

North Northamptonshire Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee

At 7:00 pm on Thursday 11th February 2021

Held as a virtual meeting via Zoom

Item No:

04

Present: -

Shadow Members

Councillor M Pengelly (Chair)
Councillor A Henley
Councillor L Lawman
Councillor H Harrison
Councillor M Rowley
Councillor A Mercer

Councillor V Perry (Vice Chair)
Councillor P McEwan
Councillor G Titcombe
Councillor J Hakewill
Councillor A Lee
Councillor C Smith-Haynes

Officers

P Goult – North Northamptonshire
Democratic Services

F McHugo – North Northamptonshire
Democratic Services

Also in attendance: - L Buckingham, D Lewis-Creser, D Dell, J Padwick & E Fedorowycz.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Davies and Councillor C Brown.

2. Notification of requests to address the meeting

The committee noted that five members of the public had requested to address the Committee on either the Forward Plan agenda item and/or the Work Programme agenda item.

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. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 28th January 2021 had been circulated.

RESOLVED that: -

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 28th January 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. Chair's Announcements

The Chair took the opportunity to again thank Members and officers involved in the recent task and finish group meetings. These meetings had been very productive, and the Chair hoped that the comments and observations made by the groups would be considered by the Shadow Executive Committee.

6. Director of Transformation Update

An updated presentation by the Director of Transformation on the progress of the LGR Programme had been circulated with the agenda.

Unfortunately, the Director was unable to attend the meeting. It was agreed that should any Committee member have any questions or comments on the presentation that this be forwarded to NNSA Democratic Services, who would forward these to the Director for a written response.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) The presentation be noted.

7. Forward Plan of Decisions February-March 2021

A copy of the Forward Plan of Decisions February – March 2021 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

Ms. L Buckingham addressed the Committee. Ms. Buckingham drew reference to the Climate Change Strategy item (scheduled for the Shadow Executive Committee meeting of 25th March 2021). Ms. Buckingham raised three concerns she hoped would be considered in discussions on the Strategy. That there was an adequately resourced work programme to ensure waterways were maintained and kept clear of rubbish and other obstructions, to mitigate against the possibility of flooding. That consideration was given to the creation of a local carbon recovery vehicle, to assist with the preservation of woodlands. In conclusion, Ms. Buckingham hoped that there would be some joined-up thinking in relation to planning, to ensure that the new authority's objective of tackling climate change was incorporated into its future planning policies.

Mr J Padwick addressed the Committee. Mr Padwick welcomed the recent decision for North Northamptonshire to join the LGA Hub on Climate Change. Mr Padwick also queried whether it would be possible for the responses to the current public consultation being conducted by the Climate Change Task and Finish Group to be published. Mr Padwick felt that it would be of interest to see the range of responses received. Mr Padwick also suggested that the new council consider the creation of citizen assemblies, as a means of gauging comments from the local community on council issues and proposals. In conclusion, Mr Padwick felt that the creation of the new council provided an opportunity for the authority to establish itself as a leader among local authorities in its attempts to tackle climate change.

Ms. E Fedorowycz addressed the Committee. Ms. Fedorowycz suggested that the authority should explore the potential of partnership working with the voluntary and community sector. There were a number of established groups in the local community who would be willing to assist the authority in tackling climate change. In addition, there were a number of local businesses who were actively engaged in pursuing innovative ways of working to reduce their carbon footprint; it was suggested that the authority seek to work with these businesses to promote good practise.

Mr D Lewis-Creser addressed the Committee. Mr Lewis-Creser wished the authority to consider the need to promote sustainable links between local communities, including pedestrian links and cycleways. Mr Lewis-Creser also hoped that the authority would work with local town and parish councils in promoting measures to mitigate against the effects of climate change. Mr Lewis-Creser also supported the possibility of creating citizen assemblies to encourage greater interaction between the authority and local citizens on a range of issues.

