

Scrutiny Assembly Meeting

One Council, One Team, One Vision

30th November 2009

Present:

Victor Brownlees Chief Executive

Scrutiny Members: Cllrs. Derek White (Chair), Keith Austin, Roger Aveley, Joy Francis, Gill Green, Yvonne Hicks, Terry Kiernan, Alan Mackenzie, Clive Mason, Adrian Meredith, John Minor, Kuldip Sahota, Charles Smith, Karen Tomlinson, Adrian Williams

Scrutiny Co-optees: Shaukat Ali, Sue Harris, Val Lindley.

Fiona Bottrill Scrutiny Manager

Stephanie Jones Scrutiny Officer

Introduction by Victor Brownlees

The One Council, One Team, One Vision proposals are about the officer side of the organisation and how it relates to itself i.e. how officers work with officers. It is up to Scrutiny to decide how it organises itself and the new structure will work regardless of this.

The change was prompted by the Employee Survey which showed that whereas 70% of staff enjoy their jobs and are committed to their individual teams, 2/3 did not identify with the Council as a whole. It also showed that a large part of the organisation feel close to senior management and trust them. Victor wants to create an organisation that is focussed on the delivery of good public services, where people work together and are proud to work for the Council. These are the issues that the proposals are aimed at addressing; they are about what goes on within the Council, how people think and feel, but not about changing the delivery of services.

People generally think of the organisational structure as a triangle with the Chief Executive at the apex and other layers of staff underneath. This is the opposite from Victor's view. Front line staff who deliver services and touch people's lives should be at the top of the organisation. The Council delivers over 700 different services to people: some touch most people (such as highways, transport) and others are for specific groups or vulnerable people (such as children in care for whom the Council is a corporate parent). The focus of the organisation should be on these services. Everything else is underneath and should support service delivery. The job of the Chief Executive is to provide the structure and resources to enable the organisation to deliver services.

Questions, Answers and Comments

Will you scrap the internal charging market (for example grass cutting can come from education or highways or community budgets)? (CS)

Yes, we must act as one team – if it's Council grass it's one public service.

We need a collective approach to things that are a collective problem. For example, the increased numbers of children coming into care means costs have increased but this should not just been seen as a budget issue for CYP as we are all responsible for looking after children in care.

Will staff be located on a single site? (TK)

Not all, as we will still need people working out in the community amongst people and re-connecting with them, but we would like other staff to be based in a single location.

Do we still need face-to-face contact, or could we use more technology? (DW)

No - a pc screen cannot replace face-to-face contact.

Can you clarify the role of the Assistant Chief Executive and at what level this post sits? Will it add to costs? (KA)

The Assistant will support the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors and Heads of Service. It is not a Deputy Chief Executive and the post will bring a net saving to the authority.

How do officers perceive elected members will fit into the structure and how will communication with members work? (GG)

There is an issue with keeping elected members informed but the reorganisation is about officer to officer communication and not officer to member communication. When officers are working better together, this could make communication with members better.

Some staff may be worried that they will be expected to take on extra responsibility which is outside their area of expertise, and if this happens expertise will be watered down. (KT)

Victor has spoken to a large number of staff over the last few weeks and they obviously want to understand where they fit in the new organisation but the feeling has been very positive about the proposition. This was the original vision for Telford & Wrekin Council.

We do not want to water down expertise and we will keep skills where they are needed and where people are qualified, but some staff have skills in areas that could be applied across different areas of work such as finance or marketing.

DW expressed a concern that skills will be spread too thinly and could be diluted.

The new structure is welcome but we have seen from a current scrutiny review about skills that there are a lot of services that are delivered that are not joined up. The NEET Strategy, Employer Engagement and the 14-19 Agenda are all cross-cutting themes that need to be joined-up. Can you give us an idea of how you see these linking up internally under the new structure? (AMac)

Within the model, there is a responsibility on senior management to knit these

issues together. We also need to work with partners such as TCAT about how we reach out to young people but we need to plan earlier from 0-5 years and not wait until 14-19.

....so how will the links be made? (AMac)

The Employment & Skills Board is trying to join this activity together and we are now talking to TCAT and partners on the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) about pulling work together. The whole mindset of the One Council, One Team, One Vision is joining up.

Is One Council, One Team, One Vision really about saving money? (DW)

The context is the huge pressure on public sector budgets and the Comprehensive Spending Review, so although the changes are not about saving money, they will be in this context. Over the next few years we will have a smaller leaner organisation, but hope to lose staff gradually so it is not too painful. The original timetable for implementing the new structure was for Heads of Service to be in place for 1st April 2010, but this has been brought forward to 11th January with the final outcome in place at the end of March 2010.

You said you preferred staff to be on a single site: will this be in the town centre? (CM)

Victor's personal view would be to have all staff in one headquarters in the town centre. The new building should house as many staff as possible that do not need to be in the community. We could also join up with partner organisations such as the police or PCT to co-locate. There is an issue with being locked into the lease on Darby House and any vision or proposals have to make sense financially.

What are the plans for Darby House – are we trying to buy it or negotiate out of the lease? (AW)

This will be part of the analysis, and there is no easy answer.

Do you feel that staff are being honest with you when they give you their views? (KT)

Yes, I do. Some staff are getting very good at being honest!

If staff are centralised in one town centre location what will happen to Highfield House, the Mount and other properties that are part of the Wellington regeneration? (KT)

We are not talking about bringing everything together. There are some very vulnerable people in communities who can be in a state of distress when they come to us so we need to bring together the people who can be brought together, but we will still need staff out in the communities.

Will you keep staff in the clusters?

We will review this. Some people think that it can be a barrier as staff get to know and get used to working with a smaller number of people. We also need to see how we can work better with families together.

The Integrated Teams are working well, but we need to join children's services together in the clusters and not separate early years out from other children's services. They should be joined up. (SH)

I absolutely agree.

If children move, they should not have to leave their familiar cluster based support and have to get to know new people. (JF) If a child moves school they can be in a different cluster area from their families, but the ethos is that services work better together. (KT)

Yes, and this will be our response as a Council.

Under the Locality Management arrangements, the Woodside project office is working extremely well as housing and other council staff have face-to-face contact with local people in a joined-up way which is very important. This is also now starting to happen on Sutton Hill. (AMac) The single-point-of-contact approach is the biggest single success of the Woodside regeneration project. (DW)

Does the One Council, One Team, One Vision proposal have the backing of all the Corporate Directors? (AW)

Yes, it is the collective viewpoint of Corporate Directors. There may be different styles and nuances, but this is a collective belief.

The Donnington neighbourhood officers are very good, but money is the biggest problem. Will the system be kept going as it works very well in Donnington? (CM)

It is horses for courses. This approach could work well for some people, but others could need a "rapid response" approach so staff go where the problems are. It is not always about money, although one proposal is to have a pot of money which can be allocated to specific areas for specific projects at a local level.

This would be welcome. Scrutiny is looking at the Locality Management model at the moment, and is also being reviewed internally. Scrutiny members visited other local authorities to see how other models were working, and in Walsall there was a community chest which could be spent on local activity such as fun days. This helped local areas to keep their local identity. (KT)