



North Northamptonshire Shadow Executive Committee

At 7:00 pm on Thursday 27th August 2020

Held as a virtual meeting via Zoom

Present:-

Shadow Members

Councillor R Roberts (Leader of the Shadow Authority and Chair)	Councillor M Griffiths (Deputy Leader of the Shadow Authority and Vice Chair)
Councillor I Jelley	Councillor J Addison
Councillor T Partridge-Underwood	Councillor S North
Councillor J Smithers	Councillor W Brackenbury
Councillor D Jenney	

Officers

E Elliott – Interim Head of Paid Service	B Gill – Interim Monitoring Officer
P Helsby – Programme Director	G Hammons – Interim Chief Finance Officer
B Smith – North Northamptonshire Democratic Services	K Denton – Borough Council of Wellingborough
P Goult – North Northamptonshire Democratic Services	A Statham – Programme Team Finance Enabler
D Pope – Democratic Services KBC	T Grant – Strategic Delivery Director
A Earnshaw – Deputy Chief Executive NCC	G Moore - Communications

Also in attendance

Councillor C Stanbra
Ms Lyn Buckingham

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Tom Beattie (Corby BC).

2. Notifications of requests to address the meeting

The Chair informed the meeting that there were two speakers, Councillor Chris Stanbra (NCC) would be addressing the meeting with regard to agenda items 8a and 9. Ms Lyn Buckingham would be addressing the meeting on items 8a and 8d.

3. Members' Declarations of Interest

Councillor Tom Partridge-Underwood declared a personal and prejudicial interest in relation to agenda item 7 – Pensions Admin Authority.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 23rd July 2020

The draft minutes of the Shadow Executive Committee meeting held on 23rd July 2020 had been circulated.

Councillor Tom Partridge-Underwood MOVED and Councillor Wendy Brackenbury SECONDED that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The minutes of the Shadow Executive Committee meeting held on 23rd July 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. Programme Director's Update

The Committee received the monthly report from the Programme Director updating them on the progress being made towards the creation of the new North Northamptonshire Council.

In relation to the Programme Status Summary, it was noted that the Finance programme had a direction of travel from AMBER to GREEN and this was welcomed. It was further noted that good progress had been made by the Task and Finish Groups dealing with finance-related matters. There was no change to the Corporate or Children's programmes which remained Amber. Adults remained AMBER but the direction of travel was to GREEN. It was noted that the "soft" disaggregation of Adult Services was still programmed for October 2020.

Under Programme Notes, the Programme Director stated there had been a positive meeting with the trade unions recently, where the draft Blueprint had been shared prior to its wider circulation.

The report and presentation included further information with regard to the Programme Health Check and the monitoring and assurance approach being taken with regard to Day One issues.

In relation to Change Management, the report indicated the actions undertaken through July 2020. Whilst there had been an additional 13 Change Champions come forward since the previous report, there was still a need to undertake a more detailed gap analysis of where there were any under-represented service areas. The report also detailed those actions underway in August 2020. The Programme Director stressed the importance of ensuring that Change Champions were supported by the Programme and their respective authorities to ensure they play an important role in taking the Programme forward.

In conclusion, the Programme Director updated the Committee on the implementation of the approved Communication and Engagement Strategy. It was noted that both internal and external additional resource had been brought into the communications team.

Attached to the Programme Director's report was a copy of an executive summary of a health check review of the Future Northants programme undertaken in July 2020. This had been undertaken with the assistance of internal stakeholders through an independent team arranged through the LGA (Local Government Association), and was intended to assess the planning to date for the Programme at the commencement of the delivery phase, whilst identifying the impact of the pandemic and the recovery requirements of the sovereign councils.

The Future Northants Finance Monitoring Report had also been circulated to the Committee. It was noted that the overall variance of £239k was an increase on the previous report by £124k. It was, however still expected that any savings not delivered in 2020/21 would be realised in later years. This variance mainly related to Adult and Children's Services, and was a timing issue; there was still confidence these savings would be delivered. There still remained considerable financial risks to the reported projected outturn position, which would not be fully understood for some time dependent upon the recovery of the economy and any further outbreaks of Covid-19. It was further noted, that of the total of £84.448m savings, £34.907m had already been delivered in 2019/20, and the Programme was on track to deliver £14.365m during 2020/21. This would leave £35.176m to be delivered post-Vesting Day.

