

## North Northamptonshire Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee

At 7:47 pm on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020  
Held as a virtual meeting via Zoom

### Present:-

#### Shadow Members

Councillor M Scrimshaw (Chair)  
Councillor V Perry  
Councillor J Beirne  
Councillor G Titcombe  
Councillor H Harrison  
Councillor L Lawman

Councillor M Rowley  
Councillor C Brown  
Councillor J Hakewill  
Councillor A Henley  
Councillor A Davies

#### Officers

E Elliott – Interim Head of Paid Service  
G Hammons – Interim Chief Finance Officer  
P Helsby – Programme Director  
P Goult – North Northamptonshire  
Democratic Services

A Earnshaw – Director of Adults,  
Communities & Wellbeing  
K Brown – Deputy Director NCC  
F McHugo – North Northamptonshire  
Democratic Services

#### Also in attendance

Councillor A Lee (KBC), Ms A Holland, Ms L Buckingham, Ms N Lloyd & Mr Dylan Lewis-Creser.

*(Prior to opening the virtual meeting the Chair apologised for the delayed start due to technical issues. The Chair confirmed that the meeting was now live-streaming on You Tube)*

### 1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor P McEwan.

### 2. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The draft minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2020 had been circulated.

Councillor Hakewill MOVED and Councillor Harrison SECONDED that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

### **RESOLVED that:-**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Under this item, the Interim Head of Paid Service confirmed that future report templates would be amended to include a section on sustainability implications.

### **3. Members' Declarations of Interest**

Members were invited to declare any matters of interest on items to be discussed during the meeting. No declarations were made.

### **4. Questions and Notifications of requests to address the meeting**

I was noted that Councillor A Lee (KBC), Ms A Holland, Ms N Lloyd and Mr D Lewis-Creser had requested to address the Committee on Agenda Item – Draft Blueprint, and that Ms L Buckingham had submitted a question relating to the same item.

### **5. Chair's Announcements**

There were no Chair's Announcements on this occasion.

### **6. Draft Blueprint**

Prior to officers presenting the report and draft Blueprint, the Chair invited members of the public to address the committee.

Councillor A Lee (KBC) addressed the Committee. Cllr Lee raised concern that there was limited detail included relating to planning and the environment. Cllr Lee felt that combining these two areas was problematic, as arguably they had contradictory priorities. In addition, Cllr Lee noted there was no detail in the North segment of the document relating to climate change issues, this was of concern. Cllr Lee also raised concern regarding the number of grammatical errors in the document, and that future versions should be subject to appropriate proofreading. The Chair thanked Cllr Lee for her contribution.

Ms. A Holland addressed the Committee. Ms. Holland stressed the importance of transport as a cross-sector issue. Sustainability needs to have more prominence, based upon standards and goals set out by the United Nations. Ms. Holland suggested the Authority build into the Blueprint a way of connecting sustainable transport across the portfolios, and create a core function which is based upon the United Nations standards and goals on sustainability to ensure the achievement of these across the organisation. The Chair thanked Ms Holland for her contribution.

Mr D Lewis-Creser addressed the Committee. Mr Lewis-Creser stressed the importance of protecting the local environment and addressing the issues resulting from climate change. He noted there was no reference to the Climate Emergency. The new authority had a prime opportunity to register its commitment to protecting the environment and local green spaces. There were no references to safeguarding the environment and tackling climate change, these topics needed to be given greater prominence. The Chair thanked Mr Lewis-Creser for his contribution.

Ms. N Lloyd addressed the Committee. Ms. Lloyd stressed the important role that local authorities had to tackling climate change. With the creation of the new unitary council, there was an opportunity for Members to set a clear agenda, based on best practise for elsewhere, to ensure policy making included addressing the threat of climate change, to ensure a sustainable community for future generations. The Chair thanked Ms. Lloyd for her contribution.

The Interim Head of Paid Service indicated to the Committee, that a new report template was being developed by Democratic Services, which would include the requirement for report authors to consider climate, environmental and sustainability issues in relation to the matters within respective reports.

