

West Northamptonshire Council

Shadow Executive

20 April 2021

Shadow Executive Committee Members Present:

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

Other West Northamptonshire Council Members Present:

Fiona Baker	Wendy Randall
Danielle Stone	

West Northamptonshire Council Officers Present:

Jeff Abbott	Benefits Realisation Manager
Jane Carr	Transformation Director
Anna Earnshaw	Chief Executive
Cathi Hadley	Executive Director of Children's Services
Paul Hanson	Democratic Services Manager
Martin Henry	Chief Finance Officer
Stuart Lackenby	Executive Director for Adults, Communities and Wellbeing
Alex Melia	Democratic Services Officer (Minutes)
Stuart Timmiss	Executive Director of Place & Economy
Rebecca Peck	Assistant Chief Executive
Catherine Whitehead	Monitoring Officer
Lucy Wightman	Director of Public Health

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE:

None received.

2. NOTIFICATION OF REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE MEETING:

Councillor Wendy Randall requested to address the meeting on Items 6, 8 and 9.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

Councillor Ian McCord declared an interest in Item 8, as a family member attends Sponne School, Towcester. The Chief Executive also declared an interest in Item 8 for the same reason.

4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 MARCH 2021

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Executive approved the minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2021 as a true and accurate record.

5. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were none.

6. FUTURE NORTHANTS CLOSURE REPORT

The Transformation Director introduced the report and highlighted the salient points:

- This report represents the final in a series brought to the Shadow Executive as part of the Local Government Reform Programme.
- It was noted that the intended vision of the Future Northants Programme is to create the two best performing local authorities in the country.
- The impact of Covid-19 was highlighted, as this caused resources to be diverted away from the Future Northants Programme to help with the pandemic response.
- The one-year extension was initially designed to further transformation projects, but this was moved to April 2021 with a focus on ensuring safe and legal status.
- The closing position of the Future Northants Programme indicated that all critical deliverables across all service areas were completed for day one of the new West Northamptonshire Council.
- All CCG registered services were able to operate legally on 1 April.
- Three new instances of three systems necessary for the safe running of Adult Social Care were complete.
- The Transformation Director emphasised that both unitary authorities have achieved a balanced budget.

Members of West Northamptonshire Council commented as follows:

- Councillor Randall expressed concerns over the harmonisation of staff from the predecessor councils and queried whether employees have sufficient opportunity to share feedback. Councillor Randall also asked for a full contact list to be made available detailing the relevant service area leads.
- In response, the Chair and the Chief Executive advised that this information has been previously distributed in newsletters to Members and agreed to resend the contact lists. The Chief Executive also confirmed that live briefing sessions have been held over the previous weeks, with around 1000 staff in attendance.

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the Finance Monitoring report and highlighted the salient points:

- The report shows an underspend of c.£2.84million, which must be considered in the context of the whole programme, from 2019-2024.
- This underspend must be carried forward into the next financial year, as commitments for this expenditure have already been made.
- The financial summary is for the previous financial year – 2020/21 – and the figures remain under review.

The Transformation Director closed the report by emphasising that safe and legal status for both authorities was achieved on Vesting Day. The total savings of £85million were broken down, with £35million saved in the financial year 2019/20, £14million projected savings in 2020/21 and a further £36million to be saved after day one of the new West Northamptonshire Council.

Members of the Shadow Executive Committee commented as follows:

- Councillor Golby stated that the task moving forward is to deliver further savings and transformation work, and advised the committee that a joint North-West Northamptonshire Council Transformation Task & Finish Group had recently taken place, which Councillor Golby deemed constructive.

There were no recommendations associated with this report.

7. WEST NORTHANTS POLICY ADOPTION – LGPS PENSIONS DISCRETIONS POLICY

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the report and highlighted the salient points:

- It was noted that a Pensions Discretions Policy is expected within three months of the inception of a new organisation.
- The full document is to be considered at the full West Northamptonshire Council meeting in June, with the current report covering discrepancies up to this point.

Councillor Bowen queried how this policy will operate and asked for examples to be given. In response, the Chief Finance Officer advised that there are 43 pensions discretions and cited flexible retirement leading to a pension reduction as an example where this policy may be relevant. It was noted that the predecessor authorities all had Pensions Discretions Policies in place, which were broadly similar with some minor differences. Not every discretion will be approved, but all will be considered and the recommendation is for the Chief Executive, as Head of Paid Service, to be granted delegated authority.

