

North Northamptonshire Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee

At 7:00 pm on Thursday 12th November 2020

Held as a virtual meeting via Zoom

Present: -

Shadow Members

Councillor Perry (Vice Chair)
Councillor C Brown
Councillor Hakewill
Councillor Henley
Councillor Lee
Councillor Pengelly (Chair)

Councillor Rowley
Councillor Davies
Councillor Harrison
Councillor L Lawman
Councillor McEwan

Officers

M Hammond – Interim Monitoring Officer
C Hadley – Director of Children’s Services
F McHugo – North Northamptonshire
Democratic Services

G Hammons – Interim Chief Finance Officer
L Hyde – Director of Transformation
P Goult – North Northamptonshire
Democratic Services

Also in attendance

Councillor W Brackenbury & Councillor J Smithers.

1. Election of Chair

Nominations were sought for the position of Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2020/21. The nomination of Councillor Pengelly was duly MOVED by Councillor Lee and SECONDED by Councillor Hakewill. There were no other nominations.

RESOLVED that: -

Councillor Pengelly be elected as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Titcombe & Councillor Beirne.

3. Questions and Notifications of requests to address the meeting

There were no requests from the Public to address the meeting on this occasion.

4. 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.

5. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The draft minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8th October 2020 had been circulated.

Under Item 9 Programme Director's Update, Councillor Harrison pointed out that the Committee had noted the Finance Monitoring Report, not approved it.

RESOLVED that: -

The minutes (as amended) of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8th October 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice Chair.

Under this item, Councillor Henley again wished it noted that he had previously requested that the baseline data, referred to by officers under the Adult Services Update on 10th September 2020, be circulated to Members. Democratic Services officers had chased this up, but the information had still not been provided by Adult Services. Councillor Pengelly agreed to raise this request with the Leader of the Council.

6. Chair's Announcements

There were no Chair's Announcements.

7. Children's Trust Update

Councillor W Brackenbury presented this item. Councillor Brackenbury introduced Ms Cathi Hadley who was the Director of Children's Services and would be the designated officer for both North and West Northamptonshire. The statutory role would remain with the local authorities. It was noted that the Lead Member and the Director would have regular meetings with the leadership of the Trust. The Trust had commenced at the start of November 2020.

It was noted that the Trust would have a new Chief Executive from December 2020, Mr Foster. Meetings between the Shadow Authority's officer and Member representatives would be scheduled with the Trust's leadership. These arrangements would be in place to cover the remainder of the Shadow Period.

The Blueprint detailed the services moving to the Trust, which included the Youth Offending Service. The Education Service would remain with the unitary authorities, initially to be hosted by the North, which would allow for school admissions to take place prior to disaggregation of that service.

Ms Hadley then proceeded to introduce a slide presentation. Ms Hadley stressed that the unitary authority retained statutory responsibilities, including the role of corporate parents. Ms Hadley, as Director, would fulfil the "intelligent client function" on behalf of the unitary authorities.

The presentation highlighted key contractual issues between the unitary authorities and the Trust. These included core legal terms and conditions, together with four fundamental schedules. These documents governed the relationship between the unitary authorities and

the Trust. These arrangements were currently between NCC and the Trust, however this would change to the unitary authorities after Vesting Day.

Ms Hadley explained the governance arrangements in place, which included the creation of a Strategic Group (to include Members and key officers) and an Operational Group. The slides explained the role of Members, which included performance monitoring and dispute resolution. Ms Hadley explained how the dispute resolution procedure would work.

Councillor Pengelly queried who had set the Key Performance Indicators and how would these be measured. Many of the KPIs were set against national performance. It was noted in some cases performance was currently above average, in other areas there was a need for improvement.

Councillor Hakewill queried how many Members were to be represented in the governance structure. Officers stated that there would be two Members sat on the Strategic Group. Councillor Hakewill wondered how the majority of Members would be able to interact with the governance structure and raise concerns. Councillor Brackenbury stated that Members would still be able to raise concerns through the Lead Member, through the DCS and the Corporate Parenting Board. The potential for Trust officers to attend scrutiny on occasions was a possibility, however the design and scope of the unitary authority's scrutiny arrangements were yet to be finalised.

Councillor Lee queried the budget of £131m provided to the Trust, and whether this would be adequate. Ms Hadley confirmed that the budget had been set based upon the activity of Children's Services at NCC and felt that it was adequate.

Councillor Harrison queried whether there would be any KPI regarding the issue of trafficked children, and the Trusts performance in tackling this matter. Ms Hadley confirmed that the responsibility sat with the Child Exploitation Group, who sought to address this issue.

