

West Northamptonshire Shadow Executive

26 January 2021

Shadow Executive Members Present:

Richard Auger	Phil Larratt
Lizzy Bowen	Ian McCord (Chair)
Rebecca Breese	Jonathan Nunn
Matt Golby	

Other Shadow Authority Members Present:

Rufia Ashraf	Malcolm Longley
Fiona Baker	Danielle Stone

Officers Present:

George Candler	Chief Executive, Northampton Borough Council
Jane Carr	Transformation Director, West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority
Martin Cox	Programme Lead, Corporate Programme, Future Northants
Anna Earnshaw	Chief Executive and Returning Officer, West Northamptonshire Council
Richard Ellis	Chief Executive, South Northants Council
Belinda Green	Operations Director, CSN Resources
Cathi Hadley	Shared Director of Children's Services and Statutory DCS, North & West Northamptonshire Shadow Authorities
Paul Hanson	Democratic Services Manager, Northamptonshire County Council
Martin Henry	Chief Finance Officer, West Northamptonshire Council
Alex Melia	Democratic Services Officer, West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority (Minutes)
Ian Vincent	Chief Executive, Daventry District Council
Catherine Whitehead	Monitoring Officer, West Northamptonshire Council

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE:

Apologies were received from Councillor Adam Brown and Audra Statham, Finance Enabler, Future Northants.

2. NOTIFICATION OF REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE MEETING:

None received.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

Anna Earnshaw, Chief Executive and Returning Officer, West Northamptonshire Council, declared a pecuniary interest in Item 9 – Returning Officer Fees.

4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 JANUARY 2021

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Executive approved the minutes of the meeting held on 5 January 2021 as a true and accurate record.

5. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were none.

6. TRANSFORMATION DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

The Transformation Director, West Northamptonshire Council, introduced the report and highlighted the salient points:

- It was noted that this item is being reported by exception, with emphasis placed on the common themes linking the risks in key areas across the programme.
- Within Adult Social Care, some risks have materialised around the systems involved. It was expected that IT issues would be prevalent heading towards vesting day and mitigation is in place for further risks that may arise.
- The Corporate element of the programme contains the biggest risks, as it is the widest area. There are some issues relating to intra-authority contracts not being in place prior to vesting day.
- It was advised that it is unlikely for all contracts to be in place for day one of the West Northamptonshire Council. However, the highest risk areas are being prioritised to ensure that these issues are addressed.
- There is some risk involved with GDPR compliance from the split of Northamptonshire County Council data, as a result of the various systems in place. A paper will be presented on this issue at a future meeting of the Shadow Executive.
- The risks noted with the Finance and ERP systems have largely been mitigated with the help of feedback from the Shadow Executive at previous meetings.
- There are a number of risks within IT, as some issues have arisen regarding the rollout of MS365 systems. Northamptonshire County Council is currently behind schedule, but an alternative plan has now been developed and will be implemented shortly.
- Some specialist skills within IT are currently being recruited from the marketplace to buttress the skills of the existing workforce. This mainly relates to specialist areas which need to be addressed in the short-term prior to vesting day.
- Further work on the disaggregation of loans and investments is required, with the Chief Finance Officer continuing to work on and alleviate these issues.

The Chief Finance Officer, West Northamptonshire Council, introduced the finance monitoring section of the report and noted that the figures included have not changed since last month, with an underspend of £190,000 based on the delayed appointment of statutory officers. It was advised that there is a profiling issue which shows savings that will be delivered in future years rather than current financial year, leading to an unfavourable variance figure equal to that reported in the previous month.

Members of the Shadow Executive commented as follows:

- Councillor Lizzy Bowen requested an update on the progress of the MS365 rollout at Northamptonshire County Council. In response, the Chief Executive, South Northants Council, advised that two alternative plans are now being considered. A different migration approach has been agreed, which mitigates many of the risks but pushes the date of the intended rollout back to mid-February.

