

COUNCIL MEETING – 25 FEBRUARY 2020

REPORT OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM SUB-COMMITTEE

4 February 2020

Present: Councillors Griffiths (Chairman) and Councillors Allebone, Francis, Scarborough and Partridge-Underwood.

Also present: Mrs L Elliott (Managing Director), Mr S Darcy, (Director of Resources/Section 151 Officer), Mr E Symons (Assistant Director) and Mrs C A Mundy (Democratic Services Officer.)

(Councillor Skittrall attended as an observer.)

(The meeting commenced at 7pm.)

1. APOLOGIES

RESOLVED to note that apologies were received from Councillors Graves and Harrington.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED to note that in accordance with the Localism Act 2011, the council's code of conduct and the council's constitution, no declarations were made.

3. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 JANUARY 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2020 be confirmed, subject to an amendment to the dates at minute 5, which was noted.

4. NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT COMMITTEE

The managing director referred to the next meeting of the North Northamptonshire Joint Committee which would be taking place on 10 February 2020 at East Northants Council.

The managing director updated the sub-committee on the content of the agenda and confirmed that Paul Helsby the Programme Director would be speaking on the local government reform programme.

This would include updates on the following:

- The programme status;
- The design phase;
- Statutory roles;

- Engagement with trade unions;
- Communication and engagement, including an update on the change champions.

She informed the sub-committee that during the last month a considerable amount of work had been undertaken on the work streams with many officers from the council being heavily involved in the various working groups. Senior officers came together on a Tuesday at the 'engine room' in One Angel Square to look at the progress made and review any actions needed.

The 'engine room' located on the ground floor at Angel Square could be visited, by prior appointment

The discovery stage of the project had concluded and a start had been made on the design phase.

Discussions around finance had also taken place and it was confirmed that there would be a finance update given in the future. Members asked various points for the purpose of clarity particularly with regard to the debts that would be inherited by the two new unitary authorities. They considered that the county council had made decisions in the past that will have significant impact on the new unitary councils, particularly around the level of staffing and the amount and type of debt taken on. Councillors from all political parties had raised their concerns and challenged the impact and sustainability of decisions that had been made.

Mr Darcy informed members that in previous years there had been an overpayment by NCC of Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) accumulated on the balance sheet to provide for the repayment of debt, effectively creating VRP which has been agreed with the auditors to be claimed back. This will allow for a phasing of MRP over the initial years of the new unitary councils.

The managing director also referred to the Children's service and the progress that had been made on the creation of the Children's Trust. A significant investment into the service had been made in the next year's budget, but savings and efficiencies were still planned to reduce the overall cost of the service. An improvement plan is in place and progress has been made against it, and would continue to be implemented, particularly around case management and practice improvement, with moves being made to change the culture of the service. The MD explained the difficulties that had arisen over the years with recruitment and retention being a challenge and a high amount of agency staff being employed at a significant cost to the service. A chair of the Trust board had been appointed who had a considerable amount of experience in this field. The recruitment process for the role of chief executive had been extended; and is due to close at the end of February. There was still a considerable amount of work required to improve the practices in the service to ensure that children were safeguarded.

With regard to local government reform the MD clarified that it was hoped that the structural changes order would progress through Parliament within the next 10 days and members would be notified as soon as this was confirmed.

The recruitment to statutory roles was expected during April/May and interim officers would be officially appointed at the shadow authority's first meeting in May 2020.

Consultation had been taking place with all the trade unions involved and continue as part of the program.

The communications team had been issuing information to officers and a number of staff from all authorities had volunteered to become 'change champions' – they would be able to inform fellow colleagues of the progress with the programme and would be regularly updated.

Elections were planned for Thursday 7 May 2020 – because of the VE celebrations on Friday 8 May 2020, the count was not expected to take place until after the bank holiday and potentially into the next week.

Discussions had also taken place about where the North shadow unitary authority's council meetings would be held. Current accommodation of the North borough/districts had a suitable location either due to the size of their chamber or the lack of parking. It was thought that the best option would be to hire Kettering Leisure Village, but this was still the subject of discussion.

(Cllr Harrington joined the meeting at this point).

Members concurred that this would be the best place, as it was on neutral ground and had plenty of parking. It was agreed that the proposal for the council meetings to be held, during the shadow council period, at Kettering Leisure Village be put forward to the NNJC meeting, and anywhere else where it was to be discussed.

Councillor Griffiths thanked the managing director for the information and confirmed that all officers from the borough council were playing a big part in securing the future of services and shaping how they would look.

RESOLVED that the verbal update be noted and that the preference for council meetings, for the shadow unitary council in the North, be held at Kettering Leisure Village be communicated.

Chairman

The meeting concluded at 8.30pm

