

# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE SHADOW AUTHORITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20<sup>th</sup> October 2020

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Communications and Engagement – progress review and update on the future timetable of activity</b>
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## 1. Purpose

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The purpose of this report is to:

- 1.1 Provide an update on communications and engagement resource, and approaches, now that the Future Northants programme has entered the implementation phase
- 1.2 Provide an overview of the key communications milestones ahead, with a particular focus on the development of the visual identity for the future authority, and
- 1.3 Review the role, responsibilities and key priorities of the Communications and Engagement Task and Finish Group with these upcoming milestones in mind

## 2 Recommendations

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It is recommended that the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 2.1 Note the updates in this report on communications and engagement resource and approaches as we move into the implementation phase
- 2.2 Note the key communications and engagement milestones ahead
- 2.3 Endorse the role, responsibilities and key priorities of the Communications and Engagement Task and Finish Group (as set out in item 3.5) for the implementation phase, with these upcoming milestones in mind

### **3. Issues and Choices**

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#### **Report Background**

##### **3.1 Future Northants Communications and Engagement function**

The overall purpose of the programme's communications and engagement function is to:

- 3.1.1 Keep residents informed, and give them a realistic confidence that the new council will deliver for and be accessible to them from Day One
- 3.1.2 Ensure that existing councils' staff feel well informed about and engaged with the work underway and key milestones ahead on the journey to creating the new council, particularly with regards to the items that emerge to be of most interest or concern to them, so that they feel confident of and positively towards their future within the new council and the route to getting there

##### **3.2 Staffing/resourcing**

- 3.2.1 Over the last few weeks, and as the Future Northants (FN) programme moves into the implementation phase (between now and Vesting Day), there have been a number of changes in the level and focus of staffing within the central FN comms and engagement team. The two previous comms and engagement leads have returned to their substantive roles and the team has subsequently commissioned external comms and engagement specialists to provide additional capacity to steer and shape the team and activity at a senior level over the coming months
- 3.2.2 As of w/c 5<sup>th</sup> October, three secondees are now onboarded onto the programme and working full-time in the central communications and engagement team, having moved over in a phased approach from their substantive roles
- 3.2.3 The central FN communications and engagement team are focused on cross-cutting programme priorities, such as providing support on the logo work, the development and cascading of key information to all stakeholders, and also temporarily filling communications and engagement gaps that remain within programmes including ICT, finance and corporate
- 3.2.4 Resourcing needs are now actively being considered for those areas highlighted in 3.1.3 and also with regards to the support that West Northants will need as a future authority, and what form that will need to take

##### **3.3 Recent activity**

To meet the need of a naturally faster-paced programme as we move into the implementation phase, in recent weeks the central communications and engagement team have:

- 3.3.1 Developed and put in place an adaptable approach to ensuring a comprehensive cascade of key information to stakeholders (internal and

external), working closely with colleagues in Democratic Services, communications leads in the 8 authorities, and with the Northamptonshire County Association of Local Councils

- 3.3.2 Worked with senior programme leadership to produce and share communications on the overview and detailed blueprints with all staff and members and town and parish councils using the cascade process noted above
- 3.3.3 Worked with senior programme leadership to develop and deliver the recent blueprint briefings for all staff and members
- 3.3.4 Developed and shared internal and external communications with partners and the media on key appointments, including the Chief Executive and senior officer posts
- 3.3.5 Produced a new communications product - a regular blog - from Anna Earnshaw for her first day in post and have further plans for an ongoing and tailored communications approach, including a video
- 3.3.6 Continued in the publication of a monthly FN cross-programme bulletin for all staff and members, while currently reviewing this in line with the note below on a full channel review to ensure that the type and frequency of content is right for the implementation phase
- 3.3.7 Shared a survey with all staff around communications channels and needs as part of a wider review of channels and the frequency of communications in this faster-paced implementation phase, to ensure a timely and core information-focused approach to internal communications and engagement
- 3.3.8 Designated a single point of contact from within the central FN communications and engagement team to liaise regularly with the Change Managers team to further help ensure join up of planning, information flow and a key route for surfacing commonplace topics requiring response
- 3.3.9 Conducted a public survey on three shortlisted draft logos for each future authority, analysed the responses and shared this insight with the Task and Finish Group for a steer (expanded below in 3.4)
- 3.3.10 Provided designated support for ICT communications needs around the roll out of Microsoft 365 for all staff and members
- 3.3.11 Continued to support the Culture and Vision Task and Finish groups with regards to the development of the vision and values for the future authorities
- 3.3.12 Developed and are now piloting a dynamic approach to gathering questions and publishing answers to FAQs from across the staff body. This process will involve a digital link that staff can visit on a weekly basis to see updated answers
- 3.3.13 Mapped outstanding communications and engagement resource needs within areas of the programme and centrally and determining timely solutions

