

Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee Minutes

Date: 30 September 2019

Time: 6.35 - 8.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor A Collingwood (in the Chair)

Members: Councillors R Bagge, P Birchley, B Gibbs, J Gladwin, G Hollis, S Jenkins, S Renshell, R Stuchbury, P Turner, J Waters and C Whitehead

1. CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed members and officers to the meeting. He requested that members restrict questions to two minutes per question to officers. The Chairman also noted that the next meeting of the Shadow Executive would be taking place on 8 October.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs L Clarke, Councillor R Newcombe, Councillor A Cole, Councillor P Kelly and Councillor S Lambert. It was noted that Councillor Sandra Jenkins was substituting for Councillor Richard Newcombe for the duration of the meeting.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 August 2019 were confirmed as a correct record.

Regarding item 6, Consolidated Financial Position, it was requested that information regarding where the figures originated from, as noted in paragraph 10 and page 25 of the report, be made available.

ACTION: Democratic Services

It was noted that actions outlined in the minutes had been actioned and information outstanding would be circulated to the Committee.

ACTION: Democratic Services

5. COUNCIL ACCESS POINTS

The Committee welcomed Sara Turnbull, Localism Workstream Officer Co-Lead, BCC and Jeff Membery, Assistant Director, Customer Fulfilment, AVDC to the meeting to provide a presentation on establishing Council and Community Access Points across Buckinghamshire. The following points were noted:

- Council Access Points would be available on day one of the new Buckinghamshire Council (1 April 2020).
- A report would be provided to the Shadow Executive on 8 October 2019, outlining the vision, approach and options in establishing the access points across Buckinghamshire.
- A member working group had been established to investigate and consider options. Members of the working group had considered good practice at other local authorities.
- The access points would be undertaken in two phases. Phase one would provide council access points for residents to access council services locally on vesting day. Phase two would be an enhanced service to provide community access points, this would be undertaken post vesting day.
- Work was being undertaken with colleagues at the councils to provide council access points the first day of the new council.
- Phase one would be for all services for both county and district to be accessed via website, social media, email, phone and face to face.
- It would be important to provide online services as these usually had a high volume of customers. However it was noted that all residents would need access to services and more complex issues would require face to face customer service.
- The proposal for phase one would be to have 18 council access points across the county for residents to have access to all services. Larger areas would have more than one access point and staff would be trained to answer queries and signpost residents to the correct area of expertise.
- Existing provision would be kept in place and staff trained appropriately to help residents with any queries. Council access points would provide an upgrade for residents to be able to access all council services.
- Consideration was being given to provide an additional access point at Waddesdon and discussions were taking place with colleagues at the parish council.
- The aim was for council access points to cover the whole of the new Buckinghamshire Council area. In areas of high demand there would be more than one access point.
- Work was being undertaken on branding and a communications plan for the 1 April launch and colleagues were working on the customer and digital strand to provide a training plan for staff to enable them to be confident in the range of services for residents to access.
- Post vesting day work would continue on the design and business case for the community access points. It was confirmed that there would be a wider range of services at the community access points. Public engagement would be included so that they would be designed to meet local needs.

In response to members' questions the following points were noted:

- The current main council offices would be used as council access points from day one but this could be subject to change in the future. The levels of usage would determine phase 2 development and the current offices would provide a range of detailed specialist services and for these to be maintained. Transformation to additional services and community access points would be dealt with post vesting day. Further work and investigation was required.
- Discussions would be taking place to consider integrating and making health services available at integrated locations in phase 2. It was noted that this was a complicated process.
- Telephone communication would be available at all the main council office buildings. At smaller locations there would be face to face customer services and officers would be trained to deal with common queries in an effective way.
- Officers noted that there were 80,000 face to face contacts last year and the aim for the access points was so that residents would not have to travel long distances to access services. Evidence over the next year would inform decisions in the future on how services could be accessed.
- Longer term it would be a consideration to have leisure facilities such as coffee shops at access points. Other local authorities had adopted these type of services along with other leisure, health and police services. Sites would vary along with the needs of the community.
- Some sites would undertake building works to facilitate areas for private face to face contact with residents.
- A member highlighted concern that some areas such as the South Bucks District Council offices were not in an accessible location and it was suggested in Gerrards Cross would be better place to provide services to local residents.
- There was concern that two access points in High Wycombe was unnecessary
- Regarding the suggestion that under used council offices should be sub-let it was confirmed that the main council office buildings would be available for residents on day one of the new council however this could be reconsidered in the future.
- Equality of access was being considered at the sites as these differed across the locations. It was noted that Buckingham Library would be one of the access points and services would be maintained.
- Using communication technology such as Skype would be investigated. Members were invited to provide further suggestions.
- Options were being considered using town and parish council facilities in the future.
- The focus was for feasible options and to minimise costs.
- There was concern that residents would not go to an access point at a library to discuss confidential issues. Work needed to be undertaken on the needs required at locations and to make this was clear for residents. Members were assured that it was critical to make sure that expectations to access

services was clear. Complex issues would be dealt with by trained customer service staff and residents if needed would be signposted to the correct service required. Expectations would need to be managed and a majority of queries would be dealt with at the main council offices or by appointment.

