NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE SHADOW AUTHORITY

SHADOW OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

28TH January 2021

Report Title	Report of the Blueprint Task and Finish Group
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List of Appendices

'None'

1.   Purpose of Report

1.1.   To report on the work of the blueprint task and finish group .

2.   Executive Summary

2.1   The Committee is asked to note the conclusions of the task and finish group, to draw any conclusions of its own, and to agree what, if any, comments it wishes to pass on to the Shadow Executive.

3.   Recommendations

3.1   That the report be noted.

4.   Report Background

4.1   This committee established the Blueprint Task and Finish Group, in order to give members insight and assurance that the blueprint agreed by the Shadow Executive was realistic, was being implemented effectively, and to make any proposals it saw fit to recommend changes to any part of the blueprint or any aspect of the implementation stage.

4.2   The group's membership comprised Cllr Harrison as chair, and Cllrs Henley, McEwan, Perry and Rowley. Other members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were also entitled to attend as observers.

4.3   The Group met four times, initially to agree its work programme, and then to work through three subject matters it had selected for detailed review. These subject matters were:-

- Housing standards in the public and private sector
- Waste collection and disposal - harmonisation and integration
- Public health and how it is enabled to influence all aspects of the work of the new council

4.4. These service areas were selected because they were thought to affect the greater majority of the population in North Northamptonshire and would be amongst the first to raise public concerns should transition not go well.

4.5. Subject matter experts from existing councils made presentations in each instance and the following conclusions are drawn from the debate which followed each set of presentations.

4.6. The Task and Finish Group is grateful to those officers who prepared and gave presentations to the group, at a time when there was pressing business for their teams to attend to.

5.   Findings and Conclusions

5.1. In broad terms, the Task and Finish Group was assured that good progress was being made across all three subject areas, and that the aspirations as set out in the blueprint were being reflected in the work underway by the cross authority teams that had been dealing with both aggregation and disaggregation challenges.. There was good evidence that officers were working well together and problem solving. The fact that the Shadow Executive has now received reports on service readiness and harmonisation in all three of the subject matters selected is further proof that joint working has been harmonious and productive.

5.2.   One of the blueprint principles is that there should be no reduction in service on day one of the new authority and the Task and Finish Group found no evidence that this was a risk; indeed opportunities had been taken to improve service delivery, by "levelling up", where this could be done without additional costs

5.3. HOUSING STANDARDS

5.3.1. The group looked at standards both in the private sector and in Council housing. Whilst it was noted that the blueprint talked about a fall back position of ensuring all services on the 1st April would be 'at least as good as' what went before, the new Council should aspire to levelling up in the first instance and improvements in service delivery over time. It was noted that some of this levelling up was already intended as part of the work to harmonise policies across the area.

5.3.2. The Group's main conclusions were:-

1. Emphasis needed to be placed on integrated working across services, that is between housing and other functions of the Council, but in particular on making collaborative connections with Public Health; as an example, the

delivery of better insulation in people's homes reduced health inequalities and, in saving money for individuals, reduced poverty as well.

2. There is a lack of baseline data for council owned properties on their energy efficiency performance, because this has only been collected when a house becomes vacant; the new Council should prioritise developing baseline data for all of tis stock.

3. The delivery of future capital programmes for council housing should rely on up to data about housing standards to identify priority areas for investment, and some of this data was currently lacking

4. The Council can help drive up standards across the whole of the area and within all sectors, by investing in, or partnering to deliver, innovative schemes which deliver more energy efficient, cheaper to run, and adaptable homes, which model what is possible and encourages developers to do the same.

5. Such projects already existed and the learning from them and the application of features should be more widely disseminated and used in the design of new publicly owned homes as well as existing stock.

6. High speed electric charging points should be built into new public housing developments as a matter of course. The 2035 target for the ending of gas central heating networks will also put pressure on the Councils' capital expenditure plans which needed early attention as part of an overall approach to energy management in its stock.

7. The Council should extend and deepen its communications about energy efficiency to its residents and tenants and landlords.

8. The continued demand for disabled facilities grants (DFGs) and the delays in addressing referrals was a system wide problem and should be addressed by the new Council as a priority. It was noted that £1 investment in DFGs produced a £7 saving on average in health and social care costs.

5.4.   WASTE

5.4.1. Members were sighted on the proposals due to be taken to Executive Committee on waste collection harmonisation and on the other "moving parts" within the waste service area, notably, the need to harmonise green waste charging, extend food waste collection, to replace the current contract for collection in Wellingborough when it expired in February 2022, and the long term shortfall in waste disposal capacity for the county. The contracts for household waste centres expired in 2025.