Mr D Dell addressed the Committee. Mr Dell welcomed recent statements by the authority in its desire to prioritise the “green environment” in its policies and corporate objectives. It was important that the new authority started with clear objectives to consider the implications of its decisions on the environment. Mr Dell also hoped that the authority would work with local businesses to promote a green agenda. Mr Dell suggested the authority may wish to consider divesting pension fund monies from companies and organisations that may be proven to be damaging the environment and who were not supporting measures to tackle climate change. Mr Dell also supported the establishment of citizen assemblies as a way of engaging local people in the development of the authority’s policies.

The Chair thanked all of the public speakers for their participation. Their views would be considered in relation to the formulation of a draft Climate Change Strategy by the Task and Finish Group.

Councillor Lawman, the Chair of the Task and Finish Group, also thanked the public speakers for their contribution. Many of the views expressed had arisen during the Group’s discussions to date. Councillor Lawman had personally considered all of the 100+ public submissions through the consultation exercise; the public consultation on Climate Change was still open and further submissions were welcomed.

Councillor Lawman explained that all of the submissions were designated to one of the categories being used by the Group during its deliberations, to ensure that each representation made was appropriately considered. The Planning, Infrastructure and the Built Environment had received the most submissions.

Councillor Lawman drew the Committee’s attention to the roll-out of e-bikes as an example of green initiatives already underway. This form of initiative was to be encouraged.

Councillor Lawman informed the Committee that at the Group’s meeting on 18th February 2021 a complete list of the representations received, by category, would be received. Officers would commence drafting a final report for presentation to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The report if confirmed by Members would then be presented to the Shadow Executive Committee at its meeting on 25th March 2021.

(All public speakers were removed from the virtual meeting at this point).

Councillor Henley raised concerns that the Forward Plan often is significantly revised each month, with a significant amount of slippage. This made considering the Forward Plan difficult. Councillor Henley suggested that it was unrealistic for the Overview and Scrutiny to consider the Plan when so many items seemed to be included, which then subsequently were pushed-back.

Councillor Titcombe understood that given the pressures on officers and the rapid approach of Vesting Day, it was understandable that there may be slippage in some areas.

Councillor Pengelly queried the item for the Shadow Executive Committee meeting of 4th March 2021 regarding Kettering Leisure Services Contract and wondered what this related to and whether this was a significant item. Officers agreed to obtain a written response to that question, for circulation to the Committee.

Councillor Mercer also expressed concern regarding slippage of decisions across sovereign councils, the increase in officer workload, and the infrequency of committee meetings. Councillor Mercer expressed a view that the new authority needed to have more than one scrutiny committee to ensure that the workload was manageable.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) The Forward Plan of Decisions be noted.

8. Work Programme

Mr J Padwick addressed the Committee. Mr Padwick felt that there needed to be appropriate scrutiny of the management and finances of Children's Trust under the new authority. Mr Padwick felt that it was important that the new authority ensured the performance of the Trust was appropriately monitored and scrutinised, particularly regarding the use of agency staff and the apportionment of costs between North and West.

The Chair thanked Mr Padwick for his contribution.

(Mr Padwick was removed from the virtual meeting at this point).

Councillor Perry explained that it was a Children's Company with a Service Level Agreement in place. Arrangements were in place for the oversight of that Agreement by the relevant portfolio holder and the Director of Children's Services. Councillor Perry stated that the new authority would not be able to get involved in operational issues, however some monitoring information may be made available.

Members were reminded that the Climate Change Task and Finish Group would be reporting back at the final meeting of the Committee on 11th March 2021. The resolution(s) of that Committee were scheduled to be submitted to the Shadow Executive Committee on 25th March 2021.

Members briefly discussed whether there was merit in the Committee considering at its meeting on 11th March 2021 other topics which due to lack of time the current membership were unable to consider. It was accepted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the unitary council would set its own agenda and identify its own priorities.

A brief discussion at the meeting on 11th March 2021 would be held, where some issues could be bullet pointed by the current membership, recognising that these would not be mandatory on any future Committee.

9. Exempt Items

There were no exempt items discussed.

10. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items discussed.

11. Close of Meeting

Meeting closed at 8:00 pm.