Councillor Harrison queried how often the Strategic Group would be meeting; Ms Hadley confirmed it would be meeting on a monthly basis.

Councillor Henley queried whether the KPI list was complete; Ms Hadley confirmed that under contractual arrangements it was complete. Councillor Henley requested a copy of the KPI list. This would be circulated to all Committee members.

Councillor Perry queried the scope of any Safeguarding Board. Ms Hadley confirmed that the Children's Safeguarding Board would cover both North and West.

Councillor Brackenbury invited members of the Committee to contact her outside of the meeting, should they have any further questions or queries.

The Chair thanked Councillor Brackenbury and Ms Hadley for their presentation.

8. Programme Director's Update

The report before the Committee appraised Members of the progress being made in relation to the creation of the new unitary North Northamptonshire Council. Although the report was produced by the former Programme Director as of the end of September 2020, the Director

of Transformation (L Hyde) explained that future reports would have more of a North-focus and based on implementation and delivery.

The report included Programme Status Summary, Programme Notes, Day 1 Assurance, Critical Products, Change Management update, Communication and Engagement update, and a Finance Report.

Under Status Summary it was noted that in future there would be a separate Programme Lead for North and West.

It was noted that there would be changes to the governance arrangements for the programme, emphasising the split between North and West. In addition, it was noted that almost all of the senior management team in the North would be in post by December 2020.

Under Critical Products, it was noted that specialist legal advice had been sought with regard to data sharing arrangements between North and South for appropriate service delivery.

There were currently 117 Change Champions from districts in the North, which would be supplemented by NCC staff once disaggregation had taken place. Ms Hyde stated that at future meetings more qualitative information on the work of Change Champions would be presented, and the report would be more North-focused.

Councillor Pengelly noted that the report being presented was from September and raised concern that the information being presented may be outdated. Councillor Pengelly also queried whether there was ongoing consultation with trade unions.

Ms Hyde explained that the report went to the Shadow Executive Committee received the Update Report first but appreciated that there was a time lag to when it came before Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Ms Hyde would try at future meetings to provide more up-to-date information to minimise any time lag. In relation to consultation with trade unions, Ms Hyde confirmed that fortnightly meetings were ongoing. All key issues were discussed, and the importance of an efficient communications cascade was highlighted.

Councillor Hakewill welcomed that officers from the county were discussing issues with colleagues in Dorset and Buckinghamshire but wondered what mechanism could be put in place for Members to discuss matters with Members who had undertaken LGR. Ms Hyde believed that there were informal channels of communications between leaders, and the Chair suggested that the political groups could open-up communication channels with their fellow Members elsewhere.

Councillor Lee welcomed that the FAQs were being updated on the website for staff and queried how Members could access these. Ms Hyde would investigate this and respond to Councillor Lee.

Councillor Davies welcomed the proposal to continue regular bulletins on the LGR programme. These were useful for Members and provided information for Members to pass on to interested constituents.

Councillor Harrison sought clarification in relation to the mechanism for making changes to the Blueprint. Ms Hyde explained that the Blueprint was subject to change management controls, to ensure that any changes had been subject to appropriate scrutiny and sign-off.

Councillor Henley sought clarification as to which version of the Blueprint was the current. Ms Hyde confirmed that the version approved by the Shadow Executive Committee should be taken as the starting point.

Councillor Henley sought clarification as to the Status Summary report, and which programmes were AMBER or GREEN. Ms Hyde informed the Committee that officers were currently collating an updated Status Summary report. All submissions from officer colleagues required scrutiny, however it was suggested that Finance may have fallen to AMBER. Adults were likely to go GREEN by December.

Councillor Henley was concerned, whilst recognising the data before Committee was 6-weeks old, had expected a clearer update on the current position.

Councillor Lee raised concern regarding Finance going to Amber. Ms Hyde explained that this related to resource implications, in relation to staffing levels.

Under the Interim Chief Finance Officer's report, it was noted that the overall variance of £416k had decreased since the previous report by £52k. This was an improved position. The programme was still expected that savings not delivered in 2020/21 would be delivered in future years. It was noted that there had been the need to reprofile some potential savings in Adult Services and Children's Services.

It was noted that there remained considerable financial risk to the outturn position, which would not be fully understood for some time yet as it depended on the recovery of the economy and the increasing outbreak of Covid-19.

It was noted that of the total £84,448m savings, £34,907m had already been delivered in 2019/20 and the programme was on track to deliver £14,065m in 2020/21. This would leave £35,476m to be delivered beyond Vesting Day.

