

**WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
SHADOW OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Tuesday, 20 October 2020

Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members present:

Councillor Ann Addison	Councillor Jamie Lane (Deputy Chair)
Councillor Dermot Bambridge	Councillor Ken Pritchard
Councillor Jane Birch (Chair)	Councillor Ken Ritchie
Councillor Julie Davenport	Councillor Emma Roberts
Councillor Penny Flavell	Councillor David Smith
Councillor Andre Gonzalez de Savage	Councillor Mike Warren
Councillor Enam Haque	Councillor Mark Wesley
Councillor James Hill	

Other Members Present:

Councillor Adam Brown	Chair, Governance Task & Finish Group, West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority
Councillor Jonathan Nunn	Chair, Communications and Engagement Task & Finish Group, West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority

Officers present:

Ed Bostock	Democratic Services Officer, Northampton Borough Council
George Candler	Chief Executive, Northampton Borough Council
Claire Hazelgrove	Communications and Engagement Lead, Future Northants
Andrew Hunkin	Interim Monitoring Officer, West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority
Alex Melia	Democratic Services Officer, West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority (Minutes)
Tracy Tiff	Democratic and Member Services Manager, Northampton Borough Council

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Ann Addison and Julie Davenport for exiting the meeting before the close. Councillor Addison left the meeting at 19.00 hours and Councillor Davenport left the meeting at 20.03 hours.

2. NOTIFICATIONS OF REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE MEETING

There were none.

3. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

4. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair of the West Northamptonshire Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee announced that going forward, the committee will have access to the notes of Task & Finish

Group meetings, but stressed that these notes are not for public circulation. The Chair also announced that Members of the committee will be able to attend future Task & Finish Group meetings as silent observers. Following this, the Chair asked for volunteers to attend the Vision & Culture and Budget Task & Finish Groups.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8th SEPTEMBER 2020

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 8th September 2020 as a true and accurate record.

6. GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY

Councillor Adam Brown, Chair of the Shadow Authority Governance Task & Finish Group, introduced the report, advising that the main body of work undertaken by the group relates to putting in place the governance structures and constitution for the future West Northamptonshire Council.

Councillor Brown highlighted the volume of work required to create the constitution, noting that many areas are bound by statute and therefore offer little room for alterations. It was also noted that legal advice had been sought on the possibility of moving away from the Leader & Cabinet model of governance, as the Structural Changes Order mandates that the West Northamptonshire Unitary Authority utilises this model at the outset. It was advised that any changes to this model could bind the authority to a five-year term of that model. Therefore, the Task & Finish Group, whilst not a decision-making body, is working on the basis that the constitution will be drafted on the Leader & Cabinet model but leaving open the possibility that in 2022 the West Northamptonshire Unitary Authority can move away from this towards a Committee structure, for example.

It was noted that much of the work is ongoing and subject to change. Councillor Brown highlighted that a first draft of the Rules of Procedure for full Council meetings was complete. However, any subsequent changes to other areas of the constitution may necessitate changes within the Rules of Procedure.

The Council Governance Task & Finish Group intends to present a full draft of the constitution to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee prior to it being seen at the Shadow Executive. It was also noted that the Scrutiny Members committee would be consulted for input on proposed Scrutiny arrangements. Councillor Brown advised that under the Terms of Reference, the Task & Finish Group is on schedule to deliver a draft constitution towards the end of 2020 or into early 2021.

Cornwall Council had been suggested as an exemplar for constitutional arrangements and the manner in which local boards operate within the authority.

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

- Members commented that references to Cornwall Council were positive, as this authority is viewed as a model for local representation within a unitary authority, but that the governance structure should not simply be copied for the future West Northamptonshire Authority.
- In response, Councillor Brown confirmed that feedback on the governance structure of Cornwall Council had been taken from the Local Government Association and informal, whilst noting that the model would be adapted to suit the needs of West Northamptonshire.

- Concerns were raised that a model for local representation may undermine the work of existing Parish Councils.
- It was noted that some divisions within West Northamptonshire do not have Parish Councils, and as such residents still require a mechanism to feel involved with local issues, with planning given as an example.
- Councillor Brown advised that the Council Governance Task & Finish Group has requested a paper to detail planning considerations to be brought to a future meeting.
- Members questioned the impact of the Council Governance arrangements on the budget moving forward. In response, Councillor Brown noted that budgetary preparations are not at an appropriate stage to make clear potential limitations, and commented that feedback from the Shadow Executive on this topic will be considered given the validity of opinions outside the five members of the Task & Finish Group.

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee noted and commented on the contents of the report.

7. COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT SCRUTINY

Councillor Jonathan Nunn, Chair, Communications and Engagement Task & Finish Group, introduced the report, noting that Future Northants is entering a key implementation phase.

Councillor Nunn noted that the key objectives of the Communications and Engagement Programme are to keep residents fully informed and inspire confidence that the new council will deliver services on day one, along with ensuring that staff are engaged with the work of the authority and look positively upon the future.

Councillor Nunn also highlighted the need to create a visual identity for the West Northamptonshire Unitary Authority, which extends beyond simply an aesthetically pleasing logo, to represent the ambition and objectives of the new council. He suggested that following the positive survey response to the logo designs, a final draft design would emerge soon. He also advised that some branding aspects are necessary to ensure that safe and legal requirements are met on 1 April 2021.