A question had been received from Ms. Buckingham; the question received stated:-

*“On page 38 it discusses the Blueprint for the strategic housing Function i.e. housing options, homelessness, housing need and supply, but does not discuss the landlord/ tenant relationship and whether these will be need to be harmonised or transferred, or if indeed if it will be a lead management function and what the practicalities of that will be?”*

*As a tenant of one of the sovereign councils, I know that when that council ceases to be, so will my tenancy.*

*What is also not clear is if the Authority would have to adhere to certain statutory requirements (particularly relating to tenant consultation) and follow the process set out in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG): Housing Transfer Manual leading to the grant of consent by the Secretary of State. Or whether other processes would take precedence? Could you possibly clarify this?”*

An answer to the question was read to the meeting:-

*“The council housing stock which is currently owned by Kettering Borough Council and Corby Borough Council will transfer to North Northamptonshire Council in April 2021 when the new council assumes the functions of Kettering and Corby. North Northamptonshire will therefore be a stock holding authority as well as a strategic housing authority and it will be landlord to more than 8,000 tenants.*

*As North Northamptonshire Council is the successor to two stock holding authorities that are being abolished, the provisions of the Housing Transfer Manual do not apply. They would have applied if there had been a proposal to transfer the stock to a different type of landlord such as a housing association or a private company.*

*Both Kettering and Corby do have a duty under s.105 of the Housing Act 1985 to consult their tenants on significant changes to the management of their homes. Clearly in this case both authorities will need to consult their tenants during the period up to April 2021 on a range of practical issues relating to the transfer. These would include allocations and transfer policies, conditions of tenancy and repairs policies among others”.*

The purpose of the report before the committee set out the draft blueprint for North Northamptonshire Council and how were generally expected to be organised at Vesting Day (1<sup>st</sup> April). It also included a general overview of some key areas, and the current plans to ensure a “safe and legal” transfer of services from sovereign councils.

It was noted the work on the document had been progressing well, when the Covid-19 pandemic, and the subsequent lockdown, required time and resources to be directed elsewhere. As a result, it was agreed that the central focus of the Programme would be ensuring that the new unitary council was “safe and legal” on Vesting Day, with significant transformation being undertaken after Vesting Day. Opportunities for transformation had been, and would continue to be, explored where they arose, but the onus would be on “safe and legal” in all cases.

It was stressed that the draft was not a structure chart, nor intended to represent a management structure. It was not a policy document, nor a corporate plan. Plans and

policies would be developed in due course. Where for example, the draft document lists the environment and planning functions together, this was to group functions and should not be interpreted as representing any intentions relating to policy. The draft document provided an opportunity for staff to see how services may be split, and where they may be located within the organisation.

It was noted that Adult Services would be subject to a “soft” disaggregation prior to November 2020.

The draft Blueprint was a high-level document, which was intended to be used for the development of more detailed plans for the structure of the new unitary council and for the delivery of services.

The draft Blueprint included sections on Background & Context which included details on the business imperatives of the unitary and details of the agreed portfolios for Executive Committee Members.

The Blueprint included details of the services provided by the county council and provided by district/borough councils. This indicated where it was proposed some services were to be delivered across the county, where it was proposed some services be temporarily hosted, or where services were to be provided by a lead authority. Clearly there were business criteria that suggested some services should be delivered across the county, whilst others could be disaggregated to North and West, and other services aggregated within North and West respectively. County services would only be disaggregated by Vesting Day if it was safe to do so.

The document also detailed key directorate themes and opportunities available, which included some transformation, but focussed initially on ensuring services were “safe and legal” for Vesting Day. The Blueprint also included key areas of focus and development during the next stage of the programme. The key decisions and next steps to be taken were also highlighted.

Within the presentation, there was detail regarding People and Place services. It was noted that there were details about proposed Digital investment going forward. Further more detailed information would be circulated to Shadow Members next week regarding intentions for service delivery.

