Dorset Area Joint Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at Colliton Park, Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1XJ on Tuesday, 17 April 2018

Present:
Rebecca Knox (Chairman)
Anthony Alford, Shane Bartlett, Cherry Brooks, Jeff Cant, Graham Carr-Jones, Spencer Flower, Matt Hall, Jill Haynes, Colin Huckle, Sherry Jespersen, Byron Quayle, Nick Ireland, Gary Suttle, Simon Tong and Daryl Turner

Officer Attending: Stuart Caundle (Monitoring Officer - West Dorset District, Weymouth & Portland Borough and North Dorset District Council), Keith Cheesman (Programme Director - LGR), Steve Mackenzie (Chief Executive – Purbeck District Council), Jonathan Mair (Service Director - Organisational Development (Monitoring Officer) – Dorset County Council), David McIntosh (Chief Executive - East Dorset District and Christchurch Borough Council), Matt Prosser (Chief Executive - West Dorset District, Weymouth & Portland Borough and North Dorset District Council), Debbie Ward (Chief Executive – Dorset County Council) and Lee Gallagher (Democratic Services Manager – Dorset County Council).

Apologies for Absence
28 Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Bill Pipe (Dorset County Council) and Cllr Barry Quinn (Purbeck District Council). Cllr Daryl Turner attended for Cllr Pipe and Cllr Cherry Brooks attended the meeting for Cllr Quinn.

Code of Conduct
29 There were no declarations by members of disclosable pecuniary interests under the Code of Conduct.

Minutes
30 The minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2018 were confirmed and signed.

Matters Arising
Minute 26 – Programme Highlight Report
Following the decision at the last Joint Committee meeting to postpone activity of several Task and Finish Groups, a specific request was made to ensure communication and engagement with Town and Parish Councils, and to make sure that communications were tailored to their needs as a distinct audience of the Local Government Reorganisation process. It was recognised that this issue would be addressed during consideration of the Communications and Engagement Strategy item at minute 35.

Public Participation
31 Public Speaking
There were no public questions received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(1).

There were no public statements received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(2).

Petitions
There were no petitions received at the meeting in accordance with the County Council’s Petition Scheme.
**Programme Update**

The Joint Committee received a report from the Programme Director which provided an update on progress since the last meeting on 21 March 2018, and a summary of priorities for the next period to 15 May 2018.

An extensive summary was provided by the Programme Director which included progress of the overall programme which was ‘on track’; progress of the Boundary Review exercise to form electoral arrangements to be reported to the next meeting of the Joint Committee; continuing work on legal orders; and the development of the Shadow Authority arrangements. Further work was required in respect of capturing information, data and processes through a workshop approach to build a detailed plan to manage the programme; appointments continued to be made to strengthen the programme team; and there was continued development of the Communications and Engagement Strategy. The Task and Finish Groups formed at the previous meeting regarding Budget and Governance had set their initial meeting dates on 23 and 24 April 2018 respectively. The work of the Programme Board continued with Chief Executives leading workstreams. Human Resources (HR) work in relation to the internal preparation for staff TUPE arrangements was progressing well.

He further explained that the reporting of the programme update would be improved for future meetings with increased detail for the Joint Committee to receive more assurance regarding critical steps in the programme, together with timescales. Assurance was provided that the tasks to meet Phase 2 of the programme were on track to deliver the new Council for 1 April 2019.

Comments were received in relation to the reporting format and style of the update, and suggestions were made to ensure that there was more information regarding progress of task and finish groups and workstreams, whilst noting that there was much more detail that sat behind the headlines in the report. The narrative within future reports would also need to reflect the position where there were different perceptions of the level of progress against areas of the plan, where individual councils may not have the same view of the progress. Ongoing close working with the Programme Board was welcomed. The workstreams of the programme listed in appendix 1 of the Director’s report would also be updated as they evolved.

The recruitment of programme team staff was explored in detail and it was explained that outstanding appointments would be completed as soon as possible. A range of positions were currently being advertised and where they had closed the necessary actions were being taken to appoint.

Discussions had been held with Trade Unions in the preliminary stages of considering the future staffing of the new Council. More detailed work would start shortly in respect of progressing the arrangements. Although some Task and Finish Groups has paused their activity, a suggestion was made for a Task and Finish Group on Human Resources to be considered in respect of member input into the future arrangements, but not to get involved in operational matters. No decision was made to constitute the Task and Finish Group at this stage.

The closure of the Task and Finish Group on Council Tax Harmonisation was agreed and members thanked the Group for its hard work.

A question was asked about the importance of the work of the Task and Finish Group on Area Based Decision Making, to which the Programme Director clarified that the work had paused to enable the Task and Finish Group on Governance to progress work on the operating model. The Group would then reconvene towards summer 2018 to allow work to continue on design principles.

**Resolved**
1. That progress and the priorities identified in the Programme Director’s report be noted.
2. That the closure of the Council Tax Harmonisation Task and Finish Group be confirmed as their work had been completed.

Programme Plan Update
33 The Joint Committee considered a report from the Programme Director which provided a high level LGR Programme Plan, service list for the existing authorities and some context was also provided regarding the programme methodology.

An overview of the Programme Plan was provided with a focus on the stages of Phase 2 to deliver the new Council from 1 April 2019, which included initiation, discovery work until mid-May 2018, detailed planning, preparation, and mobilisation. The Programme Director explained that it was necessary to be agile and progressive with the discovery and preparation parts of Phase 2 needing to continually evolve, and that not all elements would be delivered together. The workshops held with services would also drive out further changes and the service list would continue to grow. The reporting of headline progress was discussed in the previous item at minute 32 and would be developed to become more fit for purpose.

