

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held in the Canalside Conference Centre, Marsh Lane, Huntworth, TA6 6LQ on Monday 7 March 2022 at 2.00 pm

Present: Cllr S Wakefield (Chair), Cllr B Filmer (Vice Chair), Cllr A Bown, Cllr S Buller, Cllr P Ham, Cllr B Hamilton, Cllr T Grimes, Cllr A Groskop, Cllr C Inchley (from 14.15), Cllr T Munt, Cllr J Lock, Cllr P Maxwell, Cllr L Redman, Cllr D Rodrigues, Cllr W Wallace and Cllr R Williams

Other Members present: Cllr D Fothergill and Cllr F Purbrick

Other members present virtually: Cllr F Nicholson, Cllr C Paul, Cllr P Clayton, Cllr S Coles, Cllr D Hall, Cllr D Johnson, Cllr T Lock, Cllr B Revans, Cllr E Firmin, Cllr Farbahi, Cllr J Hassall, Cllr J Lloyd, Cllr P Seib, Cllr B Weston, Cllr L Whetlor and Cllr R Wyke

Apologies for absence: None

1 Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2022 - Agenda Item 2

The Minutes of the LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 31 January 2022 were approved, subject to some minor typographical amendments being made.

2 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

The Committee noted the details of the personal interests of all Councillors present already declared in relation to their membership of County, District, Town and Parish Councils.

3 Public Question Time – Agenda Item 4

Mr N Hall, a resident in Somerset, provided the following statement to the Committee: -

“Good afternoon – my name is Nick Hall. I live in Pilton, near Shepton Mallet.

It is important to have free speech and something we take for granted. My thoughts are with the people of Ukraine who are fighting for that right.

Chair, I appreciate your acceptance at the last meeting that the issues I had raised were likely to be ones that your committee wants to consider.

You also stated that Mendip District Council could also address these issues ahead of the formation of the new Somerset Council. Unfortunately I see little evidence of this and in fact the situation is worsening.

Glastonbury Festival Events Ltd (GFEL) is now seeking approval to increase Festival attendance from 203,000 to 210,000.

I believe that this drive for a larger Festival is leading to new buildings, new concrete tracks and hedgerows being removed. Also a long list of suspected planning breaches remains unresolved.

GFEL talk about being a good neighbour, but these aren't the actions of one.

And surely a Festival for 203,000 people is large enough?

Rather than making it bigger, why not make it better? Perhaps less environmental impact?

The Premises License specifies a number of requirements before the approval to increase attendance can be granted. We are struggling to engage Mendip District Council to provide us with assurances that these License requirements will be met.

From 5th May (or some date around that) the new Somerset Council will have increased responsibility for the regulation of the world's largest green field music festival. Some of us in our village would like to help shape a better course of action.

So please can I make further request that someone from the new Somerset Council engages with us to help resolve our immediate issues?"

The Chair thanked Mr Hall for his comments and for attending the meeting and advised that a written response will be provided. The comments will also be forwarded to the LGR Joint Committee.

4 **LGR Programme update (including assurance feedback from PwC) –**
Agenda Item 5

The LGR Programme Director, Alyn Jones gave a PowerPoint presentation updating the Committee on the LGR programme, covering the following matters: -

- Programme overview, strategic objectives, progress
- PwC Monthly feedback report for January 2022 ("PwC said, we did" process)

- Activity during February
- The next 3 months
- Programme risk register

Mr Jones highlighted the following in his presentation: -

- The LGR programme strategic objectives: -
 - Objective 1 – create a new unitary Council for Somerset, that delivers the approved business case on 1 April 2023
 - Objective 2 – enable performance capability - to deliver business case vision on 1 April 2023
 - Objective 3 – develop the new Council to optimise benefits and opportunities from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2025
- The programme governance for the programme and workstream level
- Advised that the LGR programme has been broken into 'tranches', moving from transition to full transformation, which is required in the business case. He also highlighted the firm link into the medium-term financial planning process (MTFP) so can ensure are delivering the benefits set out in the business case and being sure have the building blocks in place to support the MTFP process for the new organisation.
- The LGR scorecard – there are 82 individual workstream scorecards that are required to populate the document, and the complete document will be available for the Joint Committee meeting.
- PwC monthly feedback report – PwC provide 'critical friend' challenge and advice to the programme and Mr Jones referred to the key elements of their feedback and the "PwC said, we did" process.
- Work undertaken recently and activity during February, highlighting the staff briefings, regular all-Council member briefings and the Structural Change Order (SCO) passing through Parliament. The House of Lords hearing takes place on 9 March and following that it will go to the House of Commons for final vote on 14 and anticipate receiving a copy of the SCO by no later than 15 March, which will enable the statutory Notice of Election being issued.
- Outlined activity / work over next 3 months, including working towards the council election on 5 May and programme checkpoint, as will be 11 months from Vesting Day.

