

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE SHADOW OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 15 December 2020

Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members present:

Councillor Ann Addison	Councillor Ken Pritchard
Councillor Dermot Bambridge	Councillor Emma Roberts
Councillor Jane Birch (Chair)	Councillor Ken Ritchie
Councillor Julie Davenport	Councillor David Smith
Councillor James Hill	Councillor Allen Walker
Councillor Jamie Lane (Deputy Chair)	Councillor Mike Warren
Councillor Dennis Meredith	

Other Members Present:

Councillor Jonathan Nunn	Chair, Communications and Engagement Task & Finish Group, West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority
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Officers present:

Ed Bostock	Democratic Services Officer, Northampton Borough Council
Cheryl Doran	ICT Enabling Lead, Future Northants
Richard Ellis	Chief Executive, South Northamptonshire Council
Claire Hazelgrove	Communications & Engagement Lead, Future Northants
Andrew Hunkin	Legal and Democratic Lead, Future Northants
Katie Jones	Programme Manager, Communications & Digital, Future Northants
Alex Melia	Democratic Services Officer, West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority (Minutes)
Karen Perrett	ICT Portfolio Lead, Future Northants
Tracy Tiff	Democratic and Member Services Manager, Northampton Borough Council

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Penny Flavell and Andre Gonzalez de Savage. Apologies were also received from George Candler, Chief Executive, Northampton Borough Council.

2. NOTIFICATIONS OF REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE MEETING

There were none.

3. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

4. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were none.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3 NOVEMBER 2020

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2020 as a true and accurate record.

6. ICT PREPAREDNESS REPORT

The Chief Executive, South Northants Council, introduced the report and began a short presentation and noted that the brief for this report focussed on ICT preparedness, but given the interlinked nature of this topic with Day 1 preparedness, it was felt that the two could not be separated. The presentation outlined the direction for the next 2/3 years, with vesting day a key milestone in this journey.

The ICT Enabling Lead, Future Northants, gave a presentation on the item and highlighted some salient points:

- The vision for the direction of the ICT infrastructure in the coming years has been termed as enable, empower, excite, with innovation underpinning these ideas.
- There are three distinct phases to help make this vision a reality:
 - Prioritise
 - Standardise
 - Optimise
- "Prioritise" will be the focus for the current meeting, as this phase covers the safe and legal elements required for Day 1.

The ICT Portfolio Lead, Future Northants, continued the presentation:

- It was noted that some areas of the ICT preparedness are reporting as amber. This is mainly due to the different working methods across the eight sovereign councils, resulting in the amber status remaining whilst migration to the new system takes place.
- This migration involves a switch to MS365, a cloud-based system that no longer requires files to be stored in a data centre. Members and staff will receive a new email address as part of this process.
- All of the sovereign authorities are scheduled to switch to MS365 by the end of December 2020. Currently, five out of the eight councils have completed this switch, with South Northants Council due to transfer over the weekend.
- Eclipse – the new Adults Social Care System – went live on 7 December and is now planned for disaggregation prior to vesting day.
- The ICT Programme is currently in the process of identifying the devices which are unable to support the new technology.

The Chief Executive, South Northants Council, gave a short summary to conclude the presentation:

- The LGA has undertaken a readiness assessment in advance of Day 1, of which the ICT programme is a large component.

- Where elements of the programme are reported as amber, any risks have been identified and mitigation procedures have been put in place.

The Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- Members queried if new equipment will be provided and if there will be a uniformed ICT approach for councillors and officers. In response, the ICT Enabling Lead advised that existing equipment will be used whilst Members are in their sovereign councils unless obsolete, whilst an ICT survey will be used to enact changes after the elections in 2021.
- Members queried the possibility of losing emails and data during the migration process. The ICT Enabling Lead advised that the switchover to MS365 will happen prior to vesting day, at which point Members will receive their new email address. At this point, existing email addresses will become aliases, allowing access to existing messages but sending all subsequent emails from the new address.
- Members expressed concern over potential issues that may arise from remote working and internet-based systems. The ICT Enabling lead advised that the new system will be stable over 3G/4G mobile networks and that secure access can be enabled for smartphones if required.
- The Chief Executive, South Northants Council, advised that much of the switchover will take place in the background, with the aim of creating an organisation change rather than a technical change to fully realise the benefits of the new system.
- Members questioned the disaster recover processes in place to solve potential issues during the migration process.
- The ICT Enabling Lead confirmed that each “go live” plan has a detailed and documented process, with a roll-back plan at every point across all sovereign councils if problems are encountered.
- In response to a question, the Chief Executive advised that significant analysis on the matter has confirmed the finances quoted in the report are on budget.
- Members asked for clarity on the aforementioned organisational change and the subsequent implications, querying whether this would aid new working methods going forward such as hybrid council meetings. The Chief Executive, South Northants Council, noted that to fully realise the benefits of the system will require behavioural change, but this will be gradual and controlled. It was also noted that decisions over hybrid or remote meeting are outside the scope of the ICT programme.
- The Legal & Democratic Lead, Future Northants, advised that remote meetings are currently allowed because of the flexibility provided by the coronavirus regulations. When this legislation ends, the requirements of council meetings will be dictated by statute in the same manner as prior to the changes, unless further changes are made to the law.

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report and the progress on the delivery of the Future Northants ICT Programme.

7. UNITARY WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

The Programme Manager, Communications & Digital, Future Northants, introduced the report and highlighted the salient points:

- In May 2020, the Joint Implementation Executive (JIE) approved the approach to deliver two new unitary websites for the new unitary authorities for Day 1. The websites are critical Day 1 priorities to be 'safe and legal plus'. To aid this, it was agreed that the Future Northants programme would enlist the help of a partner, FutureGov.
- The agreed approach was to create an 'umbrella' website for Day 1 which will link back to the existing sovereign councils' websites.
- The Minimal Viable Product (MVP) list details the areas of the sovereign council websites that can be decommissioned as the information, functionality and transactions are transferred to the new websites.
- User research will feed into developing a beta site that will be fully functional but remain private. The aim is to have this site live by the middle of January 2021.
- The "sprints" cited in the presentation represent milestones that are reviewed fortnightly to allow for changes or issues to be made on a regular basis.
- The Programme Manager concluded by reporting that the website development is currently on-track and expressed confidence that the team will be able to deliver the West Northamptonshire MVP website on Day 1.

The Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- Members noted that the ICT Strategy presentation had provided the RAG status for various topics, and it was suggested that this may be useful for Members in future.
- Members noted that currently Northampton Borough Council (NBC) residents have an app available to report issues, which was not mentioned in the presentation.
- In response, the Programme Manager advised that app development is a separate workstream, but confirmed that both NBC and Daventry District Council "Report It apps" will continue to operate after rebranding.
- Members expressed concern that the proposed web pages may not be user-friendly, and stressed the importance of ensuring that all residents are able to use them easily. The Programme Manager confirmed that plans are set to make the websites as user-friendly as possible. It was noted that data on high-priority service areas had been utilised to help shape the website development, but the onset of Covid-19 had potentially accelerated the transition of some services to become digital.
- Members questioned the possibility of ensuring uniformity across West Northamptonshire's Parish Councils' websites. The Programme Manager advised that the intention is to maintain digital content that is easily transferable between different users, and also to ensure that access to partner organisations is easily available from the main West Northamptonshire Council website.

The Chair of the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that West Northamptonshire is geographically diverse and queried the possibility of making location-specific information available as a priority. In response, it was confirmed that customers would be able to easily navigate to events and information relevant to their local area.

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report and the progress on the delivery of the new unitary websites.

8. COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT: DAY ONE RESIDENTS' INTEGRATED MARKETING PLAN OVERVIEW

Councillor Jonathan Nunn, Chair of the Communications and Engagement Task & Finish Group, introduced the item and advised that the group had agreed to present this update

report early in order to allow for appropriate scrutiny given the increasing workload of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

- It was noted that the objective of the Communications and Engagement Task & Finish Group is to ensure that residents are fully informed of the upcoming changes and the impact this may have, through a carefully planned innovative marketing campaign. As such, Councillor Nunn asked for input from the Committee to help shape this.
- The campaign has been split into two phases – the long campaign, running from the current date until 14 February 2021, and the short campaign, from 15 February to 1 April 2021.

