

Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee 21.9.22

Report by Michael Hanley.

Chair: Beverley Morgan (L)

1. Michael Hanley: Pointed out that he had made comments at two times during the previous meeting and none of these were noted in the minutes. I was asked what I had said: the first comment was that Alston was not mentioned in the WAF, I commented that the area is very isolated. The second comment occurred later when I commented about the isolation of Alston and the need to retain the local ambulance service and help Bonds Products, the main employer in the town. It was put to the meeting whether to include these in the minutes. There was no objection to this.

2. Local Government Reform

Hari Pillai (LGR Programme Director, KPMG): The programme is in its pivotal 6-7 months to be ready for 1.4.22. A new programme of governance has been set up. The Day One Board is seeing to the fine detail. What the council will need to do in the first year will be looked at. To help with that two additional boards have been set up. We are moving into the implementation phase. The Medium Term Financial Plan is being developed. We have recently got external legal advice. We are also focused on ICT as it is a big area. There is ongoing support to managers to help with staff. A big area is how we monitor and track risk. Progress against Day One requirements is going well. 33% is underway and £2.6 million has been spent to date (from a £19 million fund). We do not anticipate not spending all of the money. Also we are not predicting an overspend. A lot of IT suppliers are being approached for contracts.

Phil Dew (PD, C): We spent £750k on branding. Was this for the logo? Did that cover both authorities? Also there is mention of possible increase in council tax. Are we on track for staffing?

HP: No money has been spent on branding at this moment in time.

Helen Smith (Chief Financial Officer, HS): You are required to harmonise the council tax across the previous authority areas over seven years. Some areas may have a small increase of a few pence to do this. Car parking machines and some other things will need new signs, that is the rebranding.

J Battye (JB, LD): With staffing, you talk about tier 2 and 3. Can we have more information on this. Is there a programme to wind down the old councils? If there is any left it would be really nice if we could spend it on the people.

HP: The transition will happen gradually in the months before new council starts.

S Evans (SE, LD): Asked about external legal advice, this costs an arm and a leg. Also asked about

waste collection and Adult and Childrens Services.

HP: Waste is one of the areas which has been discussed. The issue with staff is getting the right people. I work for KPMG (Financial Consultants). I have worked in Social Care as a manager for 20 years in the past. He discussed risks with GDPR and shared computer records systems for social workers. Previously this was run by CCC, now the area's social workers will be split between the two authorities and the computer records systems will have to be made secure.

W. Clark (WC, LD): Asked about election costs.

HS: Each council is submitting their expenses.

JB: Is the situation the same for Childrens Services (ICT)?

HP: Yes. The adult system is a bit more complicated as it has connections with the NHS computer system.

3. Preparation of WAF Plan

Dan Hudson (DH, Strategy Lead Specialist): The plan is high level (not detailed). We need a plan, we need to know what the priorities are. We have conducted a public survey. The plan is a first go, it will evolve. A lot more will emerge. The draft document details the main pressures: cost of living crisis, levelling up, climate change etc. Local issues: natural assets, old age population, health inequalities, deprivation mainly in Barrow and some rural areas. We are likely to be under major financial pressure.

Aims: empowering local communities to solve issues locally, working in collaboration with the private sector, transforming services. Also managing assets. We also have a responsibility for climate change. The vision is that this area will be a great place to live and work, housing, communities, quality of life, economy, sustainable growth, health, social care and education.

Priorities: A well balanced population, getting the working age population to grow and keep people active for longer. Also sustainable economic growth, reducing inequalities, poverty, homelessness and deprivation, climate change and improving communities. The response to the survey has been mostly positive. Most people support the vision, the main concern was lack of detail. Also there were concerns about anti-racist issues. We need to make the area as welcoming to incoming people as possible.

PD: This consultation process can be distorted by pressure groups. In challenges in the document there is no mention of rurality. Saying we are looking to have a balanced population is ridiculous, its like giving money to people to have children, we are not a dictatorship. We can do all the Zero Carbon stuff in the world and it wont affect climate change. (After the meeting I checked with Councillor Dew that he had said this. He wanted to qualify this statement saying we need to concentrate on affordable energy which might be nuclear or wind power).

Bill McEwan (BE, L): We have to keep the young people interested and stay in the county. They are the future.

Shirley Edwards (SE, LD): We need better access to jobs, transport is key. The document talks of a reformed education system, we don't have any control over education.

JB: Councillor Dew responding to climate change and biodiversity will have an impact on the cost of living crisis.

WC: The problem for young people is the lack of jobs which is why they move out of the area.

Graham Simpkins (GS, LD): I live in Brough. The post 16 school students have to pay for transport to get to the school. This is one of the main problems.

PD: I do recognise the problem of climate change. Insulation of homes will help. We need to focus less on climate change and to focus on affordable energy and food.

Beverley Morgan: Discussed three workstreams: communities, town and parish councils and governance. Town and Parish Council Clerks will be contacted.

Next: 14.11.22.