



Transformation Committee 4 September 2019

Unitary Progress Update

Purpose of report

This report provides a progress update on the planned implementation of unitary local government following the announcement by the Secretary of State (SoS) for Housing, Communities and Local Government in May 2019.

Attachments:

None

1.0 Background

- 1.1 As the Committee is aware, seven of the eight principal authorities in Northamptonshire (every council except Corby BC) submitted a proposal on 31st August 2018 to replace the eight councils with two unitary authorities; West and North Northamptonshire.
- 1.2 On Monday 13th May, the Secretary of State (SoS) announced his decision to proceed with that proposal and put the Structural Change Orders (SCOs) before Parliament. The key points of his announcement were for those two unitary councils to replace the current eight principal authorities in Northamptonshire, and for that to take place on 1st April 2021.

2.0 Recent developments

- 2.1 Boris Johnson was elected Leader of the Conservative Party, and therefore Prime Minister, on 23rd July 2019. As part of his initial Cabinet re-shuffle, he replaced James Brokenshire with Robert Jenrick as SoS for HCLG. He also replaced most of the ministerial team at MHCLG, and only one of the previous team is still in place.
- 2.2 While this is not expected to alter the unitary process, the immediate impact may be that decision-making is delayed while the new team familiarises itself with all the issues for which MHCLG is responsible.
- 2.3 In the meantime, the civil service team has been considering the requests put forward by the eight councils in respect of the content of the SCOs (our submission was made following the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 25th February 2019). The lead civil servant attended a meeting of the Leaders' Oversight Board on 24th July and tabled a draft proposed SCO for comment. He also provided further guidance and information on what was likely to be taken into consideration in the SCO. All Councils were invited to respond by the following Wednesday, 31st July, and were asked to keep both the document and their responses confidential at this stage in the process.
- 2.4 Given the very tight deadline, each council made its own response. The Chief Executive replied on behalf of this council, based on advice from the Monitoring Officer at the time and following consultation with the Leader.

3.0 Progress with the implementation programme

- 3.1 Since the previous meeting of this committee on 1 July 2019, a new Programme Director, Paul Helsby, has been appointed, and he is in the process of recruiting to the Programme Management Office. The first tranche of job offers has been made in respect of Programme and Project Managers, Business Analysts and Project Support Officers, most of whom will be seconded into the team from one of the eight councils. There are some vacancies which will be filled by external recruitment.
- 3.2 Three offers were made to ENC staff, one of whom has accepted. The other two staff have decided to remain with the council.
- 3.3 The allocation of activities to workstreams has been completed and signed off by the Design Board (i.e. the Chief Executives). There is overlap between some of the workstreams, for example Housing and Adults' Social Care, which will be addressed as the programme progresses. The detailed plans for each workstream will be prepared over the coming weeks, following which the design phase will begin. At this point, workshops will be scheduled for each workstream so that relevant customers, service users, staff, councillors and partners can be engaged in designing how services will be delivered.
- 3.4 A second meeting of the Trades Union Forum has taken place with a view to agreeing Terms of Reference for TU involvement in the process. The discussions have been positive and constructive.

4.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 4.1 There are no equality or diversity implications arising directly from this report. There are potentially significant implications from the unitary restructure and these will be addressed during the course of implementation.

5.0 Privacy Impact Implications

- 5.1 There are no privacy implications arising directly from this report. There are potentially significant implications from the unitary restructure and these will be addressed during the course of implementation.

6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 While the SoS has now made his announcement, the restructure is still dependent on the relevant legislation (Structural Change Order) being passed by Parliament. Design and delivery of the new Unitary Councils' service delivery will require significant legal input.

7.0 Risk Management

- 7.1 The primary risks to this council associated with the implementation of the new unitaries are the pressures on staff, particularly management, in participating in and / or running the projects required to do so, and the loss of staff at all levels and the potential difficulty of recruiting to those vacancies given the uncertainty over the future.
- 7.2 These risks and the steps being taken to mitigate them are set out in the risk register.
- RMCORP012 – Risk of unitary preparations diverting resources from delivery of Corporate/Efficiency Plans
 - RMCORP012a – Prepare programme plan, assess resource requirements for delivery of transition to unitary

8.0 Resource and Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no resource or financial implications arising directly from this report.
- 8.2 Significant staffing resources will be needed to support and deliver the programme of work over the next 19 months. Decisions will need to be taken in due course about the extent to which additional resources are brought in to cover for that loss of capacity and the extent to which current activities are prioritised.

9.0 Constitutional Implications

- 9.1 The new unitaries will need constitutions to be prepared and approved at their first meetings. There are no implications for this council's constitution arising from this report.

10.0 Implications for our Customers

- 10.1 The resource implications referred to above will be a challenge that will need to be addressed in order to ensure that we maintain standards of service to our customers.

11.0 Corporate Outcomes

- 11.1 The intention is to implement the programme in order to achieve a positive impact on all of the Council's corporate outcomes although, when the Council is abolished in 2021, it will be the outcomes adopted by the new North Northamptonshire Council that will become relevant.

12.0 Recommendations

- 12.1 The Committee is recommended to note the latest update on the unitary situation.

(Reason - to keep Members up to date with developments on the implementation of unitary local government in Northamptonshire)

Legal	Power:				
	Other considerations:				
Background Papers: Previous monthly reports to this Committee Minutes of the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 25 th February 2019					
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Date: 21 August 2019					
CFO 22/08/19		MO (Deputy) 22/08/19		CX 21/08/19	