

Scrutiny Review of Pioneer Somerset Phase 1

1. Summary
 - 1.1 The Joint Scrutiny Panel comprised of two non-executive members from each of the six Somerset councils. The panel reviewed the activity and outcomes from the development phase of Pioneer Somerset and compared them with the intentions within the original Programme Initiation Document (PID).
 - 1.2 The panel agreed that overall progress had been made by leaders, chief executives and officers working together. Members felt that the initial programme plans may have been too optimistic about what could be achieved quickly. A detailed update report had been produced in November 2008 and is being considered by all six councils.
 - 1.3 The panel's main concerns were about Programme Management and Communications, particularly with elected members.
 - 1.4 The panel made recommendations (some of which concur with those in the update report), which it now asks the Leaders Group to consider at their next meeting. This report will also be made available to each council's scrutiny function to consider future scrutiny arrangements.
2. Recommendations
 - 2.1 That the Leaders Group (or relevant responsible authority):
 - as a matter of urgency fills the programme management void through SOLACE Enterprises and devotes sufficient time in early January to ensure rapid progress is made in this area;
 - links the revised programme management with the production of a consistent communications plan for members – by end of February 2009;
 - ensures all the achievements made during 2008 against the Pioneer Somerset objectives are identified and published to members – by end of March 2009;
 - ensures that sufficient resources are focussed on the Shared Services and Customer Access workstreams, where most of the savings or service improvements can be made;
 - confirms revised milestones for the programme and its three priority workstreams (by end of March 2009), so that any future joint scrutiny panel can assist in monitoring progress.
 - 2.2 That:
 - each council agrees to appoint two members to a new permanent joint scrutiny panel for Pioneer Somerset, to review the implementation phase;
 - the new joint scrutiny panel should choose which aspects of the programme should be reviewed and when;
 - for continuity, the first meeting of that panel should be chaired by the existing joint scrutiny panel chairman – Nobby Turner from Sedgemoor.
3. The Review
 - 3.1 Pioneer Somerset is a programme of work, supported by the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Programme, designed to radically transform and enhance the system of multi-tiered local government across the County. It is a five year programme, starting in April 2008. The Programme Initiation Document

(PID) was agreed by all six councils between May and July 2008. The planned outcomes of the programme are:

Outcome 1 – Efficiency

To achieve annual revenue savings arising from enhanced two-tier working of £20m, by 2012/13 (Base year: 2007/08).

Outcome 2 - Customer satisfaction

For every principal local authority in Somerset to achieve levels of overall resident satisfaction in the National top quartile, by 2013.

Outcome 3 – Reputation and Partnership Working

To achieve a marked improvement in the perception, reputation and recognition of Somerset and each of its local authorities, including positive direction of travel and use of resources ratings in the new Comprehensive Area Assessment of level 3 or above, by 2013.

- 3.2 Discussions were held in early 2008 between the lead scrutiny members of each authority and an agreement was reached on an informal framework for joint scrutiny reviews. During the summer all six councils agreed to join forces for a joint scrutiny review of the progress of the first phase of Pioneer Somerset.
- 3.3 The Pioneer Somerset Joint Scrutiny Panel comprised of two non-executive members from each of the six Somerset local authorities. The panel met at the end of October 2008 to agree their terms of reference and plan the review. They held two meetings with council leaders and senior officers. Their final meeting was on 19 December 2008. The panel reviewed the activity and outcomes from the development phase of Pioneer Somerset (phase 1) and compared them with the intentions within the original PID.
- 3.4 The main aim of phase 1 of the Pioneer Somerset programme was to deliver a comprehensive action plan by November including plans for each of the nine programme workstreams. This aim was not achieved but the leaders did produce a detailed update report for consideration by each council, which was used to inform the scrutiny review.
- 3.5 The panel agreed that progress had been made by leaders and chief executives working together. In the context of “two-tier pathfinder” programmes elsewhere in England, Pioneer Somerset appeared to be doing well to keep a momentum going and all parties involved.
- 3.6 Although progress was slower than had been originally expected all the councils were still working towards shared objectives. This continuing level of enhanced co-operation was in itself a significant achievement. Each council remained committed to improving services for local people and improving co-ordination amongst the councils. The overall position was a marked improvement on twelve months previous. It had become clear that it was not necessary for every council to be involved in every initiative at the outset.
- 3.7 It was suggested that examples of the progress and an idea of any savings made might be helpful to broaden public knowledge and awareness of Pioneer Somerset. This should form part of the improved communications for members and the public.
- 3.8 Members considered the likelihood of potential savings and what would happen to any money saved by the councils. Council Leaders had asked for clarification from government and remained hopeful that all savings could be retained by each council.
- 3.9 The update report stated that much of the progress so far had been unstructured. The panel found that most of the workstreams did not achieve their intended first year programme milestones. Some made no progress other than to produce a

project initiation document. Members felt that the initial plans had been too optimistic about what could realistically be achieved quickly.

