

NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT COMMITTEE

**Meeting held on 16th September 2019
at Borough Council of Wellingborough**

Present: Councillor Martin Griffiths (Borough Council of Wellingborough) –
Chair
Councillor Tom Beattie (Corby Borough Council) – Vice Chair
Councillor Jonathan Ekins (Northamptonshire County Council)
Councillor Bob Eyles (Corby Borough Council)
Councillor John Farrar (East Northamptonshire District Council)
Councillor Helen Howell (East Northamptonshire District Council)
Councillor Ian Jelley (Kettering Borough Council)
Councillor David Jenney (East Northamptonshire District Council)
Councillor Steven North (East Northamptonshire District Council)
Councillor Tom Partridge-Underwood (Borough Council of
Wellingborough)
Councillor Victoria Perry (Northamptonshire County Council)
Councillor Russell Roberts (Kettering Borough Council)
Councillor Andrew Scarborough (Borough Council of
Wellingborough)
Councillor Mick Scrimshaw (Kettering Borough Council)
Councillor Jason Smithers (Northamptonshire County Council)

Also Present: Theresa Grant (Chief Executive, Northamptonshire County
Council)
Mark Dickenson (Chief Finance Officer, Kettering Borough
Council)
Paul Goult (Monitoring Officer, Corby Borough Council)
Paul Helsby (Programme Director)
Anne Ireson (Committee Administrator)

NNJC.12 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jean Addison and Kevin Watt (Corby Borough Council) and Councillor Steven North (East Northamptonshire District Council).

It was noted that Councillor Bob Eyles was acting as a substitute for Councillor Addison and Councillor Helen Howell was acting as a substitute for Councillor North.

NNJC.13 PROGRESS SINCE THE INAUGURAL MEETING

The Chair gave a brief update on progress made since the inaugural meeting of the Committee. Members noted that the Leaders' Oversight Board had met, with Councillor Russell Roberts elected as Chair. The second meeting was due to be held on Tuesday, 17th September. Design and Discovery meetings were also now underway.

NNJC.14 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 24th June 2019 be approved and signed by the Chair subject to amendment as follows:-

"NNJC.01 – Election of Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Ian Jelley and seconded by Councillor Andrew Scarborough that Councillor Martin Griffiths be elected Chair."

NNJC.15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

NNJC.16 MATTERS OF URGENCY

None

NNJC.17 PUBLIC SPEAKERS

No requests from members of the public to address the Committee had been received within the previously agreed timescale in accordance with the Standing Orders.

NNJC.18 UPDATE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IN NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

The Committee noted that, since the last meeting, Paul Helsby had been appointed as Programme Director. The Chair welcomed Paul Helsby to the meeting.

Members received a presentation which gave an update on the Programme in relation to the following projects:-

- Mobilisation
- Recruitment
- Programme Team Structure
- Programme Boards
- PMO Set-Up
- Developing financial reporting and governance
- Baselining and Disaggregation, including timelines
- Members' Involvement
- Communications and Engagement Update
- Next Steps

Following the presentation, members noted that confirmation of the Structural Change Order to be laid in Parliament was still awaited.

Websites for West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire had been completed and were due to become operational from 17th September. The websites would enable residents to have access to information on the new unitary authorities.

Debate ensued on the following topics as summarised below:-

Consultation with Residents

It was felt that not all residents had access to websites and it was suggested that public meetings should also be arranged to enable residents to be kept updated. It was noted that communication was still in the Design and Discovery stage. Members elected to the Shadow Council would lead the Implementation stage and it was expected that the Shadow Council would then seek feedback from residents following the elections in 2020.

Programme Costs and Potential Savings

Debate was held on the £43m projected cost of the programme. The Committee expressed concern that financial details were currently unclear, and work on clarity of costs, savings and baseline costs should be prioritised as a matter of urgency so that members were in a position to advise constituents. Additionally, information should be supplied to members in advance of meetings, rather than given as verbal updates. There was also a need to identify potential savings as they arose throughout the timeline of the programme.

The Committee noted that the projected programme cost of £43m was built up based on cost information contained in the Prospectus published earlier this year, including; £19m of Business Rates Pilot funding for transformation, with the remainder made up of NCC transformation costs and a contribution of £1.7m from each authority. Contingencies would be built in, and accurate figures obtained and budget updated accordingly.

It would also be important to identify opportunities as they arose, and the overall figure should not be considered to be a cap. Potential savings would be identified as work progressed through the programme.

Members also expressed concern regarding the Benefits Realisation development work, which was reported to be approximately two weeks behind schedule. It was noted that it was expected to catch up with this work in the near future.

Members noted that the £43m costs contained in the original prospectus had not changed, but the breakdown of costs were now being analysed and validated to ensure they were accurate.

Baselining Services and Transformation Programme

During discussion on the baselining and costs of NCC services, it was noted that disaggregation of service costs would inform the budgets for the baseline of the two unitary authorities, with the aim of reducing the cost base so that each authority was a financially sustainable organisation. This work was now in the Discovery phase, which was approximately 80% complete. Information would then be discussed by the Leaders' Oversight Board before being considered by the Joint Committee, although it was not yet possible to say how quickly this would happen. Information would not be in the public domain until it was submitted to the Joint Committee.

Discussion was held on the potential for the Transformation Programme to bring forward service improvements and savings for residents.

It was noted that business rates governance was a completely separate process and was subject to Government rules and regulations. The Business Rates Governance Board was made up of the eight local authority leaders. Minutes of the meetings were available.

