

COUNCIL MEETING – 26 MARCH 2020

REPORT OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM SUB-COMMITTEE

3 March 2020

Present: Councillors Griffiths (Chairman) and Councillors Francis, Harrington, 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 Miss E McGinlay (Electoral Services Officer.)

(Councillors L Lawman, G Lawman, V Waters and M Waters attended as observers.)

(The meeting commenced at 7pm.)

1. APOLOGIES

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

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 4 FEBRUARY 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2020 be confirmed.

4. NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT COMMITTEE

The managing director referred to the next meeting of the North Northamptonshire Joint Committee (NNJC) which would be taking place on 5 March 2020 at Kettering Borough 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;
- Recruitment to statutory roles;
- Engagement and progress with trade unions;

- Communication and engagement, including an update on the change champions;
- Change management.

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 and councillors had attended several meetings to look at the progress made and review any actions needed.

Upcoming meetings would be held to allow each council leader an opportunity to review the design principles of the unitary councils in the form of a “straw person”. The straw person is a design tool which pulls together all the principle services together in one place to allow them to be debated, scrutinised and improved. Once the design had been finalised a “blueprint” would be produced and costed.

The managing director confirmed that the statutory changes order had now been approved by parliament and noted the programme had already satisfied the requirements set out by the order – to have two joint decision-making committees and an implementation team for the programme.

It was noted that the design phase of the project was on track for finalisation at the first meeting of the unitary councils after the May elections. Once the newly elected councillors approve the draft design plans, the implementation phase will begin across the two councils.

Discussions around finance of the unitary councils took place and concerns were raised about the lack of clarity in the finance report prepared for the NNJC on 5 March 2020. It was noted that these concerns were raised at the previous meeting, so the continued lack of clarity was disappointing for members. The section 151 officer confirmed that he would raise these concerns again to finance colleagues leading on the financial management section of the unitary programme.

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.

A chair of the Trust board had been appointed who had a considerable amount of experience in this field. It was noted that the recruitment process for the role of chief executive for the trust was coming to an end with the interviews for the candidates scheduled for March 2020.

The communications team had continued to be proactive in 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. It was noted

that 25 of the 275 champions were from Wellingborough, which was very positive seeing as there are only 104 full time equivalents across the council.

It was confirmed that the election planning was going well for Thursday 7 May 2020 and the date for the count of unitary papers for the Borough of Wellingborough was confirmed as Sunday 10 May 2020 at Redwell Leisure Centre. Members expressed their concerns for the potential disruption of the polls due to the outbreak of the coronavirus in the UK. It was noted that the elections team had this as part of their risk register and measures would be put in place to alleviate any potential issues but that any cancellation or delay of polls would be on the advice of central government.

The managing director confirmed she would be raising a query on wording of some of the reports being brought to the NNJC on 5 March 2020 as they still referred to the unitary as “Shadow” for its first year of operation. It has been previously communicated by the Returning Officer for the unitary elections that the correct terminology of “unitary council in its shadow year” be used.

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.

Chairman

The meeting concluded at 7:50pm