- The amount of staff and working hours would be dependent on the type of access point. All would be paid staff, volunteers would not deal with complex queries.
- The current budget was not extensive and three sites would require building work ahead of day one to provide private areas. Sites would be reconsidered in relation to demand.
- The aim for phase one was to offer an enhanced service with a variety of services to be accessed. There was a need to gather evidence to build a business case and review demand post vesting day.
- Members highlighted concern that evidence had not been sufficiently obtained ahead of expanding the services and not all of the access points would be required. In response it was noted that the Shadow Executive report provided information on the work undertaken and detailed the training programme to be delivered to front line staff to prepare them ahead of vesting day. It was important that access to services was available on day one and to reassure residents that the council was not remote; a communications plan would be important to deliver this message.
- Concern was raised regarding a perceived possible relocation of the BCC Children's Services offices in High Wycombe. It was noted that the safeguarding of children was paramount. The officer explained that there were no plans regarding a change of office location as part of the Council Access Point Proposal and concerns would be passed on to the relevant children's services officers.
- Regarding the potential demolition of the existing Winslow Community Library, officers confirmed that BCC were undertaking discussions and future options were being considered. A press release was due to be issued regarding the matter shortly.
- Regarding the budget officers confirmed that some funding was already covered in existing budgets. The additional funding requested would be to support phase 1 of the works. It was noted that phase 2 would require significant investment but this funding was not required at this time until a business case had been undertaken.

Members outlined their concerns and agreed that these would be provided to the Shadow Executive ahead of their meeting on the 8 October. Members were concerned at the lack of evidence and business case ahead of phase 1 and that residents were provided with a continuity of service. Resources needed to be considered to help deliver a balance of services. Residents were familiar with using the 5 council locations and it was questioned if additional resources would risk confusing the public on where to go for services. However one member noted that council offices should not be under occupied and could be sub-let.

The Chairman thanked the officers for the presentation and the Policy Officer confirmed that, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman, key points would be provided to the Shadow Executive for consideration ahead of their meeting on 8 October.

6. CUSTOMER STRATEGY

The Committee welcomed Maryonne Hassell, IT Strategy Manager, AVDC and Lloyd Jeffries, Director of Customer, BCC to the meeting to provide a presentation on the planned approach and implementation of customer and digital services for vesting day of the new Council.

Members were informed that initially there would be no major transformation, new and existing signposting would be provided to residents to access services.

Members were provided with information regarding customer channel storyboards which demonstrated the customer's experience when accessing services on vesting day and beyond. It was noted that the existing telephone numbers would still be in use and a new telephone number for Buckinghamshire Council would also be available. Staff would be trained and upskilled to deal with enquiries on the telephone and for face to face queries. Payment methods would remain in place for Day 1 and websites for the councils would stay open but would be rebranded. Existing processes would be kept in place with additional signposting. Webchat would be available and social media sites would need to be rebranded.

In response to a query it was confirmed that the process for payments to town and parish councils from council tax would be in line with the current process and this was being dealt with within the finance workstreams.

It was noted that there would be an area on the new website for new residents and for people who were unsure which service to use. Testing would be undertaken well in advance of vesting day to ensure the least disruption as possible to customers.

It was unknown at this time where the central customer service team would be based for the new council.

Officers commented that currently the larger resources available provided a better position for customer access to the council than ever before and there would be multiple 'front door' access to the council for residents.

It was noted that the current telecommunication providers to the councils would be used and officers were currently in discussion with suppliers. The website for the new council would be delivered by a new provider and should be up and running by Christmas 2019.

The Chairman thanked the officers on behalf of the Committee and welcomed them to a future meeting to bring any demonstrations or tests to the Committee so that they could support the work being undertaken.

7. SHADOW EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN

The Committee noted the Shadow Executive Forward Plan. An updated version published on the 25 September had been forwarded by email to the Committee in advance of the meeting.

The Chairman reported that he would be attending the Shadow Executive meeting on 22 October to present the Scrutiny Work Programme. He noted that discussions were being undertaken with the Shadow Executive Leader regarding access to the Executive reports in advance of the meetings.

8. COMMITTEE AND TASK AND FINISH WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted and agreed the draft Work Programme, the proposed approach and schedule for the Budget Task and Finish Group, and the schedule of dates for the Implementation Plan Task and Finish Group.

Regarding the Budget Task and Finish Group it was noted that a robust process would be in place and during January 2020 the Committee would be interviewing Portfolio Holders as part of the scrutiny process.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

Jemma Durkan - Democratic Services Officer
Kama Wager - Committee & Governance Manager