The Communications and Engagement Lead, Future Northants, expanded on the introduction:

- The campaign will be split into two areas: the long campaign and the short campaign.
- The long campaign will represent a focussed effort to seize opportunities to present key messages through planned communication items and to proactively create further opportunities such as marking 100 days to vesting day through targeted press releases.
- The short campaign will cover the last six weeks prior to vesting day. From this point, the engagement with residents will become more intensive, with an increased visibility and frequency, to create further opportunities and meet critical objectives.
- This may be achieved through an increased presence in high footfall areas, targeted advertising, as well as utilising traditional advertising spaces.

Councillor Nunn advised the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee of the next steps:

- It was noted that messages have already been placed in the Northampton Partnership Homes magazine, to ensure that residents who have a close relationship with NBC are provided with information at an early stage.
- Other Unitary Authorities have been consulted for suggestions on both positive and negative methods of engaging with residents during a transition period.

Councillor Jane Birch, Chair of the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee, noted the diverse communities within West Northamptonshire and queried the possibility of providing information in places of worship, potentially in a range of languages.

In response, Councillor Nunn confirmed that the campaign would seek to utilise the vast range of communication channels available.

The Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- Members expressed concern that many residents are currently unaware of the upcoming transition to a Unitary Authority. It was noted that NCC has sent leaflets with Covid-19 information directly to houses, and it was queried whether the Shadow Authority should do likewise.
- The Committee asked for statistics on the level of engagement on Future Northants social media, to which the Communications and Engagement Lead advised that the figures for the recent West Northants logo survey demonstrated a high level of engagement, with many respondents coming through social media channels.
- Members asked for information on how all residents will be reached, noting that places such as foodbanks and community centres may be places for engagement with vulnerable residents.

- It was confirmed that those involved in the campaign are seeking to identify the critical groups that need to be reached.
- Members noted that the objective listed at 3.5.3 in the report is to identify opportunities to involve and engage residents in a meaningful way. The Communications & Engagement Lead confirmed that this was deliberate language, as the campaign seeks to actively engage residents rather than simply disseminate information.

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

a) Noted the contents of this report, and provided feedback as they saw fit as the plan moves into further development; and

b) Noted that the West Communications and Engagement Task & Finish group will remain closely involved in the shaping of this awareness campaign as it progresses.

9. FINAL WORK PROGRAMME O&S WNSA

The Legal and Democratic Lead, Future Northants, introduced the WNS Overview and Scrutiny work programme and noted that the busy nature of the programme had been reflected in this meeting. It was noted that the major work areas moving forward have a dedicated meeting scheduled for the new year:

1. The Finance Scrutiny meeting, to discuss matters related to the budget setting process, will take place on 12 January 2021.
2. The Governance Scrutiny meeting, to discuss matters related to the Constitution will take place on 25 January 2021.

The Chair advised that Members invited to act as silent observers on the relevant Task & Finish groups will provide feedback to the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee at the relevant pre-meetings.

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee noted the work programme outlined in the report for the period between December 2020 and March 2021.

10. WNSA – EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN

The Legal and Democratic Lead, Future Northants, introduced the forward plan and highlighted the salient points:

- There are a number of Shadow Executive meeting still due to take place, which will focus mainly on the same areas as the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- Members were asked to note that a number of policies and strategies will also come through the Shadow Executive.
- The Legal and Democratic Lead advised that the forward plan was a comprehensive list, and discussions are ongoing to determine which matters should be taken to the Shadow Executive.
- It had previously been agreed that all matters taken to the Shadow Executive will be those which require either political direction or have a significant community impact. For completeness, all potential decisions have been included within the forward plan as it is more difficult to add items at a later date than to remove them if necessary.

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the Forward Plan.

9. URGENT ITEMS

There were none.

10. EXEMPT ITEMS

There were none.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 20.04 hours.