

**WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
SHADOW OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Item No: 05

Tuesday, 3 November 2020

Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members present:

Councillor Ann Addison	Councillor Ken Pritchard
Councillor Dermot Bambridge	Councillor Ken Ritchie
Councillor Jane Birch (Chair)	Councillor David Smith
Councillor Julie Davenport	Councillor Allen Walker
Councillor Enam Haque	Councillor Mike Warren
Councillor Jamie Lane (Deputy Chair)	

Other Members Present:

Councillor Rebecca Breese	Chair, Council Tax Harmonisation Task & Finish Group, West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority
Councillor Martin Johns	Acting as substitute for Committee Member Councillor Dennis Meredith
Councillor Ian McCord	Chair, Vision and Culture Task & Finish Group, West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority

Officers present:

Ed Bostock	Democratic Services Officer, Northampton Borough Council
George Candler	Chief Executive, Northampton Borough Council
Martin Cox	Programme Lead, Corporate Programme, Future Northants
Belinda Green	Operations Director, CSN Resources
Martin Henry	Chief Finance Officer, West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority
Andrew Hunkin	Legal and Democratic Lead, Future Northants
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 Penny Flavell, Andre Gonzalez de Savage, James Hill, Dennis Meredith and Emma Roberts. Councillor Martin Johns attended the meeting as substitute for Councillor Meredith.

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 20 October 2020

Councillor Ritchie queried the possibility of receiving feedback on Member's comments as recorded in the minutes, to ensure that issues raised are given appropriate consideration.

George Candler, Chief Executive, Northampton Borough Council, advised that comments and suggestions made in previous Overview & Scrutiny Committee meetings have resulted in additional meetings being scheduled.

Councillor Birch, Chair of the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee, noted that an informal workshop of this Committee has been scheduled for 26 November 2020, giving an opportunity for Members to provide comment on the structure of Overview and Scrutiny in the new Authority. The Chair also clarified that the request noted in the minutes for volunteers to act as silent observers in Task & Finish Group meetings would be fulfilled when the Task & Finish Group dates had been set.

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2020 as a true and accurate record.

6. FINANCE SCRUTINY

Councillor Rebecca Breese, Chair of the Council Tax Harmonisation Task & Finish Group, introduced the report and advised that it had been considered at the West Northamptonshire Shadow Executive meeting on 27 October 2020. It was noted that the report was the outcome of the work by the Task & Finish Group, which had presented its methodology at the meeting of the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 17 August 2020.

Councillor Breese noted that Council Tax Harmonisation in the future West Northamptonshire Council must be achieved by April 2028. However, the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) must be harmonised by April 2021, as bound by government regulations.

Councillor Breese wished to highlight that the Task & Finish Group had considered the potential financial implications of the proposals on both residents and the authority. It was highlighted that the report details the three existing schemes of the sovereign councils, with the proposals creating a cost-neutral scheme that will not further impact the budget of the West Northamptonshire Council.

It was suggested that under the proposals, most people - primarily those living within the Northampton Borough area - will see council tax charges reduced. However, it was also noted that some residents may see an increase in their council tax charges going forward.

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

- Concerns were raised over the discrepancies between the proposed figures and the existing rates across the existing authorities. In response, Councillor Breese advised that the output from the Council Tax Harmonisation Task & Finish Group are proposals that will be consulted upon, with the Shadow Executive making final decision on the LCTRS.
- Members noted that the report suggests the majority of residents in West Northamptonshire will benefit from the proposals and asked for a breakdown of figures. The Chief Finance Officer responded that there were different impacts on

claimants currently residing in each sovereign authority. The total number of claimants at the time of the report was 13,070, broken down as follows:

Northampton Borough Council	9,635
Daventry District Council	1,921
South Northants Council	1,514

The current LCTRS rate in Northampton Borough Council is 31%. Under the proposed scheme, this figure will reduce to 26.5%. With residents of Northampton Borough Council comprising slightly under 75% of claimants at the time of the report, it was noted that the majority of residents in the future West Northamptonshire Unitary Authority will experience a reduction.

- It was noted that it would be difficult to categorise blanket impact on individual households because of the variation in circumstances regarding Local Council Tax. Councillor Breese also advised that the Citizens Advice Bureau has a calculator able to decipher these figures.
- Members expressed concerns that there may be disharmony from those who experience an increase in the rate and questioned the rise from the current 8% in South Northants to the proposed 26.5%.
- The Chief Finance Officer advised that the 26.5% figure has arisen as a result of the key principle of the LCTRS – to create a cost-neutral scheme for West Northamptonshire. He stressed that all the figures are subject to consultation, with the proposal to seek views on the subject.
- Members queried the possibility of exploring a banded scheme based on income, noting that this had been ruled out at page 14 of the report.
- Councillor Breese advised that the scheme based on income bands had been discounted at this point due to the discrepancies in financial modelling and software across the sovereign councils, but suggested that this could be revisited in future if necessary as a scheme of this nature may be more responsive to individual needs.

