

WORCESTERSHIRE FLOODS SUMMER 2007

Possible Arrangements for a Joint Scrutiny

Background

1. At the joint Worcestershire scrutiny chairmen and vice-chairmen meeting on 19 July 2007, it was agreed that joint working between Districts and County scrutiny would be useful to avoid duplication and develop partnerships and communication. It was also noted that the impact of scrutiny could be strengthened by working together.
2. If it is agreed by members on 26 November 2007 that a joint countywide scrutiny of the summer floods would be useful, the arrangements for taking this forward will also need to be agreed.
3. A possible way forward has been set out below and views are sought on these in order that a way forward can be agreed on 26 November.

Constitutional arrangements and processes

4. Developing a formal joint scrutiny committee would be time-consuming and may delay the progress of a summer 2007 floods scrutiny. It is therefore suggested that an informal, county-wide, joint scrutiny task group is established to carry out this review. As the group would be informal, its powers to review and scrutinise, request information and make recommendations would rest in its constituent scrutiny committees.

Membership

5. Each authority's scrutiny committee would be invited to nominate a member for the joint scrutiny task group.
6. The suggested size for the scrutiny task group is one member from each authority, but suggestions for any non-councillors to be co-opted on to the task group are welcome.
7. As an informal body, political balance rules do not apply. However it would be sensible to ensure that there is a range of political groups represented.

Chairing

8. It is suggested that the task group nominates a chairman from its membership

Terms of Reference/Scope of Scrutiny

9. It is suggested that members discuss the possible terms of reference and scope of the scrutiny on 26 November. The resulting draft scope would then need to be agreed by each authority's scrutiny committee.
10. Any comments or suggested changes to the scope would be circulated and a final version agreed by the representatives on the task group.

Gathering evidence

11. It is suggested that witnesses are invited to meetings of the task group. However, there may be times when task group members could gather evidence separately and report back to the main group.

Meeting Times

12. Members will need to say when is best to meet, e.g. evenings or daytimes.

Public access to meetings and information

13. As an informal body, access to information rules would not apply. However, it is good practice to work in a transparent way, and it is anticipated that meeting times, agendas and notes of meetings would be published on the internet. They could also be circulated to each Scrutiny Committee.

Agreeing recommendations

14. It is anticipated that the task group members would agree any recommendations by consensus. Once a scrutiny report is drafted by the task group, it would need to be approved by each authority's scrutiny committee.
15. If any authority's scrutiny committee was unable to agree the joint report, they could submit their own, separate report.

Submission of recommendations

16. The report and recommendations will be circulated to whichever body they are aimed at, e.g. District Council and County Council executives, or partner organisations.
17. Those bodies would be required to respond to the recommendations as coming from the scrutiny committees of the respective local authorities.

Monitoring of implementation of recommendations

18. It is suggested that the scrutiny report highlights a timescale for when the recommendations should be monitored and that the task group is re-formed to carry out that task.

Resourcing

19. The County Council's scrutiny team can resource the summer 2007 floods joint scrutiny task group.
20. However, Districts are asked if they could nominate a relevant officer to act as a liaison point, from whom advice and information could be sought during the scrutiny.

Future Joint Scrutiny

21. It is likely that an increasing amount of joint scrutiny will be developed in the future, experience from this review could be used to inform the development of future, possibly more formal standing arrangements.

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