5.4.2. Members also noted that final budgets had not yet been allocated to this service area, and expressed concern that the service was unsighted on what it's exact budget would be; but assured that this in hand.

5.4.3. Members also noted that the pandemic had created potentially long term changes in the profile of waste collected, with more food and other recyclates being collected from homes. At the same time the value of recyclates in the market had declined as volume had increased, and the disposal costs of recyclates was now closer to the disposal costs for residual waste.

5.4.4. Finally, it was noted that recycling credits would cease to exist when the unitary council was in being.

5.4.4. The main conclusions were:-

1. That the principal risk for the new Council was the lack of waste infrastructure and there was a critical need to develop plans, probably as joint ventures with West Northamptonshire and others, to ensure long term and sustainable provision was developed soon.

2. The proposed harmonisation of waste collection practices was supported, with its objectives of reducing residual waste, improving the ability to communicate with residents, and gradually levelling up standards, as well as allowing for synergy in enforcement procedures. It was vital that the right communications were readied to advise residents about the changes and that the changes did not involve the wholesale replacement of waste containers.

3. The creation of a unitary authority was an opportunity to take more creative approaches to recycling, and to develop a more competitive commercial refuse offer

4. In assessing the costs and benefits of charging for green waste, account needed to be taken of the differing demographics between large parts of East Northamptonshire and the rest of the new council area.

5. The current county waste partnership should end on 1st April, but that a continuing relationship with West Northamptonshire Council was important to address waste infrastructure needs.

6. The Council should review its waste budget early in 2022 to ensure it remains fit for purpose, especially in the light of changed waste patterns as a result of the pandemic.

5.5.   PUBLIC HEALTH

5.5.1 Members were sighted on the approach to public health being taken now, and in the future, which was to embed public health considerations in every area of service delivery, recognising in particular the inter-dependencies between public health outcomes, tackling inequalities generally and climate change action plans. The range of public health measures and intended outcomes meant that it was a "whole system" feature for how the Council would operate in future. It was noted that some opportunities for improvement would have a broad span across the county whereas others would be more ward specific

5.5.2. The challenges thrown up by the pandemic could also provide an opportunity to tackle public health with the benefit of much greater public awareness and engagement. The focus moving out of the pandemic will be look at catch-up in those service offers that had taken a back seat and the steps taken to even out inequalities.

5.5.3. It was noted that, in other countries, the combination of both GDP and Wellbeing trackers has a positive impact in that an increase in GDP tends to result in an increase in wellbeing markers and this is reflected in the reverse cycle. Increased wellbeing increase GDP.

5.5.4. The main conclusions coming from this session were

1. The importance of the new Council developing a culture whereby all strategy and policy work properly addressed the public health, inequalities and climate change implications of its subject matter and carried out thorough assessments of each, as a matter of course and without having to rely on in house experts to do that for them

2. That the community hubs being developed for adult services should be broadened to incorporate public health and health and wellbeing activities to benefit their communities

3. That the proposed structure for the public health team, which retained expertise and capacity in a shared service between the two authorities and the NHS, but included a dedicated team for each authority, to deepen local knowledge, responsiveness and aid connectivity, be fully endorsed.

4. That greater reliance needed to be placed on the gathering and use of local data sources, because of the time lag in national datasets being provided

5. That unintended barriers to the access and use of leisure facilities, country parks and other settings where people can improve their health needed to be considered, including parking charges.

6. A wellbeing measure should be developed to measure progress with initiatives and to develop greater awareness of localities that had fallen behind, or to expand on areas of success, and that the conclusions from the application of such a measure should help direct future investment.

7. That the voluntary sector should be supported to take up a significant role in public health promotion and service delivery

5   Implications (including financial implications)

5.5 Resources and Financial

The report highlights budgetary issues for the new Council to consider.

5.6 Legal

None as a result of this report

5.7 Risk

The reports highlights some of the risks the new authority will need to manage

5.8 Consultation

These conclusions have been developed with the support of teams within the current sovereign authorities.

5.9 Climate Impact

Many of the conclusions of these reports impact on climate change outcomes. The views of this task and finish group are to be shared with the Climate Change Task and Finish Group in order to inform their thinking.

5.10 Community Impact

These service areas have a significant impact on the community in the way they are delivered and developed.

6   Background Papers

Presentations to the task and finish group and minutes of each meeting
The Blueprint (relevant extracts)