- 3.10 The panel recognised the benefits of re-shaping the programme across three key workstreams with sufficient focussed resource. They believed the emphasis of work in 2009 should be on Shared Services and Customer Access, where most of the savings or service improvements can be made. These opportunities should be progressed quickly and should be a key part of the remit of the new programme manager. Consequently the revised milestones for the programme and its three priority workstreams need to be in place before the end of March 2009.
- 3.11 The panel's main concerns at both meetings were about:
- Programme Management and
 - Communications, particularly with elected members

3.11.1 Programme Management

At the first panel meeting it became clear that there were difficulties with the overall management of the programme. A programme manager had been appointed in July but left within a month. Consequently the structured programme support team had not materialised. The leaders group considered a range of options and chose in November to commission SOLACE Enterprises to fulfil the programme management role until March 2009.

Members expressed concerns at their final meeting that the new programme manager had only just started his work. They concurred with the view that structured programme management was required to bring the overall Pioneer Somerset programme back on track. The panel urged the leaders to devote sufficient of their and senior officers time in early January to ensure rapid progress is made.

3.11.2 Communication

The panel believed there had been insufficient and inconsistent communication throughout the previous twelve months to elected members about Pioneer Somerset. This emerged as a recurring theme and was acknowledged by the Leaders and Chief Executives present. Members felt that where progress had been made those good results had not been communicated or celebrated with the general public.

Members noted that many success stories had emerged from the councils working more closely together but often these had not been tracked or recorded properly. They recommended that all the achievements made during 2008 against the Pioneer Somerset objectives be identified and published to members.

The panel were pleased that their concerns were being addressed in that resources to support programme communications had been agreed on a secondment basis.

The panel felt it was essential that a consistent joint communications plan for members, aligned to future programme milestones, should be produced by the end of February 2009.

- 3.12 Panel members welcomed the open and frank discussions with Council Leaders and senior officers. They now felt involved and informed and many could see the potential benefits of Pioneer Somerset. There were comments that the wider council membership might feel likewise with improved communication.
- 3.13 The panel agreed there was a need to establish permanent joint scrutiny arrangements for the Pioneer Somerset programme. They recommended each

council appoint two members to a new permanent joint scrutiny panel for Pioneer Somerset, to review the implementation phase.

- 3.14 The new joint scrutiny panel should choose which aspects of the programme should be reviewed and by what means. Some members suggested it would not be practical to cover the whole programme at every scrutiny meeting and recommended a themed based approach. The panel's final recommendation was that the first meeting of any new panel should be chaired by the existing joint scrutiny panel chairman.
- 3.15 The content of the panel's report and recommendations (in 2.1 & 2.2) were approved by the panel chairman. As agreed in the panel's terms of reference these will be sent to the Somerset Leaders group and to each Council's Scrutiny Committee.
Note: A single page summary (v1.1) containing the panel's recommendations has been circulated for early action; these are identical to the recommendations within the final version of this outcome report (v2).
- 3.16 The panel members wish to see the outcomes leading from their work. Consequently the panel requests an initial response from the first meeting of the Leaders Group in 2009. They also request the production of a short progress report by the Pioneer Somerset Directors Group at the end of March 2009 that would be available for circulation to all council members.
4. The Joint Scrutiny Panel

Authority	Members
Mendip District Council	Jim Barron Philip Whitmarsh
Sedgemoor District Council	Roger Lavers Nobby Turner (Chairman)
Somerset County Council	Derek Nelson Alan Paul
South Somerset District Council	John Calvert Sue Steele
Taunton Deane Borough Council	Terry Hall
West Somerset District Council	Chris Morgan Tim Taylor

5. Background Papers

Pioneer Somerset Programme Initiation Document – June 2008
Brief of Joint Scrutiny Panel – Pioneer Somerset (agreed 24 October 2008)
Pioneer Somerset Update Report and Appendices – November 2008

Note: For copies of background papers please contact the report author.

12 January 2009

Prepared on behalf of the Pioneer Somerset Joint Scrutiny Panel by:
Keith Wiggins
Scrutiny Manager
Somerset County Council

kmwiggins@somerset.gov.uk 01823 355032