

CUMBERLAND SHADOW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Shadow Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 22 March 2023 at 10.30 am at Conference Room A/B, Cumbria House, Botchergate, Carlisle, CA1 1RD.

PRESENT:

Cllr T Allison
Cllr R Betton
Cllr Dr H Davison
Cllr M Eldon
Cllr J Ghayouba
Cllr J Gridale
Cllr M Hawkins (Chair)
Cllr L Jones-Bulman
Cllr J Mallinson
Cllr S Pollen
Cllr A Pratt (Vice-Chair)
Cllr G Troughton
Cllr H Tucker

Officers:

Mrs L Davis - Democratic Services Officer (Cumbria County Council)
Ms R Jones - Policy and Scrutiny Officer (Carlisle City Council)
Ms C Liddle - Monitoring Officer (Cumberland Council)
Mr J Rasbash - Policy and Scrutiny Officer (Cumbria County Council)
Ms H Younger - Local Government Reorganisation Programme Manager
(Cumbria County Council)

Also present Councillor Lisa Brown, (Deputy Leader Statutory) Portfolio Holder for Governance and Thriving Communities.

PART 1 ITEMS CONSIDERED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

6. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor L Patrick.

7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest received.

8. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED, that the press and public not be excluded from the meeting for any items of business on the agenda.

9. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

With reference to minute 4 (page 14, 1st paragraph, line 4 and page 15, paragraph 4, line 2 respectively) – Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 15 February 2023, it was agreed that the word 'decide' should be 'advise' and the words 'came up' should be 'agreed'.

Subject to the amendments above, it was

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meetings held on 1 February 2023 and 15 February 2023 be confirmed as true records.

10. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

Members received a report on the Scrutiny Annual Report 2022-23. The Annual Report summarised the role of Scrutiny in the Cumberland Shadow Authority and provided information on scrutiny activity over the shadow year, highlighting achievements and offering recommendations for Scrutiny activity in the next civic year, 2023-24. It was noted that the Shadow Constitution did not require Scrutiny to produce an annual report but they are considered good practice and the Cumberland Constitution would require a Scrutiny Annual Report to be produced in future years. Shadow Scrutiny therefore had chosen to produce an annual report to align to good practice and provide an insight into their work. The Annual Report was appended to the report.

Members thanked the officers and team members for all the work undertaken. It was requested that specific details on Scrutiny training and briefing activities be included in the Annual report. The officers were advised that the links in the report were not working and they agreed to check them.

A discussion took place on the importance of embedding a robust and effective Scrutiny process to act as a 'critical friend' and their recommendations to influence the decision makers. Assurance was given

by the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Thriving Communities of an effective, open and transparent Scrutiny process.

A member questioned the arrangements for localised Community Panels, specifically where his division had been placed, and asked if there would be opportunities to review these. The member asked for assurance of involvement in strategic projects in his area. The Portfolio Holder for Governance and Thriving Communities confirmed that the establishment of the Community Panels was an Executive decision, that the arrangements would be kept under review, confirmed involvement in strategic projects and outlined the opportunities these Panels would afford members for community engagement.

The Committee reflected on last year's Shadow Scrutiny work and the opportunities in having a Shadow year, culminating in a structure that would work towards achieving the aspirations contained in the Cumberland Plan.

The Committee discussed the recording of Scrutiny achievements, recommendations and final decisions and whether it was possible to have an action tracker for ease of reference, to act as an audit trail and avoid repetition. It was agreed that an action tracker be devised and appended to Scrutiny Annual reports going forward.

A member sought assurance that the Authority would be safe and legal on 1 April 2023. The member also felt that publicity was needed on the aims and objectives of the Community Panels to encourage attendance. The Portfolio Holder for Governance and Thriving Communities outlined the Authority's plans for publicity and reiterated that the new Community Panels would be an opportunity for members to engage with local communities and deliver local priorities. Members noted that research undertaken by the University of Lancaster had highlighted that only 9 out of 500 people would ask the Council for assistance and it was recognised that this needed to change. Members were informed of two planned workshops, the second one focussing on engagement.

