

**WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**  
**SHADOW OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Monday, 25 January 2021**

**Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members present:**

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

**Officers present:**

George Candler	Chief Executive, Northampton Borough Council
Andrew Hunkin	Legal and Democratic Lead, Future Northants
Catherine Whitehead	Director of Legal and Democratic Services, WNC
Tracy Tiff	Democratic and Member Services Manager, Northampton Borough Council
Ed Bostock	Democratic Services Officer, Northampton Borough Council (Minutes)

**1. APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Roberts.

**2. NOTIFICATIONS OF REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE MEETING**

None.

**3. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

**4. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

None.

**5. MINUTES**

Members queried reference to the national living wage in the minutes and questioned why it was not being considered across the entire authority. Councillor Ritchie stated that the authority should be seeking accreditation as a Living Wage Employer. Councillor Meredith noted that a Scrutiny report (Food Poverty) by Northampton Borough Council recommended that the national living wage be implemented. The Chief Executive, Northampton Borough Council, advised that the report had been considered by the Cabinet and

recommendations approved, that could be implemented before vesting day. After Vesting Day it would be for WNC to determine the approach.

Councillor Bambridge noted that the response to his questions around funding were not included in the minutes, although they were included in the report of the Committee in relation to the budget consultation.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2021 as a true and accurate record, whilst noting the above observations.

## **6. GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY**

Catherine Whitehead, Director of Legal and Democratic Services, West Northamptonshire Council, presented the report and highlighted the salient points. She explained that a report was presented to the Constitution Task and Finish Group with a range of options in terms of how the Constitution could be taken forward. Six principles were adopted by the Task and Finish Group, set out at 3.3.1 of the report, and it was the aim that the Constitution would be written in plain English, as far as possible.

A new structure was chosen based on key decision-making bodies. The West Implementation Executive would be consulted on the draft Constitution before a final draft was referred to the Shadow Executive and ratified by the Shadow Authority on 23 February 2021.

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services explained that a section in the Constitution dealt with the interim period between vesting day and elections, which would fall away following an election.

In response to questions, it was explained that:

- Who should Chair the Council was a political matter and did not form part of a Constitution.
- There had been debate around localism but due to the issues around Covid-19, proper engagement with local communities was impossible. The Director of Legal and Democratic Services explained that NBC Members of the Task and Finish Group were keen on “theme based” community boards and noted that this would be a piece of work that she would like to see done within the new authority’s first year, providing there was the opportunity to engage with local communities.
- Regarding petitions, there was scope for a scheme of petitions to be added to the Public Participation section if Members felt it necessary; other councils found a scheme restrictive, rather than just allowing petitions to be presented to a committee.
- Regarding climate change, this was not included in the constitutions of any of the Sovereign authorities, and the approach to climate change would need to be considered by the West Northamptonshire Council.

- Regarding young people, the Director of Legal and Democratic Services agreed to add a sub-section within the Public Participation section acknowledging the importance of engaging with young people as part of the democratic process.
- There was an aim to write the Constitution in plain English, however due to the nature of the document this was not always possible. This would also be an ongoing task post-vesting day.
- It was anticipated that a boundary review would take place and changes implemented before the elections in 2025; members of the public and councillors would have a chance to make submissions.
- Officer arrangements were not included in the Constitution since they were not part of its governance arrangements.
- Regarding Planning committees, the proposal comprised 3 Local Area Committees and 1 Strategic Planning Committee which would deal with major development, waste disposal, etc. This was due in part to the Local Plan of each authority continuing to be separate until a single Local Plan for the area could be developed. Whilst there was no need for area committees to be politically balanced, local Member representation would be required.
- A Summary and Explanation was contained at the beginning of the Constitution.
- The Executive had powers to make changes to the Executive arrangements within the Constitution.
- A Member could sit on both Area and Strategic Planning Committees.
- The Strategic Planning Committee was created since it would have implications for the entire authority, beyond the boundaries of local areas; representatives of all areas would sit on the Strategic Planning Committee.
- The guillotine on meetings was proposed to be amended to 10:30pm and the limit of speakers further amended. Also proposed was an extension of a meeting by 15 minutes, at the Chair's discretion.
- Arrangements for S106 funding did not form part of the Constitution. This would be dealt with through any management arrangements West Northamptonshire Council put in place.
- A meeting room had been identified for council meetings but there was no space for the public, which is a legal requirement. Webcasting was being considered.

**RESOLVED:**

The Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the report on the proposed Constitution and made comment as detailed above.

**7. BUDGET CONSULTATION – DRAFT GENERAL FUND AND HRA BUDGET**

The Chief Executive, Northampton Borough Council, advised that the Committee could delegate powers to give the Chair discretion to add items to be agreed, following discussion under item 5.

In response to questions, the Committee heard that the “plus” in “safe and legal plus” referred to transformation relating to social care and the Children’s Trust; other parts of the wider transformation plan had to be scaled back due to the pandemic.

The Chair confirmed that any updates to the draft report, proposed at this meeting would be included within the report.

The Chief Executive, Northampton Borough Council, advised that the Transformation team was employed on fixed-term contracts, with the anticipation that transformation would be scaled back. However no date had been set. The Transformation budget included overhead expenses. In response to comments relating to the Children’s Trust and Member involvement, it was suggested that a Member briefing note be arranged to assure Members of the level of governance surrounding the Trust.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the Committee delegates to the Chair to make any required updates to the report.
2. Subject to updates made at the meeting, the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved the report of the Chair of the West Northamptonshire Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee that detailed the Committee’s comments on the draft Budget 2021-2022 and Medium Term Financial Plan – General Fund Revenue and Capital for submission to the Section 151 Officer to append to the report on the budget that will be considered by WNSA at its meeting on 23 February 2021.

**8. WNSA – EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN**

The Legal and Democratic Lead, Future Northants, presented the WNSA Executive Forward Plan and highlighted the salient points.

It was suggested that a briefing in respect of Transformation is provided to the next meeting of this Committee for consideration.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the Forward Plan.

**9. URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 19:55 hours