their Business case. Members should however note that the scoring system used is the adopted SSDC matrix – as used in District Executive Reports.

It is intended that the document will be filled in by members at their meeting on 17th December and will be constantly reviewed and updated as the project progresses – the information contained in this first draft reflects the comments made by members of the Task and Finish Group to date based on the evidence they have considered, but it is not exhaustive and is intended more as a basis for further discussion by members than as a definitive document at this stage.

Risk register – key

Catastrophic		17	22	23	24	25
Major		12	18	19	20	21
Moderate		6	13	14	15	16
Minor		2	8	9	10	11
Insignificant		1	3	4	5	7
Impact		0.1	0.25.	0.5	0.75	0.9
	Likelihood	Remote	Unlikely	Possible	Probable	Highly probable

Risk	Cause	Consequence			Score	Risk Mitigation
Lack of clarity over SSDC Goals	No current Corporate Plan reflecting agreed member priorities. No detailed budget figures going forward.	Members unable to assess the ability of each business case to deliver 'vision'	Probable	Major	20	Member workshops to inform Corporate Plan.
Member misunderstandings – lack of trust at member level across both authorities	Members outside of the 'core team' are not fully briefed at either council at all stages of the process.	Members feel unable to take a decision because 'trust issues' have not been addressed.	Possible	Major	19	Workshops Joint Scrutiny
Lack of objectivity in Business Case preparation	Those preparing the business cases will be directly impacted by the outcome and so cannot reasonably be expected to be wholly impartial.	The final Business Cases may not be seen as suitably objective	Probable	Major	20	Clear evidence base is available for every proposal and independent, impartial capacity is sourced for the lifetime of the project. External validation/verification Task and Finish involvement
Timescale is too short for members to give due consideration to all available evidence.	A deadline of February (or possibly March) 2016 has been set for consideration of the headline business cases.	Members are not able to give the matter due consideration which may compromise the quality of the final decision	Probable	Major	20	Request by members to delay report to Full Council

Risk	Cause	Consequence			Score	Risk Mitigation
Lack of clarity as to what criteria the final business cases will be assessed against.	Lack of member consultation re priority/weighting of differing success measures.	Members find it difficult to assess business cases against their aspirations for SSDC	Possible	Major	19	Task and Finish representing wider membership, providing a success criteria
The two Business Cases are not given parity of esteem.	Perception that the majority of effort is put into the shared management team business case.	Members unable to make a decision due to lack of information.	Possible	Moderate	14	Robustness of Task and Finish Group assessment
Perception that Joint Management proposals represent a 'take over' by one partner.	Lack of an SSDC CEO leading to the assumption that the SDC CEO is the 'ranking' officer and de facto 'in charge'.	SSDC members feel their sovereignty is compromised.	Possible	Moderate	14	Open selection High level negotiation at JLAG level
Lack of awareness of Cultural Differences	Lack of awareness/ understanding of the culture of each organisation. How each authority works, the working relationship/style of staff and members.	Unfamiliarity causes misunderstanding and trust issues. Causing potential delays and lack of confidence in any form of shared working	Possible	major	19	Time is spent understanding the 'cultures' of each partner organisation and strategies for harmonising are developed.