

Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee Minutes

Date: 8 July 2019

Time: 10.00 am - 12.30 pm

PRESENT:

Members: Councillors P Birchley, A Collingwood, P Cooper, C Ford, B Gibbs, J Gladwin, G Hall, G Hollis, P Jones, S Lambert, R Newcombe, S Renshell, R Stuchbury, J Teesdale, P Turner, J Waters and C Whitehead

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

The Clerk to the Committee requested nominations for the position of Chairman.

Councillor Hall proposed Councillor Collingwood for the position of Chairman, this was seconded by Councillor Whitehead.

Councillor Jones proposed Councillor Lambert for the position of Chairman, this was seconded by Councillor Stuchbury.

Following a vote it was agreed that Councillor Collingwood be elected as Chairman.

RESOLVED: That Councillor A Collingwood be elected as Chairman of the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee until 31 March 2020.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman proposed that Councillor Gladwin be appointed as Vice-Chairman, this was seconded by Councillor Hollis.

Councillor Jones proposed that Councillor Stuchbury be appointed as Vice-Chairman, this was seconded by Councillor Lambert.

Following a vote Councillor Gladwin was appointed as Vice-Chairman.

RESOLVED: That Councillor J Gladwin be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee until 31 March 2020.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor L Clarke OBE, Councillor A Cole and Councillor P Kelly.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SHADOW OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members noted the Responsibility of the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in the Constitution of the Shadow Authority.

In response to a query it was noted that a Shadow Executive meeting would be taking place on the 9 July and the usual statutory 5 clear days' notice of the agenda had been applied. There was also a meeting of the Shadow Executive taking place on the 23 July and members were able to raise questions to the Shadow Executive in advance of the meeting. The Chairman noted that any member of the Committee could raise a question and it was requested that these be circulated to the Committee for information.

The business of the Committee as outlined on Paragraph 13.1 of the report was noted and it was also requested that the Shadow Executive forward plan be added as an agenda item.

It was noted that resources could be an issue, however Committee meetings and Task and Finish Groups would need to be supported to enable detailed work to be undertaken. Agreement would also need to be made on how the Committee and Task and Finish Groups would be administered as processes differed at the five councils.

During the discussion it was suggested that a Budget Task and Finish Group and an Implementation Plan Task and Finish Group be created. Members requested that the current budgets from the five councils be circulated to the Committee for their consideration.

It was also requested that an officer from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) be asked to meet with the Committee to discuss scrutiny best practice.

6. IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report that outlined the officer governance arrangements for the implementation programme towards the creation of the new Buckinghamshire Council for 1 April 2020. The implementation plan outlined the governance arrangements and Implementation Team as directed by the Structural Changes Order.

The governance was headed up by a CEO Implementation Group (CIG) with membership from the County, District councils, and the Programme Office, under

which sat five programme boards with various workstreams running across these boards. The programme boards met usually on a weekly basis and included existing staff from the five councils. It was noted that the Programme Management Office included 10 members of staff who supported the programme on a full-time basis.

Resourcing was important and staff across the councils had been encouraged to be involved. A budget had been set for the delivery of the programme and the CIG received regular budget monitoring reports. Strong transformational work was being undertaken to help develop the new council over the next 2 years.

Members discussed the report and a number of points were raised:

- There were a number of acronyms in the report and it was requested if these could be minimised.
- Regarding resources the Programme Manager confirmed that Chief Executives regularly reviewed staffing levels and these remained level, however some key areas were being monitored.
- The Programme Manager explained that a budget had been allocated for the transformation programme and a report was being presented to the Shadow Executive to request a draw down from these funds for additional resources to support officers.
- Communication and engagement with staff was important and staff representatives and trade unions were regularly updated on issues and there had been positive feedback regarding this matter. It was requested that the impact on staff with regards to work and well-being balance be added to the Work Programme.
- Members were concerned that the culture of the new authority had not yet been considered and that joint working should not be the method used. A framework for a new way of working for the new authority to work as a team should be undertaken.
- It was requested that the programme budget monitoring reports should also be made available to the Committee.
- The Programme Manager explained he had direct experience whilst working at Durham County Council during their unitary transition. Also that information and documentation had been obtained from other organisations that had experienced unitary transitions more recently. The Programme Officer from Dorset Council had been invited to speak to officers and lessons had been learnt from these organisations.
- It was noted that the best of the five councils processes would be included as part of the programme and an ethos for the new council was being agreed as a key part of the programme.
- Members requested that the Implementation Plan be provided to the Committee.
- It was reiterated that it was important to learn from best practice and the Programme Manager offered to bring key aspects from other organisations to a future Committee.
- Concern was raised regarding staff stress levels and that Unison should be involved at all matters in relation to pay and conditions.