Claire Hazelgrove, Communications and Engagement Lead, Future Northants, noted some of the key recent activities within the Future Northants Programme:

- All-Member and all-staff briefings held online
- Work with newly appointed West Northamptonshire Chief Executive, Anna Earnshaw, to increase engagement and offer new channels of communication
- The piloting of a new FAQ process to answer questions in a timely manner

Claire Hazelgrove drew attention to the upcoming milestones of the Programme that form the roadmap to day one, underlining the importance of the Residents' Day One Campaign that will run from January to March 2021, as a means to ensure that residents are fully informed about the work of the future West Northamptonshire Authority.

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

- Concerns were raised that the key objectives cited did not make reference to Members, to which Councillor Nunn explained that the priority areas are those who will use the services and those who deliver them, but that he considered Members to be an integral part of shaping the Programme.

- Members noted that existing sovereign councils have a large social media presence, and it was suggested that this should not be lost during the transition to a unitary authority. Councillor Nunn commented that this has been considered by the Task & Finish Group, as maintaining continuity for residents trying to access services and information is key.
- Concerns were raised that residents with accessibility issues may struggle to engage with the content being produced. Issues highlighted included, but were not limited to, those who do not have regular internet access, those who have a visual or hearing impairment, and residents who do not have English as a first language.
- In response, Councillor Nunn noted the diversity of West Northamptonshire and the need to engage with all members of society. It was suggested that lessons from the current Covid-19 situation could help provide new methods of communication going forward. Claire Hazelgrove further commented that engagement with residents would not solely be reliant on digital formats.
- Members noted previous discussions on the input of Parish Councils and Residents' Associations, and suggested that these bodies could be utilised to fully engage local communities with the work of the future authority.
- The importance of creating a quality website was stressed. It was reiterated that information and services must be easily accessible via numerous mediums on day one of the new authority, with attention drawn to current issues such as mobile optimisation.
- It was noted that whilst providing information to residents should remain a key focus, engaging with the residents to find out the information they require is equally vital. The importance of keeping Northampton Partnership Homes tenants informed during the transition period was highlighted as an example.
- In response, Councillor Nunn advised that tenants would continue with Northampton Partnership Homes as the main point of contact, and agreed that communication with residents on this topic should occur.
- Claire Hazelgrove advised that the Day One Residents' Campaign was in the early stages of development and suggested that this item could be brought to a future meeting of the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- Members noted that engagement with residents should commence in the correct manner, with an open discussion between the authority and its residents.

In response to a question, Councillor Nunn and Claire Hazelgrove confirmed that references to point 3.1.3 to the report were erroneous inclusions from a previous draft.

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

- a) Noted the updates in this report on communications and engagement resource and approaches as we move into the implementation phase;
- b) Noted the key communications and engagement milestones ahead; and
- c) Endorsed 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.

8. WNSA - EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN

George Candler, Chief Executive, Northampton Borough Council, addressed the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee and referred Members to the WNSA Executive Forward Plan. He advised that the agenda for the next Shadow Executive meeting on 27 October has been published and contains significantly fewer items than the seventeen listed in this report.

An agreement has been reached to create a Forward Plan that will cover the period between this meeting and the end of March 2021. The Chief Executive stated that he and Andrew Hunkin, the Interim Monitoring Officer, will collaborate on this work. As such, an updated set of proposed papers is currently being drafted with the intention to circulate these in advance of the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 November 2020.

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

- Concerns were raised that some items were not marked as being a key decision, but in the opinion of some Members they should be considered a key decision.
- The importance of pre-decision scrutiny was highlighted, with attention drawn to decisions that may be taken by sovereign councils but will receive endorsement by the West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority.
- Attention was drawn to the legacy of the existing scrutiny committees within the sovereign councils and the importance of considering where the work of these committees will fit within the new authority.
- It was also stressed that information regarding decisions made by sovereign councils between now and 1 April 2021 should be given to the Shadow Authority to allow full transparency.

In response, the Chief Executive, Northampton Borough Council noted that some decisions originally included within the Forward Plan would be taken by sovereign councils, rather than the West Northamptonshire Shadow Executive. In some cases, reports were included in the Forward Plan for awareness.

Andrew Hunkin, Interim Monitoring Officer, West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority, noted that plans are in place to ensure the “neat and tidy” transfer of information and records from sovereign councils, allowing the West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority to begin operations as efficiently as possible.

In response to a question regarding the Assets, Capital Schemes and Reserves Notification Process, the Chief Executive, Northampton Borough Council, advised that these reports provided focus for the Shadow Executive to view instances where sovereign councils intend to spend over £100,000 revenue or over £1,000,000 capital, if this spend is not accounted for within the sovereign council’s approved budgets. These decisions can still be made by the sovereign council, but protocols are in place for the West Northamptonshire Shadow Executive to consider decisions that may have an impact on the finances of the future authority. The Chief Executive advised that at present he felt no decisions had been sent to the Shadow Executive that would cause concern in this respect.

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 20.33 hours.