

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT COMMITTEE

Monday 3rd February 2020

PRESENT: Councillor Jonathan Nunn, Chair, (Northampton Borough Council)
Councillor Richard Auger, Vice Chair, (Daventry District Council)

Councillor Adam Brown, Daventry District Council
Councillor Jo Gilford, Daventry District Council
Councillor Ken Ritchie, Daventry District Council
Councillor Stephen Hibbert, Northampton Borough Council
Councillor Danielle Stone, Northampton Borough Council
Councillor Matt Golby, Northamptonshire County Council
Councillor Stephen Legg, Northamptonshire County Council
Councillor Suresh Patel, Northamptonshire County Council
Councillor Ian McCord, South Northamptonshire Council
Councillor Rebecca Breese, South Northamptonshire Council
Councillor Peter Rawlinson, South Northamptonshire Council
Councillor Chris Lofts, South Northamptonshire Council

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Alan Chantler, Phil Larratt and Malcolm Longley.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Tuesday 7th January 2020 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

5. MATTERS OF URGENCY WHICH BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCE THE CHAIR IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED

There were none.

6. PRESENTATION – FUTURE NORTHANTS PROGRAMME UPDATE

General update

Paul Helsby, the Programme Director provided the Committee with an update on the Future Northants Programme. Workshops had been held across all areas and the design principles would start in February. March would see the building of the 'straw men' which would be the first set of designs to be tested and challenged before being developed further into blueprints. The blueprints would be handed to the Shadow Authority in May.

Interim and permanent recruitment update

A Task and Finish Working Group had been set up to finalise the appointments to the interim roles of Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer.

Permanent recruitment to the above posts, along with a Director of Social Care and Director of Adult Social Services was being considered and would involve benchmarking and the engagement of an external recruitment consultant.

Working with Trade Unions Agreement

Discussions with Trade Unions were on-going.

Communications and Engagement Update

Information had been provided via debriefings and newsletters for staff in each authority. The 'Engine Room' had been set up which provided a visual representation of the programme. Over 250 people attended a recent Change Champions event. A County wide branding audit would be taking place.

In response to a question from Councillor Adam Brown regarding the upcoming elections, the Chief Executive of Northamptonshire County Council advised that it was likely that the votes would be verified locally and perhaps counted centrally, although this was yet to be finalised. Due to the Bank Holiday, it was likely that the Unitary count would take place on the Sunday, with the count for the PCC taking place later.

Councillor Ken Ritchie expressed concerns regarding the financial baseline figures. Residents would want to know how their services were going to change. The Chief Executive of Northamptonshire County Council noted that the 'strawman' phase was only a proposal, and it was for the Shadow Authority to make the decisions. It would be misleading for proposals to be put in the public domain, as the situation could change. The Shadow Authority could adopt the proposals, consult on them or start over.

In response to a question from Councillor Danielle Stone, the Chief Executive of Northamptonshire County Council advised that the NCC budget for next year had resorted back to the base line figures so that any pressures were accounted for, along with an increase of £11 million for Social Services.

7. FUTURE NORTHANTS FINANCE UPDATE

The Section 151 Officer for Daventry District Council submitted a report providing an update on the financial position for the Future Northants Programme.

Councillor Matt Golby noted the hard work that had gone into getting the budget to the current position.

In response to questions, the Programme Director advised that the costs of delivering projects were built into the budget, allowing for greater transparency.

Councillor Ken Ritchie considered that greater explanation of the budget lines would be useful. The Chief Executive of Northamptonshire County Council advised that further detail was available in the monthly revenue monitoring report, and queries could be raised directly.

RESOLVED:

That the forecast outturn position for the Future Northants Programme be noted.

8. FUTURE NORTHANTS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES (INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL)

Louise Spolton, the Head of Communications at Northamptonshire County Council outlined the internal and external engagement strategies for the Future Northants Programme. Additional resources had been secured to assist with the work.

In response to questions, the Head of Communications advised that non-political advertising campaigns would take place in the run up to the elections to inform the public about the Unitary authority and what they were voting for. Discussion followed regarding some of the harder to reach groups, and how the information could be disseminated. Councillor Chris Lofts noted that many elderly people did not make use of websites, and suggested that a leaflet be included in the Council Tax bills.

The Head of Communications added that use would be made of residents' magazines and voluntary sector groups. Colleagues in authorities that had undergone the transition to unitary status in the past had been helpful in sharing their experiences of what worked best.

Councillor Ken Ritchie considered it important that feedback from the public was taken seriously. The communication needed to be very proactive as this situation was unique.

In response to a question from Councillor Danielle Stone, the Head of Communications advised that each Communications team in the eight Local Authorities would be aware of their harder to reach groups.

RESOLVED:

1. That the internal engagement strategy and external engagement strategy of the Future Northants Programme be noted.
2. That consideration be given to including information on the Unitary elections in with the Council Tax bills.

9. STRUCTURAL CHANGE ORDER VERBAL UPDATE

The Chief Executive of Northamptonshire County Council advised that a meeting had been held last month with Senior Civil Servants. The Statutory Change Order had been laid but not yet made. It had been mooted that the SCO would be heard in the House of Lords on Tuesday, although this had not been officially notified. The intention was for the Order to be made before Parliament broke up for the February recess.

The SCO needed to be made before the end of March for the elections to go ahead as planned.

A number of further Orders would be needed over the year.

A note would be provided when here was an update.

Councillor Ian McCord considered that any ancient rights of the authorities should be sought out so that they were not lost forever.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal update be noted.

10. REPORT OF THE GOVERNANCE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Councillor Peter Rawlinson outlined the report of the Governance Task and Finish Panel. The possible provision of area committees and a youth council required further consideration, but were beyond the remit of the current Task Panel. It was therefore suggested that a working group be established with the current membership to look into the matters.

The Code of Conduct would be reconsidered in order to include complaints about an Interim Officer. Following discussions, it was also suggested that the Group give further consideration to the Standards Committee and the issue of political balance.

Councillor Ian McCord reminded the Committee that the priority had to be managing the workload so that the authority was ready for operations on day one. A youth council may be very beneficial but it may need to wait until the essential matters were finalised.

RESOLVED: That

- a) The WNJC note the work undertaken by the Governance Task and Finish Group in relation to the draft Constitution, including the Code of Conduct for Members.
- b) The draft Code of Conduct for Members attached at Appendix B be referred back to the Governance Task and Finish Panel, in order to consider:
 - (i) A procedure for raising a complaint against an interim statutory officer, and
 - (ii) The form and composition of any Standards Committee and whether or not it needs to be politically balanced.
- c) The WNJC note the specific functions of the Joint Committee set out in the draft Structural Changes Order.
- d) The WNJC note the timetable set out in the draft Structural Changes Order for performing those functions.
- e) The WNJC approve the use of a system of recording member attendance at meetings of the Shadow Authority, its Executive, Committees and Sub-Committees and recommends this to the Shadow Authority.
- f) The WNJC appoints a working group, comprised of current members of the Governance Task and Finish Group, to consider the merits of appointing area committees and/or a youth council and to report to the WNJC of its findings and views.
- g) The Task and Finish Group recommend a procedure for complaints against an interim statutory officer.
- h) The Task and Finish Panel investigate the issue of political balance on the Hearings Panel.

The meeting concluded at 7:25 pm