- Members were concerned that there had not been enough positive messages to officers, members and residents regarding the new Authority.

The Committee thanked the Programme Manager for the update.

7. COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Committee received a report which summarised the Communications and Engagement Strategy for the transition to the new Buckinghamshire Council.

The Programme Communications and Engagement Lead officer advised that the strategy provided key stakeholders with a coordinated approach to communications throughout the transition period, to increase awareness and understanding ahead of 1 April 2020. This would be led by the Programme Office on behalf of the Shadow Authority.

The communications strategy had three phases of supporting communications and engagement plans:

- Phase 1: the period up to the making of the Structural Change Orders
- Phase 2 (a): from the calling of the first Shadow Authority meeting to end March 2020 (including transition arrangements)
- Phase 2 (b): promote the lead-in to the new Council creation and then first 100 days in. This phase would be developed as the programme progressed.

Stakeholder plans had been identified for five main stakeholder groups: Internal Staff, Elected Members, Town and Parish Councils, Residents and Strategic Partners and Businesses. A Shadow Authority website and social media accounts had been launched and regular e-newsletters were being circulated. A joint intranet site was being developed for staff and members, and regular updates were provided to residents through a variety of existing communication channels.

It was noted that the stakeholder plans were live working documents to respond to emerging requirements from the Programme Boards and to incorporate feedback from stakeholders, staff, members and residents.

Members raised a number of issues and received clarification on a number of points as follows:

- Members of the public needed information on how to communicate and contact the new Authority, such as a direct phone number.
- It was suggested that parish and town clerks be asked to add the unitary transition to their council meeting agendas so they can discuss, inform and support the process. Officers confirmed that this would be added to the monthly parish and town councils newsletter as a suggestion.
- As some members worked it was difficult to attend member engagement sessions held during the daytime and budget scrutiny briefings being offered over a condensed two week period would be difficult to manage.

- The communications protocol to deal with emerging issues will enable and support responses to the media that will need to be dealt with promptly.
- Some residents and hard to reach groups would require additional support and assurances and it was noted that not all residents would have access to social media. Officers confirmed that community magazines and existing communication channels were used to provide information.
- Members requested that the parish and town council newsletter and the link to the new Shadow Authority website be circulated.
- It was also noted that Charter Trustees could require special communication and that members should be provided with information on changes at an early stage. There was concern that member and resident communication had not been significantly considered.

The Chairman thanked the officers for the report.

8. WORK PROGRAMME

Members discussed items for the work programme, meeting times and venues.

There was concern that daytime meetings could exclude some members from attending. However it was noted that evening meetings could cause some issues with traffic and travel during the winter months. Following a discussion members agreed that future meetings would take place at 6.30pm.

Regarding substitute members for the Committee the Constitution was silent on this matter. However, it was suggested Committee members could nominate non-executive members of the Shadow Authority as substitutes.

Members discussed webcasting of meetings and it was noted that not all of the five council offices provided webcasting facilities. This would need to be considered when making arrangements for future meeting venues.

Suggested items for the work programme included a Budget Task and Finish Group and an Implementation Plan Task and Finish Group. Timetabling of the Shadow Authority and how budget scrutiny would fit into this should be considered and members requested that information be circulated regarding this matter. The Chairman suggested that the process to scrutinise the budget should start as soon as possible due to the complex nature of this matter. Volunteers for the task and finish groups would be requested by email via the clerk.

It was noted that if any additional task and finish groups were required that these would be considered on a case by case basis.

Concerns were raised regarding additional demands on staff and resources. Staff well-being and realistic expectations for support should be considered.

Suggested work programme items were as follows:

- Shadow Authority Risk Register
- Structural Change Orders - compliance with the orders

- Project Management Office - Project Plans - Update
- Communications and Engagement Strategy - Update
- Shadow Executive Forward Plan
- Implementation Plan (Task and Finish Group)
- Budget (Task and Finish Group)
- Vision and Values
- Staff and Resourcing
- Learning outcomes from other Unitary councils
- Centre for Public Scrutiny

Regarding the appointment of the external auditors it was noted a report regarding this matter had been provided to the Shadow Authority as its meeting on the 3 June 2019.

9. MEETINGS OF THE COMMITTEE 2019/20

It was agreed that additional meetings would be arranged and dates and times would be circulated to Members.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

Jemma Durkan	- Democratic Services Officer
Roger Goodes	- Programme Manager
Jill Hemmings	- Communications & Engagement Lead Officer
Kelly Sutherland	- Committee and Governance Manager
Kate Walker	- Communications & Engagement Lead Officer
Catherine Whitehead	- Monitoring Officer