The Interim Chief Finance Officer informed Committee that there was a considerable amount of work underway in compiling draft budgets for the two new unitary councils. The draft budget 2021/22 was due to be presented to the Shadow Executive Committee in December, to be recommended for wider consultation. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would have the opportunity at its next meeting to start considering how it wished to scrutinise the budget proposals.

The Interim Chief Finance Officer explained, with reference to the AMBER status in the Status Summary report considered earlier, that this related to ensuring staffing resource was retained to assist with the closing down of accounts in 2020/21 among sovereign councils. There were currently temporary staffing resources in place in some councils; this resource needed to be retained to ensure accounts could be closed down efficiently.

Councillor Pengelly queried what risks had been identified. The Spending Review was expected on the 25th November, with the Local Government Funding proposals to follow a few weeks later (mid-December). Currently estimates were being factored into budget proposals.

Councillor Hakewill raised concern that if the NCC accounts for 2018/19 and 2019/20 were not signed-off that these may need to be picked-up by the new unitary councils. Councillor

Hakewill also suggested that if the unitary programme had not been going ahead the Business Pilot monies could have been allocated to frontline services.

The Interim Chief Finance Officer confirmed that it was unlikely that NCC would have signed-off their accounts before Vesting Day, therefore estimated figures would be used. In addition, on Vesting Day none of the 2020/21 accounts for sovereign councils would have been signed-off. There was work underway to estimate figures and these were being kept under review.

In relation to Business Rate Pilot monies, that was being invested in services that were delivering benefits in service delivery.

It was noted that the Shadow Authority would need to set a balanced budget for 2021/22, although it was recognised that there may be some risks within that budget; these risks would need to be mitigated.

RESOLVED to: -

- (i) Note the high-level Programme Delivery Status;
- (ii) Note the update on Change Readiness and Change Champion Recruitment;
- (iii) Note the Communication and Engagement Update; and
- (iv) Note the Finance Monitoring Report.

9. Forward Plan of Decisions – November 2020 to February 2021

The Forward Plan of Decisions November 2020 – February 2021 had been circulated with the agenda.

The Interim Monitoring Officer introduced this item. In introduction, the Interim Monitoring Officer indicated that the Plan had already been amended, in that some of the financial reports would now be going to January's Shadow Executive Committee not in December. There were likely to be a couple of new items added for the next version of the Forward Plan when published.

Councillor Henley queried when the outcome of the LCTS consultation would be received. The Interim Monitoring Officer confirmed that this was likely to be presented to Members in January 2021, as a decision needed to be agreed by the end of that month. The officer confirmed the exact timing of both Shadow Executive Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussions on this item were yet to be agreed.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) The Forward Plan be noted.

10. Work Programme

Councillor Lawman updated the committee on the initial meeting of the Climate Change Task and Finish Group. It was noted further meetings had been scheduled over the coming weeks. It was hoped to have a list of recommendations by the end of January 2021, to hand over to the Shadow Executive Committee and hopefully feed-in to future unitary council policies.

Councillor Lee suggested that the Group may need more time to discuss a wider agenda than that detailed.

Councillor Pengelly drew Members attention to an APSE event on Climate Change to be held on 24th November 2020; Councillor Pengelly would arrange for Members on the Committee to be sent joining details in relation to the event.

Councillor Hakewill suggested that the initial meeting featured a number of officer contributions but had not agreed to co-opt a number of interested individuals onto the Group. He felt this was a missed opportunity.

Councillor Pengelly informed the Committee that sovereign council specialist officers were to be invited to contribute to future meetings, and the Group could invite interested parties to contribute through presentations should they wish.

Councillor Lawman concluded by saying that it was a very structured meeting, and its work would reflect the work already undertaken by the West Northamptonshire Group. It was recognised that officer time was restricted given the current workloads. Experts were being invited to attend future meetings to assist in deliberations.

Councillor Harrison updated the Committee that an inaugural meeting was being established, to be held next week. The focus will be to look at particular areas of the Blueprint to look at in detail, rather than review the whole document. The Blueprint was a “living document” which would be kept under review. The inaugural meeting would decide the key areas for scrutiny, which would determine which officers and subject matter experts needed to be invited.

Councillor Hakewill queried who was on the Blueprint Group, when meetings were scheduled, and whether non-Group Members could attend. It was confirmed that the Group membership were Councillors Harrison (Chair), Henley, McEwan, Perry and Rowley. The inaugural meeting of the Group would be w/c 16th November, with the precise date and time to be determined. Members would be provided with a link to the Group meeting if requested. Councillor Harrison confirmed that the Group was fully constituted, however if any Group Member dropped-out then Councillor Hakewill would be invited to attend as a full Group Member.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) The updates from the Task and Finish Groups be noted.

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 8:37 pm.