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

RESOLVED: That the West Northamptonshire Council Shadow Executive Committee:

a) Delegated to the Chief Executive (as Head of Paid Service) all relevant pensions discretions to exercise if necessary on an interim basis; and

b) Asked the Chief Executive to draw up a pensions discretions policy to be presented to a future meeting.

8. PROPOSAL TO FORWARD FUND EXTENSION AND IMPROVEMENT WORKS AT SPONNE SCHOOL - TOWCESTER

Councillor Baker introduced the report and highlighted the salient points:

- This report concerns capital improvement works and funding for Sponne School.
- It was advised that Sponne School has recently increased its PAN – Pupil Admission Number – in order to help demand from increased development in the local area. 66 extra pupils will have taken a place at Sponne School over a three-year period as a result, but this report will not increase this number further.
- Some Section 106 funding has been earmarked for the school, which will signify the end of WNC's contribution to the extension and improvement works. Further development will be funded by the school itself.

Members of West Northamptonshire Council commented as follows:

Councillor Randall queried how a new school intended for Daventry, which will be controlled by Sponne School, will be financed if Sponne School requires forward-funding of £320,282 to develop its existing site.

In response, the Chair advised that the agenda item refers only to approval of Section 106 funding, rather than issues concerning a new school the Daventry area.

Shadow Executive Committee Members commented as follows:

- Councillor Bowen expressed concerns that the development plan outlines a staff building to be constructed at Phase 1 and questioned why this was being prioritised.
- Councillor Baker suggested that the current faculty space will be integrated into the education facilities and advised that this information is contained within the original plans.
- In response to Councillor Randall, Councillor Auger highlighted the Department of Education's decision that a new school in Daventry is a required.

The Chair emphasised that the report being considered refers only to the approval of Section 106 funding for Sponne School.

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

RESOLVED: That the West Northamptonshire Council Shadow Executive Committee:

a) Approved the first tranche of Section 106 funding from the Towcester South SUE of £1,296,776 to Sponne School;

b) Approved the release of £182,942 in historic, banked S106 contributions to Sponne School; and

c) Delegated responsibility to the Executive Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance and the relevant portfolio holder to consider and determine Sponne School's request to forward-fund a further £320,282 of capital improvement works at the school to allow the extension of the school's Science Block against the value of future S106 funding to be received.

9. HOLIDAY ACTIVITY AND FOOD PROGRAMME

Councillor Golby introduced the report and highlighted the salient points:

- On 8 November 2020, the Holiday Activity and Food Programme was expanded across the whole of England following pilots and is designed to alleviate pressure on families.
- The first tranche of funding amounts to c.£2million and will cover the main school holiday periods across the whole of Northamptonshire.
- This HAFP will work closely with North Northamptonshire Council and Children's Services, with funding allocated in line with free school meal entitlement.

Members of West Northamptonshire Council commented as follows:

- Councillor Baker emphasised that the activities carry no financial burden for eligible children, with those who do not qualify still able to participate for a small fee.
- Councillor Stone welcomed the contribution towards young people, but suggested that the figure quoted may be low and questioned how the activities will be delivered.
- In response, the Director of Public Health advised that there were only eight weeks to mobilise the inaugural programme after funding was granted. It was noted that organisations involved in delivering the pilot programmes were procured and these organisations will be utilising local schemes such as NSport.

- The Director of Public Health confirmed that the programme is open to all eligible children, including those who have not taken up the free school entitlement.
- The Executive Director of Children's Services noted that schools were consulted to ensure that all children were covered and advised that data from the first tranche is awaited which will help inform future decisions.

In response to a question, the Executive Director of Children's Services advised that extra transport had not been provided during the first programme as the pandemic resulted in an increased number of virtual sessions, but this has been raised as an issue and will form part of the analysis moving forward.

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

RESOLVED: That the West Northamptonshire Council Shadow Executive Committee:

- a) Noted the direct award of the Easter HAF programme due to the timeline for delivery from DfE;**
- b) Approved the related DfE £1.8m grant allocated for the coordination of 2021 Summer and Winter school HAF Programme be used to procure the HAF service in line with national and council procurement guidelines;**
- c) Approved the passporting of resources to Public Health Northamptonshire, hosted by North Northants Council, and that this mirrors the Government funding distribution methodology of allocating the funds on the basis of children eligible for free school meals. The North Northamptonshire Council S151 officer is aware and has approved this arrangement; and**
- d) Agreed that delegated authority be given to the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Director of Children's Service, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing and Cabinet Member for Children Services, to agree the procurement, management and delivery arrangements for this service.**

URGENT ITEMS:

There were none.

EXEMPT ITEMS:

There were none.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 19:08.