



Transformation Committee 24 January 2020

Unitary Progress Update

Purpose of report

This report provides a progress update on the planned implementation of unitary local government in Northamptonshire following the announcement by the Secretary of State (SoS) for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) 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 Order (SCO) 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 Progress of SCO

- 2.1 Prior to parliament rising for the General Election in December 2019, the SCO went through the first stage of the required approval process and is now an 'instrument of interest'. This means that it is still a live document and will now go through the rest of the parliamentary process rather than that process having to be started all over again.
- 2.2 We have been advised by MHCLG that the SCO should be enacted by the end of January, although it would be prudent to assume that it may take a while longer. It now seems likely that it will be in place by the end of February at the latest.
- 2.3 On the assumption that this is the case, preparations are being made for the elections to the shadow councils (the Shadows) in May 2020. The pre-election period (purdah) is scheduled to start on 31st March.

3.0 Progress with the implementation programme

- 3.1 The New Year marks the start of the design phase for the programme, whereby each service area will aim to come up with a set of options for how it might be delivered in the future. These will be tested via briefings with Leaders, and there will be opportunities for customers, partners and other stakeholders to be involved in that process.
- 3.2 It should be noted that no definitive decisions can be made during this period as to how the unitaries will eventually operate from 1st April 2021. That will be for the Shadows to decide once they are created following the May elections. This phase is intended to gauge the level of support for various options and to ensure that they have been worked up in sufficient detail to enable the Shadows to make decisions promptly thereafter.

3.3 During the design phase, Chief Executives will be meeting weekly to discuss progress on their individual portfolios, and particularly to identify areas of overlap and dependency in order to ensure that the options being developed fit together and do not conflict.

3.4 Leaders will also be meeting weekly, to

- receive a series of briefings on each portfolio;
- ensure that the high-level principles adopted earlier in the process are being applied; and
- to provide a steer as to which options are likely to be preferred.

They will also be seeking to ensure that action is not taken by any of the existing sovereign councils that might prejudice the ability of the two unitaries to make their own decisions about how any particular service might be delivered in the future.

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 Health Implications

6.1 There are no health implications arising directly from this report as it is simply an update report. The health implications of the decisions that will be made during the implementation of the unitary structures will need to be considered by the appropriate bodies, particularly the Shadow Authorities, at the appropriate time.

7.0 Legal Implications

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

8.0 Risk Management

8.1 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 as part of the unitary work programme, the loss of staff at all levels and the potential difficulty of recruiting to those vacancies given the uncertainty over the future.

8.2 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

9.0 Resource and Financial Implications

- 9.1 There are no resource or financial implications arising directly from this report.
- 9.2 Significant staffing resources will be needed to support and deliver the programme of work over the next 15 months. Decisions will need to be taken during that period about the extent to which additional resources are brought in to cover for loss of capacity and the extent to which current activities are prioritised.

10.0 Constitutional Implications

- 10.1 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.

11.0 Implications for our Customers

- 11.1 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.

12.0 Corporate Outcomes

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

13.0 Recommendations

- 13.1 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)

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| Legal | Power: | | | | |
| | Other considerations: | | | | |
| Background Papers: Previous reports to this Committee Minutes of the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 25 th February 2019 | | | | | |
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| CFO 13/01/20 |  | MO | | CX 07/01/20 |  |