The Committee discussed the presentation, and the following is a summary of the areas raised: -

- Customer access points, culture / pace of change in transition and need to learn from each other. Need to be careful about the level of ambition when designing target operating model and to change gradually over the transition period.
- Explanation of the 'LGR scorecard' – Mr Jones explained in view of the size and complexity of the programme, the scorecard is critical as it will provide

assurance and enable oversight. It is essentially a tracking tool, to see how are performing.

- Would be useful if the risk register was prioritised and need to know what *hasn't* been progressed in terms of the 'PwC said, we did' so there is a full picture of what's happened. Mr Jones said that had tried to cover this in the next steps section / slides.
- Concerns expressed and issue of scrutiny / oversight going forward if the paper to be considered later at the meeting (at agenda item 9) is agreed.
- Questions around the budget setting processes, whether have budgets to implement the process, how ensure all 5 Councils have been robust and the assets protocol in terms of outcomes for communities. Mr Jones confirmed that with regard to the budget setting process, it was why wanted to ensure the programme plan was cognizant of the MTFP and have the necessary steps in place. The assets protocol is part of that step and any section 24 notice linked to the SCO also provides that control. Outcomes for communities are front and centre in the programme. The programme is high paced and need to ensure using the implementation budget to best effect and can respond to requests form workstreams for additional support as swiftly as possible.
- How will measure the business case objectives 'better services', 'better VFM' (objective 3)? Mr Jones provided this by way of an example of the mapping work being done and 'products' (what need to do to be fit for purpose) for example the establishment of one single phone number and website for all council services from April 2023, for the whole of Somerset, to avoid duplication (which will avoid duplication of effort too). The business case sets out what outcome should be in order to deliver better local services.
- Satisfied have sufficient staffing and resources and programme management office in place? Mr Jones explained that the programme is building and are recruiting to ensure have resources at the right time. There are 400+ people involved in the programme overall and there has been some backfilling in place. In response to questions, Mr Jones agreed to (a) find out the number of full-time equivalent staff on the programme and (b) with regard to resources, to raise with the Programme Board the situation in the District Councils and if each had included extra resources towards the unitary plan and backfilling of posts.
- Question about where the planning function will 'sit' in the new authority. It was clarified that this will be a decision for the new administration and leadership team of the new organisation – the planning function will not be devolved to the local Community Networks (LCNs) and organisationally, will be done at least the same level as before.
- Query about the role of the Advisory Board going forward. Mr Jones confirmed that it is likely to continue, to advise / guide the programme.

The LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee agreed: -

To recommend to the LGR Joint Committee (the LGR Implementation Executive after the SCO is signed off), that the reporting of the advice / activities of PwC include the recording of advice which has not been progressed / taken forward.

The voting was as follows: -

For – 10 votes

Against – 6 votes

Abstention – 0 votes.

5 LGR Risk Register - Agenda Item 6

The Acting Strategic Manager Business Change, at Somerset County Council, Alastair Higon, gave a PowerPoint presentation on the LGR Risk Register.

The Committee discussed the presentation, and the following is a summary of the areas raised: -

- LGR Risk Summary – helpful to have more details on the risks by category and priority area. It was confirmed that all actions are being considered and actively managed by each local authority and section 151 officers. For this reporting period (February), there are 19 'active' strategic (programme-level) risks identified and there are a further identified 56 other risks within LGR workstreams, who are actively managing mitigating actions for these and escalating via scorecards as required. A new member of the PMO team will be leading the risk work.
- Request for update on the Enterprise Resource Planning system (risk ID 26) – Mr Higon explained that once the discovery phase is completed can assess and understand better how interacts with the programme
- Question about monitoring the programme level risks until new arrangements are in place. Mr Jones confirmed how the risks will be managed - overseen by officers in that period / the Programme Board as the accountable body that will be considering and holding the programme to account. As Programme Director have role to review those risks and ensure that suitable action is being taken. PwC have oversight role as well.
- Concerns about duplicate wording of risk ID 20 and 21 relating to Children's services and adult social care, which shows lack of understanding and does not give confidence in some of the other risks detailed in the paper. It was explained that the document is reporting on programme level risks, and they are being managed and overseen by those service areas. In the light of feedback, it was agreed that the programme office will review the risk register i.e. how articulated and if the score is appropriate and the linkage to the programme and those services.

- The need for effective scrutiny should be included in the risk register (including any gap in the 'interim' period going forward i.e. the pre-election period and until arrangements are established following the elections).

The LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the work on the LGR Risk Register and officers agreed to review how the LGR risk summary information is presented in future reporting.

MEETING ADJOURNED 16.00 – 16.10

6 LGR Implementation Budget Update – Agenda Item 7

The Strategic Director and Section 151 Officer for Sedgemoor District Council, Alison Turner gave a PowerPoint presentation which provided an update on the LGR implementation budget. A copy of the presentation will be circulated following the meeting.

Ms Turner highlighted the following in her presentation: –

- implementation costs and the spend profile for the £16.5m implementation costs;
- principles and process for applying for resources;
- criteria for approving resources from the implementation budget;
- implementation costs – governance and monitoring. Each of the 7 budgets has named responsible budget holder(s);
- implementation bids; and
- next steps – the product list has been divided into tranches which has been useful to align to the resource requests. Approved bids will be added as commitments to the Implementation Budget monitor and workstream leads are responsible for managing the budgets they requested. Budget monitoring will continue on a monthly basis to the Programme Steering Group and Board

A question was asked about underspends / overspends in the budget. Ms Turner explained that the funding is a total figure, if not used in 2021/22 it will be carried forward into 2022/23 or 2023/24. There is clear budget monitoring process in process in place and any overspend go through normal processes. The LGR budget split between Somerset CC and Districts is 80/20% and there is a contingency in the total budget of £1.5m.

The LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the implementation budget update.

7 Local Community Networks (LCN) Update – Agenda Item 8

The Head of Corporate Services for Mendip District Council and LCN project lead, Sara Skirton, gave a PowerPoint presentation which provided an update on the Local Community Networks (LCN) and progress to date and some feedback and early lessons from the 3 LCN pilots. LCNs are fundamental to the business case and plans are being developed for between 15 – 20 LCNs across the county, to give communities influence over decisions about their local area. They will have flexibility to set their own priorities based on evidence and they will be formal committees of the new Council.

The Committee discussed the presentation, and the following is a summary of the areas raised: -

- Parish & Town Councils are concerned about what being asked to do, in terms of time commitment; how will people be encouraged to stand and support which will be provided etc? Ms Skirton said that each LCN will have dedicated support (manager) from the officer cohort, and they will have, through identifying priorities, the ability to influence Council priorities and in terms of frequency of meetings, it is estimated will be 6 to 8 meetings a year, but that that is to be determined.
- Engagement with Parish & Town Councils – Ms Skirton outlined the ongoing engagement and recognise their concerns; all will be in a LCN but not forced to engage; recognise capacity constraints; are meeting every 2 weeks with Town & Parish clerks.
- Powers / services of LCNs and needs to be clarity on terminology used about the role of LCNs as well - – Ms Skirton clarified that assets and services won't be devolved to LCNs and will have an influencing role.
- Question on the role of elected members on LCNs – Ms Skirton said that they will have fundamental role.
- Comments on governance of the LCNs, and potential tension between LCNs and Town / Parish councils and their different roles.
- Geography of LCNs – will develop and consult on potential LCN boundaries and are learning more from similar networks in other unitary areas. Initial options will be considered by the LGR advisory board early summer 2022 and there will be stakeholder and public engagement. Geographies will be formally agreed by end 2022. A LCN will not divide across a Town or Parish Council, however there will probably be some LCNs where a unitary councillor division will sit across 2 boundaries, at least until the boundary review and 2027 elections.
- LCNs could be big committees and could be tensions there. The Business case envisages 4 – 9 unitary councillors on each LCN and until 2027 elections and boundary review there may be councillors sitting on 1 or more LCN.
- Outcome / feedback from pilots – provides the opportunity to test what works and what doesn't work.

The LGR Joint noted the LCN update.

8 Future Meetings and Work Programme – Agenda Item 9

The Scrutiny Manager for Somerset County Council, Jamie Jackson presented a report regarding the future of the LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee. Mr Jackson explained that subject to the Structural Change Order (SCO) coming into effect on / around 15 March 2022, this will be the last meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Committee in the current form. It will be for the newly elected Council following the elections in May 2022 to determine any future scrutiny or joint scrutiny arrangements.

The Committee discussed the report and expressed its deep concern about the scrutiny role during the period until future joint scrutiny arrangements are established following the May 2022 elections.

The LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee:

- 1. Noted that subject to the SCO coming into effect, this is the last meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Committee under its terms of reference.**
- 2. Unanimously agreed that the LGR Joint Committee look at how to maintain and continue scrutiny in the interim period – that is 15 March 2022 until arrangements are established following the May 2022 elections.**
- 3. Asked the Scrutiny Manager to discuss with the Monitoring Officer for view on options available to the Joint Scrutiny Committee.**

(The meeting ended at 5.06 pm)

CHAIR