Councillor Hakewill commented that he hoped that members of the community who had knowledge and experience on specific issues, could be drawn upon in the future to assist the unitary council in developing its policies. Councillor Hakewill drew reference to comments made by previous public speakers, and also requested that a link to the United Nations document referenced by circulated to Committee members.

In relation to the public contribution regarding housing, Councillor Hakewill noted there was likely to be some consultation between current Housing authorities and their respective tenants. Councillor Hakewill suggested that it may be appropriate for the Committee to be kept updated on this, whilst recognising it was a sovereign council issue.

Councillor Hakewill again raised concern that within the portfolio slide there was no reference to rural issues; he had raised this previously. The Interim Head of Paid Service did comment that rural issues fell within the portfolio of Councillor D Jenney, and Members were

invited to contact Councillor Jenney should they have matters they wished to raise. The Chair suggested that to improve clarity, the word “rural” may be included in the portfolio title going forward.

Councillor Davies agreed it was important that any future report template included a range of implications, including sustainability, so Members could consider prior to determination of any recommendations.

Councillor Davies broadly welcomed the document and the aspirations expressed. Councillor Davies was particularly pleased to see an emphasis on digital transformation. Councillor Davies also expressed support for seeing an improving and expanded social housing function, including reducing voids and seeing additions made to the housing stock. Councillor Davies supported ensuring the new council had a strong estate management function, ensuring that the new council maximised the benefits from its estate, and maximised inward investment. Overall Councillor Davies wished to see the new council continue the ambition for the area, and build upon the quality of services currently provided by sovereign councils.

Councillor Davies hoped that the new council adopted a holistic approach, ensuring council decisions were joined-up and maximised benefits to the local community.

Councillor Harrison thanked officers for the report. Councillor Harrison did suggest that the format of the draft could be reconsidered to make it more “user friendly”. Councillor Harrison recognised that the document did seem to cover-off all of the significant issues for Day One, and this was welcomed. Councillor Harrison recognised that it was important that all implications were clearly presented on issues, to ensure a holistic approach could be taken.

In conclusion, Councillor Harrison that the document was “high-level” and lacked some detail, however overall it was a good document, laying out important aspirations, and providing a base on which to develop the new council further.

Councillor Henley, noted that a more detailed document was to be distributed shortly. Councillor Henley felt it was important that the Committee saw more detail as soon as possible, to enable Committee members could fully engage in debate and discussion. Councillor Henley expressed concern that One Angel Square (OAS) was envisaged to be a “hub”, and expressed his wish that nothing for North Northamptonshire was based at OAS.

Paul Helsby commented that the document before the Committee was “high-level”, and had been taken through the Shadow Executive Committee. Paul Helsby confirmed that the more detailed Blueprint would be in the public domain next week, and due to be debated by the Shadow Executive Committee meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020. The detailed document would build upon the draft. It would not be a policy document, but build upon the assurances mentioned in the draft. The emphasis on “safe and legal” for Day One would continue to be prioritised.

Councillor Pengelly stressed the importance of waste collection and management, he felt that this could have greater prominence in the document. Councillor Pengelly also hoped that if there were any proposed changes to housing policies that there was full consultation and Member involvement. Councillor Pengelly stated that he and other Members would be seeking to maintain and enhance the social housing function of the new council.

Councillor Pengelly also expressed concern that there was a lack of training for Shadow Members on some of the issues highlighted in the document, which fell outside the normal remit of some Members.

The Chair stated that his understanding was that any tenant consultation would only relate to the transfer of housing stock from sovereign councils to the new council, and that any significant changes to housing policies would be the subject for determination by the new council.

Councillor Titcombe thanked the public speakers for attending. Councillor Titcombe recognised the significant environmental issues that were present, but stressed that sovereign councils were working towards addressing these issues, and towards a “cleaner and greener” society.

Councillor Perry noted that the more detailed Blueprint was to be tabled at the Shadow Executive Committee prior to Overview and Scrutiny Committee being able to input. Councillor Perry felt that the Committee continued to be out of step in the decision making process, and were continually unable to input its thoughts and views to decision makers prior to the determination of decisions. The Blueprint omits from talking about scrutiny and its role, and Councillor Perry felt that this omission should be addressed.

