

TRANSFORMATION COMMITTEE

Date: 01 July 2019

Venue: East Northamptonshire House, Cedar Drive, Thrapston

Time: 7.30pm

Present: Councillors: Helen Howell (Chairman)
Harriet Pentland (Vice Chairman)

Tony Boto Barbara Jenney
John Farrar Janet Pinnock
Richard Gell Rupert Reichhold
Roger Glithero JP

56. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Marian Hollomon, David Jenney and Steven North.

57. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 May 2019 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

58. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations.

59. QUESTIONS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.3

There were no questions submitted under Procedure Rule 10.3.

60. UNITARY UPDATE

The Chief Executive presented a report which provided a progress update on the planned implementation of unitary local government in Northamptonshire.

It was confirmed that he had sent a response to MHCLG in relation to the questions discussed at the last meeting of the committee. The other Northamptonshire councils had also responded although there were some differences in response, particularly around the period during which elections for vacancies would be required to be held. It was noted that the outcome of these representations would not be known until the Draft Structural Change Order was produced.

It was also confirmed that the first, largely administrative, meeting of the North Northamptonshire Joint Committee had been held on 24 June 2019. A Member Briefing had been circulated outlining the appointment of the Chairman and Vice Chairman together with the creation of four working groups, each of which would have a representative from this Council. Nominations would be announced at the July Council meeting.

During an overview of the appendices, the governance arrangements in Appendix 1 were noted, including the role of commissioners linking into the Leaders Oversight Board, and it was highlighted that the implementation phase would commence at a similar time to the Shadow Council i.e. May 2020. In relation to Appendix 2, it was noted that baselining work was nearly completed and that engagement of councillors/staff/public would start soon for the design phase. The design phase would produce the two blueprints which would have some parts in common and some differences to reflect the different priorities for the North and West. In relation to Appendix 3, which showed the high level service work streams together with chief executive Senior Responsible Officers (SRO), it was noted that the role of SRO was to provide leadership to ensure appropriate engagement in developing the blueprint for that area and not subject specialism, which would be included in the project teams. Chief Executives had been allocated on the basis of previous partnership work within the county and / or professional expertise, whilst the NCC Chief Executive had an overall co-ordinating role across all work streams and was charged with ensuring that the Programme Office met the resource requirements of each workstream.

During discussion it was noted that talk in the media about the budget for the transformation work was premature at this stage as only estimates were available. It would not be until detailed projects plans had been produced that a more accurate view of costs could be made. Provision had already been made in this and other councils' budgets for the estimated costs and it was confirmed that the costs for the current financial year would be met from the Business Rates Retention arrangements noted in the report.

RESOLVED:

That the unitary update be noted.

61. JOINT WORKING WITH BOROUGH COUNCIL OF WELLINGBOROUGH

The Business Transformation Manager presented a verbal report which highlighted the additional opportunities that the decision on unitary councils had created and that the relevant councils would ensure that this project's progress was aligned with the wider unitary journey as they developed their plans. In particular, more joint working in other service areas would be considered if it would provide benefits to customers.

In terms of specific team activity, it was noted that the joint working in Revenues and Benefits was progressing well with the Academy switchover going very smoothly on 24 June 2019 (after being delayed by the ICT freeze because of the EU elections). This had included shared approaches on areas such as naming conventions and data retention schedules but it was noted that the two data sets for residents were being kept separate. It was reported that it had been decided to delay launching the Document Management System until mid-October 2019. There were a number of reasons for this including resources focussing on the system go-live, testing and user training to ensure that the reputational and service risks to the council with our residents and businesses were minimised. A member of the Project Board with experience of similar work at another local authority had commended the quality of the process work being undertaken in this project.

For Building Control it was reported that there was only one remaining action, which was the signing of a data sharing agreement. This had been drafted with input from the Data Protection Officer and was awaiting finalisation. In addition it was noted that a Building Control Charter was currently being drafted that would provide customers with a clearer understanding of the building control process. The Charter was designed to provide clarity about the things Building Control could and could not do. It would also provide information about our service aims and performance targets, which should help bring consistency for both councils. This document would be distributed for comment before being placed on the website. ENC had also been focussing on the correction of inaccurate historical data that was identified on the inspection and completion records. This work would help to improve the data quality provided to Land Charges as well as placing ENC in a more reliable position.

It was reported that the work on the Democratic Services area had been delayed by the EU elections but had now resumed. ENC had adopted an Electronic Committee Management System (CMS) and staff from both councils had been involved in the training ready for unitary. The Councillors on the CMS Working Party had now received their pilot ICT equipment. Functionality for the CMS was being rolled out on a step by step basis to allow for testing at each stage with the next stage being public access to the meeting and reports web-pages created by the system. Process reviews for civic support, committee management and member services were also being undertaken. On the Elections side there would be a joint review of learning from the EU elections shared working in mid July. Finally current recruitment activity in both teams is being done in a way that supported shared service activity, although successful applicants would be appointed by each council.

Finally, it was reported that the accurate data Land Charges and Planning Administration project was unlikely to achieve the original deadline due to planning resource issues, both in terms of higher volumes of planning applications as applicants seek determination by this council in advance of the unitary changes, and unforeseen staffing issues. However, two productive workshops had been held to understand how the different teams used data and their roles and responsibilities.

Members thanked the Officer for the report and noted the impact that the current capacity issues were having on the Planning Management team and the measures that were in place to support staff.

RESOLVED:

That the progress on joint working with the Borough Council of Wellingborough be noted.

62. UPDATE ON THE OFFICE TRANSFORMATION PROJECT

The Business Transformation Manager provided a report on progress with the Office Transformation Project (OTP).

It was confirmed that work on the first part of phase 1b (west wing of the upper ground floor stone building) had now been virtually completed and staff had moved back. A few minor elements of the work remained but would be completed shortly. It now included two new meeting rooms and had provision for 20 staff. Staff had commented positively that it was a fresh, modern, spacious and attractive environment to work in. Members were encouraged to visit the new area to see the improvements for themselves. It was also noted that staff had been moved to temporary locations from the remaining phase 1b area (east wing ground floor modern building) at the end of the previous week and work had already started in this area and would be completed in August.

Further to the previous report, it was noted that the issue with the desks was continuing to be progressed, with the new workstations passing health and safety assessments and receiving positive feedback from the staff now using them. Where possible, costs had been minimised by, for example, reusing some desks that were still fit for purpose whilst other items such as cupboards had been refurbished and the door signs made in house.

The Chairman congratulated the Business Transformation Team for their hard work, level of thought in the refurbishment and for staying within budget. The clarity and detail of the reports from the team were also commended.

RESOLVED:

That the progress being made on the Office Transformation project be noted.

Chairman