The Finance Report also included details, obtained from sovereign councils, on the current projected outturn positions of authorities for 2020/21. These figures included details of the projected impact of Covid-19 on authority income, together with mitigating measures to offset losses (including current Government additional grants). It was noted that further assistance from Government may be forthcoming, which would improve the outturn position.

Councillor Martin Griffiths MOVED the recommendations; these were SECONDED by Councillor Steven North.

RESOLVED that:-

- i) The High-level Programme Delivery Status report be noted;
- ii) The update on Change Readiness and Change Champion Recruitment be noted;
- iii) The Communication and Engagement update be noted;
- iv) The contents of the Independent Programme Health Check be noted, and the recommendations included in the report be adopted; and
- v) The Finance Monitoring Report be noted and approved.

6. Future Northants Programme – Draft Blueprint

The Committee received a report setting out the draft Blueprint for the new North Northamptonshire Council. This included suggestions for how services were generally expected to be organised at Vesting Day, as well as an overview of some key areas of activity, and proposals to ensure a safe transfer to the new authority of services, and aspects of proposed service improvements.

Attached to the report was a copy of the draft Blueprint, which had been widely circulated for comment and discussion. The draft included an overarching view of how services would be delivered, what would be delivered and where, approaches to how the new unitary authority may operate, and details of how some transformation of services were to be delivered.

The draft included chapters on Background & Context, Draft Blueprints, Key Directorate Themes and Opportunities, Key Areas of Focus and Development at Next Stage, and Decisions and Next Steps. This was a high-level Blueprint and more detailed work, which was continuing, would underpin the key themes. Issues and comments arising from consultation would be taken into account, prior to the final Blueprint being tabled for determination.

Councillor Steven North welcomed the draft, and was pleased to see that whilst it focused on ensuring a “safe and legal” position on Vesting Day opportunities were being taken to transform some services without necessitating unreasonable risks.

Councillor Jason Smithers also welcomed the draft, and the opportunities being presented. Councillor Smithers did query whether there were avenues for the new North unitary authority to disaggregate in the future, where currently it was envisaged there would be a shared or joint service provision with the West. Officers confirmed that the North and the West would have their own respective budget provision. If the North decided in the future to cease a joint or shared service, a mechanism would be in place to do so, however there may be contractual or financial risks that would need to be considered, but it was feasible. Officers highlighted that IT provision presented a particular area that would require careful consideration, given that this underpinned all service areas.

Councillor Steven North MOVED the recommendations; these were SECONDED by Councillor Ian Jelley.

RESOLVED that:-

- i) The progress made on preparation for the new Unitary Council be noted, and the Draft Blueprint be approved, including how the services were likely to be configured within the new Council, taking into account the arrangements agreed with the Shadow Executive with regard to the disaggregation of Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) services and aggregation of district and borough services;
- ii) The aspirations and opportunities set out in the papers be noted as a result of bringing services together, underpinning capabilities being progressed in relation to our digital transformation, as well as consider future aspirations for the People and Place of North Northamptonshire;
- iii) The wider engagement programme, as set out in Section 4 of the report, with all Members and stakeholders on the content of the Blueprint, and more detailed work that sat below the summary presented to the meeting, in order to understand the service plans for Day 1, be endorsed;
- iv) Feedback be received on the draft Blueprint from employees, Members and trade unions at a future meeting (to help shape the final agreed approach), following the recent commencement of trade union and staff engagement; and
- v) The North Northamptonshire Shadow Authority be recommended to adopt the draft Blueprint.

7. Pensions Administration Authority

The Committee received a report to consider the options available for the future administration of the Pensions Administration Authority. This function was currently undertaken by Northamptonshire County Council.

The Pensions Administration Authority was responsible for delivering a range of critical functions. An LGPS Administering Authority need to be identified to support the professional and transactional functions involved.