Delegated Authority Process

Clarification was sought by the Committee on the process for decision-making, and it was noted that a draft scheme of delegation was due to be considered by the next meeting of the Leaders' Oversight Board before being brought to the Committee.

Debate then ensued on member involvement and assurance was sought that there would be agreement on the way members would be engaged throughout the process. It was felt that reliance was placed on Leaders to keep their members involved, as observers and other members were not permitted to speak at the Leaders' Oversight Board meetings.

It was noted that Design and Discovery Boards would involve members other than the Leaders. The Leaders' Oversight Board was not a

statutory body and would not make decisions or perform a scrutiny role. Reference was made to the Terms of Reference for the Joint Committee, which was the decision-making body. The Business Rates Pilot, for which KBC was the responsible owner, had a specific, separate governance board, which was properly minuted and audited.

Some decisions were also required to be made by sovereign authorities where appropriate.

It was felt that many of the concerns expressed by members would be allayed once a scheme of delegation had been agreed.

Political Uncertainty and Brexit

Discussion was held on current national political uncertainty and the potential effects of Brexit. Members expressed concern that the Programme could be cancelled if there was a change of Government and the subsequent effect on delivery of services.

It was noted that officials from the MHCLG were due to attend the next meeting of the Leaders' Oversight Board and would answer questions in respect of Brexit and political uncertainty. The Government had expressed a clear ambition to lay the Structural Change Order before Parliament and a window of opportunity existed for this to happen. If the Order was laid, and a general election subsequently called, it could be pushed through as urgent business. It was noted that further information in this respect would be sought at the meeting.

The Chair assured the Joint Committee that all asked-for deadlines would be met and that the Government would be pushed for speedy decisions to be made. The general feeling was that, even if the Government changed, the programme would go ahead.

NNJC.19 GOVERNANCE WORKING GROUP – INTERIM REPORT

A report from the Chair of the Governance Working Group was considered regarding progress made to date on the compilation of a draft Constitution for the North Northamptonshire Shadow Council.

It was noted that Dorset and Cheshire templates had been used as guidelines only.

The Structural Change Order was likely to determine that the Shadow Council would operate under executive arrangements. This was based on advice received from the MHCLG.

The Shadow Council once in place would be able to consider the governance arrangements for the future unitary authority. This would

include consideration of alternative arrangements through a committee-style system.

The Chair thanked the Chair and Members of the Governance Working Group for their work to date.

RESOLVED that the progress made by the Governance Working Group and the agreed Scoping Report be noted.

NNJC.20 STATUTORY OFFICER APPOINTMENTS WORKING GROUP – INTERIM REPORT

A report from the Chair of the Statutory Officer Appointments Working Group regarding their discussions to date was submitted for consideration.

The officer support provided by Sam Maher of East Midlands Councils and officers from Kettering Borough Council and Corby Borough Council was noted and welcomed by the Committee.

Discussion was held on branding and style for the Shadow Council and it was noted that the Programme Team would look at this in the period leading up to the elections for the Shadow Councils. It was felt that branding was important in looking forward to the future for the two unitary authorities in Northamptonshire.

The Chair thanked the Chair and Members of the Statutory Officer Appointments Working Group for their work to date.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the report and appendices be noted;
- (ii) the Group extend its consideration of the permanent designation of respective roles of permanent Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer if included within the Structural Change Order; and
- (iii) the request for NNJC to be provided with some guidance from the Programme Team in relation to the branding of the Shadow Council (for use on documentation etc.) be noted.

NNJC.21 INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL WORKING GROUP – INTERIM REPORT

A report was submitted by the Chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel Working Group regarding progress made to date on the work of the group.

In the interests of expediency, it had been agreed by the Working Group to invite all existing Independent Panel Members from across the five sovereign councils to submit an expression of interest if they wished to be considered for appointment to the Panel.

The Chair thanked the Chair and Members of the Independent Remuneration Panel Working Group for their work to date.

RESOLVED that progress made by the Independent Remuneration Panel Working Group and the agreed Scoping Report be noted.

NNJC.22 TERMS OF REFERENCE WORKING GROUP – REPORT

A report was submitted by the Chair of the Terms of Reference Working Group regarding its discussions on potential extension of the North Northamptonshire Joint Committee's Terms of Reference.

The report was updated at the meeting in respect of the need for the proposed amendments to be approved by all five principal authorities and the requirements of the Structural Change Order.

During discussion, it was pointed out that a Coat of Arms, badge, etc. could take up to a year to receive approval from the College of Heralds and there was a need to move quickly in this respect.

Clarification was given on point 8 of Appendix 2 in respect of the need to delete the reference to the Steering Group and replace with Leaders' Oversight Board or Design Board.

The Chair thanked the Chair and Members of the Terms of Reference Working Group for their work.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the report and appendices be noted;
- (ii) the update from the Chair of the Working Group on the Group's meeting of 9th September 2019 be noted; and

- (iii) the request for NNJC to provide some guidance in relation to the branding of the Shadow Council (for use on documentation etc.) be noted and looked at by the Programme Team.

NNJC.23 CHAIR’S CLOSING COMMENTS

The Chair thanked Members for their attendance and debate, commenting that there were considerable tasks ahead for the Committee, but that Members were fully committed to delivering the Programme for the people they represented. More clarity would become evident moving forward, but at the present time the transformational nature of the Programme must be borne in mind.

It was noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Committee was on 12th November 2019.

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and ended at 8.00 pm)

Signed
Chair

AI-kbc