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered the report that was considered by the Shadow Executive on 27 October 2020 and provided comment as detailed above.

7. VISION AND CULTURE

Martin Cox, Programme Lead, Corporate Programme, Future Northants, addressed the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee and advised Members that the focus of the Vision and Culture Task & Finish Group is focussed on different blocks of building a positive culture.

The Vision and Culture Task & Finish Group has met on a regular basis since June 2020, with the early meetings noting the work of the sovereign councils, to build upon the existing work. The Programme Lead advised that he considers the work of the group to be around 3/4 complete. As such, the group is now in the process of testing its work by taking ideas to partners, employees, service users etc. There are ten sessions spread throughout November for the various groups to feed back on the ideas presented. The December meeting will focus on collating and summarising this feedback, before looking to widen the proposed vision and values in January 2021.

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

- Questions were raised over the areas in which existing authorities were not achieving values and how this would be addressed going forward. In response, the Programme

Lead, Future Northants, advised that the purpose of the focus groups is to engage with these issues, to ask open questions and to engage with employers and the Trade Unions.

- Councillor Ian McCord, Chair of the Vision and Culture Task & Finish Group, noted that the future West Northamptonshire Council requires its own independent values to ensure a fresh start and create a bright future, making it an employer of choice for staff.
- The Chair of the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee highlighted the recruitment and retention of staff as an important measure.
- In response to a question, the Programme Lead advised that a mission statement had not yet been drafted, but Members feedback on this issue would be taken on-board.
- Members noted the importance and requirement of a vision statement but expressed a desire for these statements to be followed through and not consist of “hollow words”. In response, the Programme Lead resolved to present an action plan on how the vision will be achieved. It was stressed that as the new council will be bringing together existing councils, a strong set of vision and values is required to achieve positive outcomes.
- Councillor McCord emphasised the need to take a positive approach on putting the needs of residents first, rather than those of the organisation.
- Members expressed a lack of clarity on what culture is to include, citing central government criticism of the embedded culture at Northamptonshire County Council. In response, Councillor McCord assured the Committee that positive steps have been taken since this criticism, stressing the need to avoid looking backwards and build a West Northamptonshire culture.
- Members queried whether other Unitary Authorities have been consulted on successfully embedding a positive vision and culture. The Programme Lead confirmed that discussions with successful authorities have taken place, with a focus on embedding and implementing the ambitions of the programme.
- Members noted that the voluntary sector was not mentioned in the report and suggested that this was an area of increasing importance. It was confirmed that this was not a deliberate omission, but rather that the voluntary sector had been incorporated into the plans under a banner title.
- Members questioned the opportunities for staff to feed back on the proposals, adding that the need for free and open discussion of concerns is vital. Councillor McCord agreed that free speech is a key component of soliciting feedback. The Programme Lead added that focus groups from across all four existing authorities were being engaged to gauge a cross-section of opinion, with all responses confidential to ensure open and honest views.

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee provided comment on the report, as detailed above, and noted the work programme outlined in the report for the period between November 2020 and March 2021.

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 Overview & Scrutiny Committee is rapidly gaining pace and undertaking a lot of important work and its work programme was quite full.

An additional meeting of this Committee, proposed for December 2020, is under consideration. It was also suggested that due to the magnitude of the topics to be considered – budget and governance scrutiny - two meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee will be required for January 2021.

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

- The Chair of the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee reiterated an earlier comment raised by Members, querying where comments made by the Committee are picked up by the relevant officers.
- It was noted that Councillor Brown, Chair of the Governance Task & Finish Group would attend the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's informal workshop on 26 November 2020 to discuss the path of overview and scrutiny moving forward.
- The Legal and Democratic Lead, Future Northants, advised that the Governance Task & Finish Group will meet on 12 November, followed by the informal workshop on 26 November. A full draft constitution for West Northants Authority will be presented to the Shadow Executive on 26 January 2021, prior to the full Shadow Authority meeting in February 2021.
- Following a request from the Chair of the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Davenport volunteered to act as an observer at the Governance Task & Finish Group meeting on 12 November.

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 20.02 hours.