Councillor Perry also expressed concern that some Shadow Members required further training, and that there was a lack of knowledge on some key service areas; this may make scrutiny of future budget proposals difficult.

The Chair agreed that it did seem in most cases that the Committee was playing “catch-up”, and the Committee was currently unable to play its role to the full, and help inform decision makers.

Councillor Davies also stressed the importance of adequate training being provided to Shadow Members going forward.

Anna Earnshaw in response to the point raised regarding the use of OAS, it was stressed that it was intended for some service provision to be based at OAS in the short term, however the customer face of such services would be customised for North and West respectively. Nothing would be branded for OAS and would be branded for North Northamptonshire.

The Chair summarised the discussion held, which was generally positive, and requested officers summarise the discussion and submit a written representation to the Shadow Executive Committee for consideration. The Chair also took the opportunity to thank all of the public speakers for attending and their respective contributions.

#### **RESOLVED:-**

- i) The report be noted, and comments made by the Committee be forwarded to the Shadow Executive Committee for consideration.

## **7. Adult Services Update**

The Committee received a presentation from Katie Brown and Anna Earnshaw on the transformation of Adult Services by the county council, and details regarding the soft-disaggregation of the service later in the year ahead of Vesting Day.

The presentation included details of transformation activity, including the Target Operating Model (TOM), a new case management system, the integration of health and social care etc. The presentation included the transformation roadmap for the service, which highlighted key milestones and objectives.

The key mission statement of the service, was to make the best use of the available resources to keep the people of the county safe and independent. The service wanted to ensure that people maintained their independence as much as possible, but where support was required that this was communicated quickly and efficiently.

The presentation provided an overview of how successful the service had been in improving performance and raising the quality of service received by residents. Information was provided, regarding the proposed move from centralised adult social care teams, to a more community based social care teams.

The reasons for the proposed change in the method of service delivery included that staff would have a base but their work would predominately be out in the community. Staff would connect to and work with voluntary sector partners, parishes and district/borough services in the respective areas. Being based in communities would mean that staff would know all of the available support for people in their areas. It would also mean that staff could easily meet people to talk and understand their needs and outcomes.

The service had been trialling the new model over the previous 5-months, across two teams. Trial results showed that the strengths based approach and increased connectivity with the community had led to better, more independent outcomes for residents needing the service's support. Examples of positive feedback from residents, partners and staff were provided in the presentation.

Councillor Pengelly sought clarification on what discussions and consultation had been held with the trade unions. Officers confirmed that there had been long-standing consultation and full involvement. Discussions had been positive, and trade unions had been supportive in the improvements and changes made to the service.

Councillor Davies welcomed the positive presentation, and that staff were being empowered. The improvements to the service for customers were welcomed, and the work being undertaken with partners.

Councillor Henley welcomed the presentation, and sought some context in relation to some of the data contained within it. Councillor Henley also felt that it would be useful to be able to benchmark against comparable authorities. Officers agreed to circulate baseline data outside of the meeting, in order that Members could more fully scrutinise the outcomes detailed. Officers confirmed that the service was high-performing on benchmarking scales, which was well received.

Councillor Perry felt that it was important that Members had as much data as possible, in order to gauge performance and direction of travel of services. Councillor Perry welcomed the presentation, and provided anecdotal testimony that staff and service users had seen an improved service. Councillor Perry noted that she had received a lot of positive feedback from residents.

**RESOLVED that:-**

- i) The presentation be noted.

**8. Programme Director's Update**

The current Update had been circulated. Paul Helsby informed the Committee that an updated version would be considered by the Shadow Executive in due course, but did wish to update the Committee on some items.

Under the Programme Status Summary, Paul Helsby reported that there were now only three programmes reported as Amber (an improvement from four). Direction of travel was now only one Amber, rather than two.

There were now just under 350 Change Champions, and there was now a greater understanding of where there were gaps in representation from service areas and sovereign councils. Discussions were ongoing with senior managers to encourage further participation.