An appendix accompanying the report provided background information, together with an analysis of the potential options available for the future administration of the pension's service.

Officers were recommending that West Northamptonshire Council act as the future Pensions Administering Authority for both unitary councils.

Councillor Martin Griffiths MOVED the recommendations; these were SECONDED by Councillor Ian Jelley.

(Councillor Tom Partridge-Underwood did not vote or participate in this item having previously declared a personal and prejudicial interest).

RESOLVED that:-

- i) Approves the selection of West Northamptonshire Council as the Pensions Administration Authority (Option 3 in the report).

8. Task and Finish Group Updates

8.1 Council Tax Harmonisation

The purpose of the report was to provide information on the progress made to date by the Council Tax Harmonisation Task and Finish Group.

Councillor Chris Stanbra addressed the Committee. Councillor Stanbra noted that in the report reference was made to the cost of moving to a 20% LCTRS being £600k. Councillor Stanbra suggested this was £539k. Councillor Stanbra was concerned, that if agreed, the potential financial increase for some Corby residents under the LCTRS would be threefold. Councillor Stanbra suggested that additional income may be obtained from the increase of penalties on empty properties, and that this may negate the need in an increase in the LCTRS. In conclusion, Councillor Stanbra suggested an increase in the public consultation period from 6 to 8 weeks. The Chair thanked Councillor Stanbra for his contribution.

(On conclusion of his contribution, Councillor Stanbra was removed from the virtual meeting)

Ms. Lyn Buckingham addressed the Committee. Ms. Buckingham recognised the difficult issues facing the Authority, and the need to have a consistent approach across North Northamptonshire. Ms. Buckingham felt that the proposed approach on the LCTRS would result in a negative impact on Corby residents, and unfairly hit the vulnerable and those on low wages. Ms. Buckingham questioned if the Authority had considered a phased approach to any reductions in the LCTRS, to mitigate any financial hardship encountered by recipients.

(On conclusion of her contribution, Ms. Buckingham was removed from the virtual meeting)

The report included details of the discussions regarding the approach to Harmonisation, the options relating to the Harmonisation Period, the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS), Council Tax Discounts and Exemptions.

The recommendations from the Group included –

Council Tax Harmonisation

- To adopt the Alternative Notional Amount (the average council tax) methodology, as set out in legislation, for calculating the baseline level of council tax to apply the referendum principles against;
- To harmonise the level of council tax across North Northamptonshire in the shortest possible period taking into account the financial position of the Council and the impact on taxpayers.

Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme

- To develop a scheme for consultation and propose to the Shadow Executive Committee in September 2020.

Council Tax Discounts and Exemptions

- That the new authority should harmonise the discounts and exemptions to the level of the existing majority; and
- That the new authority should consider maximising the Long Term Empty Property premium to an extra 100% for 2-5 years, extra 200% 5-10 years, and extra 300% for 10 years plus.

These recommendations would now be forwarded to the Budget and MTFP Task and Finish Group for consideration.

Councillor David Jenney MOVED the recommendations; these were SECONDED by Councillor Jason Smithers.

RESOLVED that:-

- i) The progress made by the Council Tax Harmonisation Task and Finish Group be noted.

8.2 Disaggregation

The Committee received a report from the Disaggregation Task and Finish Group on its work to date. The Group were focussing on the approach being taken to the disaggregation of county council services, together with the aggregation of district and borough services across North Northamptonshire.

The report highlighted the principle issues and choices being addressed by the Group, the key risks associated with disaggregation, the perceived benefits, and the current financial position (Balance Sheet) of sovereign councils covering General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Capital.

The output from the Group would now be forwarded to the Budget and MTFP Task and Finish Group in order that Group could complete its work.

Councillor Jason Smithers MOVED the recommendations; these were SECONDED by Councillor Martin Griffiths.

RESOLVED that:-

- i) The progress made by the Disaggregation Task and Finish Group be noted.

8.3 Day One Accommodation - North

The purpose of the report was to make recommendations for the principles for Day One Accommodation and the associated principles to be followed. Adoption of the principles set out in the report would allow the Future Northants Programme to communicate clearly on the approach for Day One Accommodation to staff and Members across North Northamptonshire.