Members recognised that the Plan was a draft and that a separate Implementation Plan would also be required and was being populated. The Plan would develop over time and would be refined in terms of language and content to provide a clear sense of the overall programme including specific timelines, achievements and any slippage.

In respect of the operational structure, it was noted that the completion date of May 2018 would be unrealistic as preliminary discussions had only just started.

Of general interest was the visibility of the Plan and how it provided information for the public, and it was acknowledged that communications and engagement would be developed for the public and stakeholders. This also related to the regularity of reporting outside of formal meetings, and the need to ensure fortnightly updates for members, and separate regular updates within respective councils regarding the programme.

Noted

Change Advisory / Design Authority
34 The Joint Committee considered a report from the Programme Director which set out a proposal for how the LGR Programme should implement a “design authority” through a Change Advisory Board which would have a clear remit to ensure that all decisions about structures, services, spending and change were consistent with the emergent operating model and/or do not impact upon the financial. As requested at the last meeting on 21 March 2018, a plan for a mechanism that would support existing sovereign councils to oversee and review all major change programmes within the context of LGR was also included.

The proposed formation of the Change Advisory Board was discussed in detail, which included the accountability for decision making of existing sovereign councils to conform with the principles of the wider programme. Concern was expressed that it was not clear what governance and accountability there would be for a Change Advisory Board, its influence over individual council’s decision making, and the future governance within the Shadow Authority arrangements. It was clarified that the Change Advisory Board would be accountable to the Programme Board (comprising all Chief Executives), which in turn was accountable to the Joint Committee. It was also felt that external audit arrangements, scrutiny, and the reporting of information to the Joint Committee would need to be considered when finalising the governance of the new Board.
Cllr Haynes explained that there was a nervousness regarding how the governance arrangements would work. She suggested that a delegation to leaders to consider the proposed change advisory / design authority arrangements and how these would work in practice could help overcome the nervousness. Concern was expressed by Cllr Suttle that the discussion would be repeated by the Leaders’ Group to understand the level of control and governance, and would add to the already high number of meetings for leaders.

Based on the discussion the Monitoring Officer drafted the following wording as a suggested amendment to the recommendation within the Director’s report: ‘That the LGR Programme Director should be asked to agree the necessary arrangements for a Change Advisory Board with the Programme Board and its terms of reference will be agreed by the Leaders’ Group’. The amended wording was proposed by Cllr Jill Haynes and seconded by Cllr Graham Carr-Jones.

**Resolved**

That the LGR Programme Director should be asked to agree the necessary arrangements for a Change Advisory Board with the Programme Board and its terms of reference will be agreed by the Leaders’ Group.

**Draft Communications and Engagement Strategy**

The Joint Committee considered an update report from the Communications and Engagement Manager on the Communication and Engagement Strategy approved in September 2017. The update provided an outline communications approach in line with the work of the Task and Finish Group on Member Engagement and the Local Government Reorganisation Communications Group; updated media protocol to take account of the introduction of the Programme Director and Programme Board; and the main communications and engagement objectives to keep the public, stakeholders and members informed through various media channels.

Further to reference being made at minute 30 regarding the importance of communication and engagement with town and parish councils, a full list of 900+ councillors had been compiled, together with clerks of each council, and Dorset Association of Town and Parish Councils (DAPTC) to ensure an email communication channel to each council. It was envisaged that direct communication with DAPTC and clerks by email would be appropriate, but a request was made to send information directly to councillors at the same time to ensure consistent messaging. It was also appreciated that county and district councillors should act as a link between their councils and town and parish councils, but that this was sometimes inconsistent.

The need to manage expectations of town and parish councils, together with harnessing the level of interest and energy to look at discussing opportunities, was raised in relation to the opportunities for double devolution. It was requested that appropriate wording be prepared to explain this issue. The formation of frequently asked questions would also aid in providing a range of responses to issues raised by stakeholders.

Meetings and briefings with town and parish councils by district and borough councils was raised as an area of interest as there were several approaches which were in place already which were exploring the issue of devolution of decisions, assets, and finance. A concern was raised that the exploration of ideas should be dealt with as a ‘one council’ approach in order to develop understanding and manage expectations.

In relation to staff, concern was expressed that internal communications required more attention to provide staff with more information. In terms of staff bulletins, it was noted that these would be shared with members on a routine basis.
The need to articulate the aspirations of the new Council to put Dorset at the forefront of innovative local government in the Country was raised, and encouragement was given to ensure external links with government, national publications and the civil service. Officers acknowledged that this was included in the Strategy.

A request was made for consideration to be given to the possible use of an alternative phrase to ‘Local Government Reorganisation’ to which it was confirmed that internal micro-branding of the programme was being considered.

In relation to the voluntary sector, it was recognised that voluntary organisations were significant stakeholders and it was just as important to engage with them as it was to engage with town and parish councils. It was requested that a similar means of communications and engagement with voluntary sector organisations should be developed.

**Resolved**
1. That the communications update be noted.
2. That the revisions to the media protocol (appendix A of the report) be agreed.

**Work Programme**

The Joint Committee considered its Work Programme and added the following items for future meetings:

- Change Advisory / Design Authority – Update on 15 May 2018 (Min 34)
- Appointment Process for Interim Officers – 15 May 2018

Regarding the Medium Term Financial Plan Progress (including reserves, balances and capital resources), it was reported that all the required information had been collected from each authority and the Task and Finish Group on Budget would consider the information at its meeting on 23 April 2018 before being reported to the Joint Committee meeting on 15 May 2018.

A request was made that more information be provided on the work programme for items that had been deferred or removed from agendas to understand the reasons for the delay, particularly in relation to significant items such as consideration of Revenues and Benefits arrangements.

**Resolved**
That the Work Programme be updated.

Meeting Duration: 2.00 pm - 3.45 pm
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