An Action Plan had been developed arising from the recent LGA Review. These actions had been assigned to senior managers to action.

Councillor Harrison noted that there were to be some changes to personnel, and sought assurance that appropriate officers would continue to undertake their "lead roles" in the programme, in order to avoid disruption. It was confirmed that officers would continue in the "lead roles" supported by the wider team. In addition, the Chief Executive of Northampton BC would be taking an oversight role for Day One Readiness and for Communications & Engagement.

Councillor Hakewill raised the issue of sovereign council reserves. He was concerned that it was being reported that there may be the need to use reserves to cover a shortfall of £8.567m. In addition, Councillor Hakewill sought clarification regarding the level of projected savings.

The Interim Chief Finance Officer explained that the report included the current impact of Covid-19 on sovereign council finances, which took into account the Government's mitigating measures to date. There was continued lobbying of Government to increase assistance to local government.

The Interim Chief Finance Officer explained that the Future Northants project was a multi-year project, and currently was in its second year. The report detailed the benefits that had been realised to date. In 2019/20 financial year £35m of savings had been delivered through transformation of services etc. In the current financial year it was expected that a further £15m of savings were to be achieved. This comprised £50m. It was envisaged that a further saving of £35m would be achieved post-Vesting Day by the new unitary council. This covered both new unitary councils.



The Chair noted that should the pressures on council finances due to Covid-19 continue there would be a need to factor these in to the budget proposals for the new unitary council. Officers confirmed that would be the case. Currently the Government's additional financial package related to 2020/21 only.

Councillor Pengelly noted that in-house leisure services had suffered a significant income reduction, but that externally provided leisure services had also suffered. Councillor Pengelly suggested that the unitary council may wish to consider bringing leisure services in-house across the authority, to provide additional protection for these services.

Paul Helsby updated the Committee, that in relation to the reported variances, the latest position on NCC was a projected positive variance of £3.3m (previously reported as a positive variance of £0.172).

**RESOLVED that:-**

- i) The report be noted.

**9. Forward Plan of Decisions**

The Forward Plan of Decisions 1 September – 31 December 2020 had been circulated with the agenda.

**RESOLVED:-**

- i) The Forward Plan be noted.

**10. Work Programme**

The Committee briefly discussed agenda items to be included for future meetings of the Committee. These included:-

October – Children's Services (the future relationship between the Children's Trust & the unitary council and the role of unitary members), Council Tax Support Scheme consultation.

November – Invitation to the Leader and the Deputy Leader of the Authority.

December – Budget.

January – Budget.

Other topics may be considered dependent upon time and availability. The Chair stressed the importance on the Committee contributing to the discussions on the budget for the new unitary council; this would need to be prioritised.

Councillor Hakewill raised the issue of town and parish council precepts, and the impact that Council Tax harmonisation may have on these. Councillor Hakewill suggested that the future conduct of virtual meetings, including whether conducting hybrid meetings is an option, may be an area for future scrutiny. In conclusion, Councillor Hakewill suggested seeking some assurance about arrangements for the May 2021 elections may be appropriate. The Chair agreed to consider these items outside of the meeting for future inclusion on the Work Programme.

Councillor Pengelly again raised the issue of training for Shadow Members, particularly ahead of discussions on the budget.

Councillor Pengelly had previously raised concerns as to whether trade unions were fully engaged in the Programme. The Interim Head of Paid Service reported that she had met with trade union officers the previous day, with further meetings scheduled with representatives. Points raised from the meetings would be forwarded to the Programme's HR Enabler for consideration. The Chair agreed to discuss further with Councillor Pengelly outside of the meeting, and if appropriate would bring any issues back to Committee.

Councillor Perry again stressed her concerns that the Committee were not receiving information in adequate time, in order for the Committee to be able to constructively engage prior to decisions being taken. The Chair would request officers raise this issue again with the Programme.

**11. Exempt Items**

There were no exempt items discussed.

**12. Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items discussed,

**13. Close of Meeting**

The Chair declared the meeting closed at 9:43 pm.