- Councillor Bowen also queried whether the disaggregation team should be updated on the progress of disaggregation, particularly budget issues. The Chief Finance Officer advised that this is a live topic with outstanding issues still to be resolved. Meetings are still ongoing and it was hoped that an update can be provided within the final budget report.
- Councillor Matt Golby noted that many outstanding issues relate to the IT areas of the programme, and asked whether there is sufficient expertise available and the time to implement these skills.
- The Transformation Director advised that there is sufficient skill within the marketplace, and the programme intends to upgrade the skills available in West Northants through the framework agreement.

Other Members commented as follows:

Councillor Danielle Stone expressed concerns over capacity issues and the resulting pressure on staff, and asked for information on the effects of this stress and the ability to deliver targets.

The Chief Executives of the sovereign councils responded as follows:

- The Chief Executive, West Northamptonshire Council, advised that NCC is recording monthly staffing and capacity level monthly. It was noted that sickness levels are higher than in previously seen during the Covid-19 pandemic. With reference to specialist areas such as cyber security, the importance of bringing in the relevant expertise was emphasised.
- The Chief Executive, Northampton Borough Council, advised that sickness levels have dropped within the previous 12 months, with various causes. It was advised that there has been some increase in the previous two months, reflecting winter and a small number of self-isolation periods, but this has not affected frontline service delivery.
- The Chief Executive, Daventry District Council, noted the small cohort of staff in Daventry and advised that sickness levels are causing stress not by volume, but rather which staff members are affected by illness. Currently, there are three areas under pressure: IT, Environment Health and Revenues & Benefits.
- The Chief Executive, South Northants Council, advised of a fall in overall sickness rates, which are being monitored. It was suggested that there may be stress in some key areas and therefore resources are being moved as appropriate.

Councillor Rufia Ashraf queried the possibility of upskilling staff through apprenticeships. In response, the Transformation Director advised that because of the time pressures and specialist skills required in the short-term, external support is required. However, the commitment of West Northamptonshire Council to providing apprenticeships and other opportunities moving forward was emphasised.

The Transformation Director summarised the remainder of the report:

- The Change Management area of the programme is continuing on a “you said, we did” basis to address the concerns of staff and demonstrate the subsequent responses.
- It was noted that pressures as a result of Covid-19 have caused extra stress on some areas and staff. The Transformation Director highlighted that mental health first aiders at Northamptonshire County Council are available for guidance and support.

The recommendation was proposed and seconded. Upon the vote being taken it was:

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Executive:

- a) **Noted the high level programme delivery status;**
- b) **Noted the update on change readiness;**
- c) **Noted the communication and engagement update; and**
- d) **Noted and approved the finance monitoring report.**

7. PROGRAMME CHANGE REQUESTS

The Transformation Director, West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority, introduced the report and delegated to the relevant programme leads.

The Shared Director of Children's Services and Statutory DCS, North & West Northamptonshire Shadow Authorities, presented the first requested change:

- At the formation of the Children's Trust, the Education Service was left without commissioning and sufficiency as this had been previously shared with Children's Services. The initial blueprints did not show this requirement.
- The commissioning and sufficiency resource is required to support and manage the skills and contracts within Learning Skills and Education and to ensure placements and High Needs Funding requirements are met within the Designated School Grant allocation for this area.
- The cost of this change is £274,000, which has already been confirmed within a £500,000 budget for structural changes.

The Programme Lead, Corporate Programme, Future Northants, presented the second requested change:

- This change relates to how the Council will manage spend on agency staff and temporary employment.
- It was advised that this change will ensure competitive rates for the new Council, with further decisions on this subject required for West Northamptonshire in future.
- It was also noted that all existing councils are being transitioned to this change and will derive benefit.

The recommendation was proposed and seconded. Upon the vote being taken it was:

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Executive:

Approved the changes requested to the Blueprint as outlined at Appendix A.

8. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

The Chair noted that this item is the subject of Special Urgency, and thanked the Chair of the West Northamptonshire Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee for agreeing to waive the call-in process.

Councillor Rebecca Breese introduced the report and highlighted the salient points:

- Each of 3 sovereign authorities operate their own Local Council Tax Reduction Schemes, which are required to be harmonised by vesting day.
- The original proposal called for a 26.5% scheme, which would be cost-neutral to West Northamptonshire Council.
- Responses to this proposal via the consultation process were evenly split, with 43.28% of respondents strongly agreeing, and 43.27% strongly disagreeing.