Appendix A, accompanying the report, highlighted the key principles that the Group felt needed to be applied when considering Day One accommodation, the suggested approach to be taken, and also the potential risks which required mitigation. It was envisaged that the vast majority of staff would be in their current location on Day One, and that local Members would use existing facilities. It was noted that there would be a need to accommodate disaggregated staff from the county council.

Councillor Steven North commented that the assumptions made to date for Day One were that virtual meetings would be continuing. Councillor North wished it noted that potentially there may have been a return to more “normal” working arrangements by Day One, including meetings being held “on site”. Councillor North felt that this possibility needed to be factored-in. Councillor Wendy Brackenbury noted this suggestion; options were subject to further discussion and development.

Councillor Wendy Brackenbury MOVED the recommendations; these were SECONDED by Councillor David Jenney.

RESOLVED that:-

- i) It be agreed that the current working and location arrangements were maintained where feasible, safe and legal for Day One as shown in the attached report, under sections entitled “Recommendations” and “Approach”.

8.4 Corporate Communications and Engagement - Visual Identity

The purpose of the report, was to present to the Committee the work undertaken to date by the Communications and Engagement Task and Finish Group relation to the development of a logo for the new unitary authority.

Ms. Lyn Buckingham addressed the Committee. Ms. Buckingham suggested that two of the designs circulated, bore a resemblance to designs used by existing organisations. The Committee may wish to consider this, prior to making a final decision. The Chair thanked Ms. Buckingham for her contribution.

(On conclusion of her contribution, Ms. Buckingham was removed from the virtual meeting)

The Committee noted that three designs had been produced following discussion, which were now subject to wider consultation. The results of the consultation process would inform the Task and Finish Group’s final recommendation.

Councillor Jean Addison MOVED the recommendations; these were SECONDED by Councillor Ian Jelly.

RESOLVED that:-

- i) The three proposed designs (Appendix A) be noted;
- ii) It be noted that the designs had gone out to staff, trade unions, Members, partners and the public to seek their opinion of the three designs via an online survey; and
- iii) It be noted that feedback would be used to shape and inform additional work on these if required, and the final logo to be presented to the Shadow Executive Committee for approval in November 2020.

9. Referral of Motion – from the Shadow Authority Meeting held on 20th August 2020 (received in accordance with Meeting Procedure Rule 12)

The following motion had been tabled at the Shadow Authority meeting held on 20th August 2020. The motion had been forwarded to the Shadow Executive Committee for determination.

“The recent decision by Northamptonshire County Council to go ahead with arranging and awarding the Highways Maintenance Contract is premature.

The new North Northamptonshire Council should make these decisions as the contract need not start until 2022 and its impact will be felt for years to come.

The Shadow Council is asked, therefore, to request that Northamptonshire County Council does not adopt a new Highways Maintenance Contract covering North Northamptonshire and that approval of any contract is deferred until it can be considered by the new North Northamptonshire Council in 2021 and as part of that process, the option of bringing the maintenance work in-house is thoroughly assessed”.

Councillor Chris Stanbra, who had tabled the original motion to the Shadow Authority meeting, spoke on this motion. Councillor Stanbra felt that there needed to be greater consideration of an in-house option, and that this matter should be determined by the new unitary council. The Chair thanked Councillor Stanbra for his contribution.

(On conclusion of his contribution, Councillor Stanbra was removed from the virtual meeting)

Councillor Jason Smithers stated that an in-house option in this case was not realistic. This was currently the responsibility of the county council as Highway Authority to determine, however the new unitary council would be able to determine this matter when it arose in the future.

Councillor Ian Jelley MOVED that the motion be rejected; this was SECONDED by Councillor Jason Smithers.

RESOLVED that:-

- i) The motion be rejected.

10. Exempt Items

The Chair reported that there were no exempt items.

11. Urgent Items

The Chair reported that there were no urgent items.

12. Close of Meeting

Meeting closed at 8:20 pm.