### **3.4 Visual identity**

- 3.4.1 The development of the visual identity for the future authority is a key priority for the Communications and Engagement Task and Finish Group and the central communications and engagement team
- 3.4.2 A public survey seeking preferences and feedback on three draft logos for West Northamptonshire ran from 17<sup>th</sup> August – 6<sup>th</sup> September and received 1,740 responses. This is significantly higher than a typical survey, and signifies the interest held by residents and staff in shaping the future authority
- 3.4.3 The full detailed results of this survey, both quantitative and qualitative has been shared with the Task and Finish Group and their steer requested for next steps. This has been to iterate the most popular logo incorporating feedback received to improve it further and is underway at this time, ahead of formal approval from the West Northants Executive in November
- 3.4.4 Work is underway with the appropriate leads within each programme to prioritise items for rebranding with the same “safe and legal for Day One” lens as across the rest of the programme. This will entail the development of guidance/criteria which set out the rationale for recommendations to be agreed through the regular approvals process, with input from the new Chief Executive, Anna Earnshaw, due to the cost considerations of these decisions
- 3.4.5 Longer-term branding prioritisation decisions, beyond Day One, will sit with the future authorities and not with the programme

### **3.5 Upcoming milestones**

- 3.5.1 Please refer to Appendix 1 attached for an overview of the roadmap to Day One which will be discussed in more detail at the committee meeting

### **3.6 Role, responsibilities and priorities of the Communications and Engagement Task and Finish Group**

- 3.6.1 Please refer to Appendix 2 for the current Terms of Reference for the Communications and Engagement Task and Finish Group
- 3.6.2 Given the nature and scale of the milestones from now until Day One, we have proposed in section 2.3 that the role and responsibilities of this group are maintained as they stand
- 3.6.3 We recommend that the priorities of the Task and Finish Group are guided by the agreed principle of providing a strategic steer and sounding board for the substantive and long-term communications and engagement milestones, including shaping: the new council’s visual identity, Day One readiness residents’ campaign, and consultations (including on council tax and housing allocation), and overall supporting the aims set out in section 3.1
- 3.6.4 Through providing this strategic steer and sounding board, the Task and Finish Group will share ideas and input with FN communications and

engagement staff on significant activity across the programme involving substantive support from this team, supporting them and their contributions as a strategic as well as enabling function

#### **4. Implications (Including financial implications)**

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##### **4.1 Financial**

- 4.1.1 No immediate implications through adopting the recommended actions in this report
- 4.1.2 No financial implications in the development of the new logos due to using talented in-house designers
- 4.1.3 A key focus of the rebranding work will be to ensure senior level approval of all items agreed to be rebranded for Day One through the appropriate channels. This work has yet to be finalised

##### **4.2 Resources and Risk**

- 4.2.1 No implications through adopting the recommended actions in this report.
- 4.2.2 As noted in items 3.1.3 and 3.1.4 both the immediate programme and future authority communications and engagement needs are being actively considered at this time. A reputational risk to both authorities would emerge if neither were addressed
- 4.2.3 As noted in item 3.3, there is work underway to prioritise items for rebranding for Day One and the risks here would arise if there were any delay to finalising the logo or priorities list. Potential financial risks have been covered in this paper

##### **4.3 Legal**

- 4.3.1 No implications through adopting the recommended actions within this report. A key focus of the rebranding work will be to ensure that all items legally required to be rebranded will be for Day One (e.g. parking tickets)

##### **4.4 Equality and Health**

- 4.4.1 We are working closely with the designers on the new logo to ensure that it meets accessibility requirements for the range of situations in which it will be visible

#### **5. Background Papers**

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- 5.1 Terms of Reference for the Communications and Engagement Task and Finish Group (Appendix 2)
- 5.2 Roadmap of key milestones to Day One (Appendix 1)