- Having considered the consultation process and the ongoing economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, a 20% scheme was recommended for adoption moving forward. The cost of this scheme will be c£780,000.

The Chair noted that around 80% of people in receipt of LCTRS will be in either an equal or better off position, based on the new proposals following the consultation response.

The recommendation was proposed and seconded. Upon the vote being taken it was:

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Executive:

- a) **Noted the contents of this report and the previous report received by the Shadow Executive on 5 January 2021;**
- b) **Agreed, under 3.2.2 of the report, the following proposals:**
 - Proposal 1 - The minimum level of contribution was set at 20.0%;**
 - Proposal 2 - War widows and war disablement income to be disregarded;**
 - Proposal 3 - Removal of the family premium for new claims;**
 - Proposal 4 - Limit the child allowance to two children when assessing new claims;**
 - Proposal 5 - Apply a minimum level of income to those people who are self-employed;**
 - Proposal 6 - Harmonise the rates of non-dependant deduction to the prescribed amounts set by Government; and**
- c) **Granted delegated authority to the Section 151 Officer to make amendments as required to the Local Council Tax Reduction Regulations up to and including 31 January 2021 including the income uprating announced by MHCLG.**

9. RETURNING OFFICER FEES

The Monitoring Officer, West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority, introduced the report and highlighted the salient points:

- The report concerns the elections scheduled to take place in May 2021. The schedule of fees has been set out for the whole of the Northamptonshire area.
- The report recommends the fees for the returning officer, who is in turn responsible for setting the fees payable to all other staff. Appendix A to the report provides detail on all of these fees.
- It was noted that the fees payable will be less than those currently payable in Kettering, East Northants and Daventry.

The recommendation was proposed and seconded. Upon the vote being taken it was:

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Executive:

- a) **Approved the Returning Officer fees contained within Appendix A; and**
- b) **Noted all other fees and charges within the Scale of Fees at Appendix A.**

10. HIGHLY COMPLEX AUTISM TENDER

The Chief Executive, West Northamptonshire Council, introduced the report and highlighted the salient points:

- The report seeks approval to delegate authority to Katie Brown, Interim Director of Adult Social Services, to give permission to proceed with the tender for complex autism services for autistic people over the age of 14 years.
- It was noted that the challenging needs of those with autism have not necessarily been met well in previous years.
- As a result, parent groups and other key partners have provided feedback to help create an outcome framework with bespoke services. This framework will provide a commonality across children's, young people and adult services.
- Progress on this framework has been slightly delayed as a result of Covid-19.

Members of the Shadow Executive commented as follows:

- Members offered their support to the recommendations and noted the benefits of an integrated approach with Northamptonshire County Council Cabinet, who will consider the report on 9 February 2021.

In response to a query, it was confirmed that the report concerns people from the age of 14.

The recommendation was proposed and seconded. Upon the vote being taken it was:

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Executive:

Approved Delegated Authority to Katie Brown, Interim Director of Adult Social Services to give permission to proceed with the tender for complex autism services for autistic people over the age of 14 years

11. TRANSFORMATION TASK & FINISH GROUP UPDATE

Councillor Matthew Golby introduced the report and highlighted the salient points:

- It was noted that transformation will extend well beyond vesting day.
- Some staff working on transformation have been reassigned to other areas due to the impact of Covid-19.
- This has resulted in some elements of transformation intended for vesting day not being completed, but discussion on future principles continues.

The Transformation Director commented:

- The importance of the long-term ambitions for West Northamptonshire Council was noted, but emphasis was placed on the first few years of the new authority because of the pressures arising from the disaggregation and hosting of services.
- After assessment, a timeline and roadmap will be available to outline the path of these services. Discussions with North Northamptonshire on this topic remain ongoing.
- The contribution of Members was highlighted as a key element of this transformation work.

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Executive:

- a) Noted the content of the report; and**
- b) Agreed to support the continuation of the work of the group to finalise the Transformation priorities and to agree joint priorities with the North Northamptonshire Transformation Task & Finish Group.**

URGENT ITEMS:

There were none.

EXEMPT ITEMS:

There were none.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 18:55.