A member requested that the Constitution and Community Panels be added to the recommendations for future Scrutiny to ensure fairness and opportunities for members to be involved in the processes. The Monitoring Officer advised of the governance process for reviewing and amending the Constitution. It was noted that a cross party Constitution Review Group would be established, reporting to the Standards and Governance Committee and then finally to Council for approval.

At a previous meeting it been agreed that the wording 'Climate Change' be reworded to Climate Emergency and this decision was reconfirmed at this meeting.

To conclude, the Chair thanked the members and officers of the Task and Finish Group that had help shape the Scrutiny arrangements.

RESOLVED, that

- (1) additional specific details on Scrutiny Training and Briefing activity be included in the Scrutiny Annual Report;
- (2) the Scrutiny Officers develop an action tracker on Scrutiny recommendations for monitoring purposes and appended this to future Scrutiny Annual Reports;
- (3) the wording in the Annual Report be changed from 'Climate Change' to 'Climate Emergency';
- (4) the Scrutiny Officers check the links in the Annual Report.

11. SCRUTINY OVERVIEW AND WORK PLAN REPORT

The Scrutiny Officers provided the Committee with an overview of matters related to the Committee's work, along with the current version of the Scrutiny Work Programme. It was noted that a robust work plan was important for Scrutiny. Members asked for briefings regarding major projects of sovereign councils.

In discussion of the Shadow Scrutiny Committee Work Plan 2022/23, it was agreed that the Shadow Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15 February on the budget be included in that Work Plan.

RESOLVED, that

- (1) the most recent Forward Plan of Key Decisions be noted;
- (2) the progress on resolutions from previous meetings be noted;
- (3) the completed work programme, amended to include the additional Shadow Scrutiny Meeting held on 15 February on the budget, be noted.

12. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION PROGRAMME TRANSITION

The Committee considered a report from the LGR Programme Manager which provided an update on the Programme in place to support Local Government Reorganisation in Cumbria and highlighted the main points to note.

It was noted that 85% of the programme's milestones had now been fully completed, equating to 117 day 1 requirements fulfilled. Members heard direct appointments for most of the Assistant Director roles had been confirmed. It was noted that five Assistant Director appointments were now being advertised externally. It was reported that the LGR Implementation Reserve was being closely monitored and managed to ensure all expenditure had been accounted for in the year-end accounts.

The Committee noted that new websites and telephony solutions with "golden numbers" were in place for each new unitary council. It was confirmed that the websites, with a new "front page", would be legacy websites and staff would in place checking systems to flag any critical issues.

Members were informed that a number of ICT systems would be split after Vesting Day, including both the Adult and Children's Social Care case management and charging systems. The systems were now subject to Plan B contingency planning to ensure a solution was in place for uninterrupted service delivery on day 1. A resource plan was being prepared to ensure the remaining ICT projects were delivered in a timely manner after 1 April.

Members noted the activities listed in the report to be completed after vesting day and were informed that the intention is for delivery of these post-Day 1 activities to be monitored via a Joint Transition Board across both Councils. To conclude the officer outlined business continuity arrangements.

A member sought assurance on the accuracy of the direction of travel and this was given. Concerns were raised regarding the risk of having vacant Assistant Director posts. The need for harmonisation of salaries were discussed. It was confirmed that the two authorities would be working towards this as soon as possible. Confidence in Plan B for the Case Management system working and the Council being safe and legal on day 1 were sought and given.

A discussion took place on risk management and identifiable high risks. ICT services was considered to be one of the highest risks and members expressed concerns that the AD post for this service was vacant. Although it was acknowledged that staff were in place to deliver the service, it was agreed that the Director of Business, Transformation and Change be asked to provide a briefing note for members on the recruitment process and interim cover arrangements.

A member raised a concern over limited opportunities for Copeland Borough Council officers in the recruitment process.

RESOLVED, that

- (1) the report details and key points included in section 3 of the report be noted;
- (2) the Director of Business, Transformation and Change be asked to provide a briefing note for members on the recruitment and interim cover arrangements for the AD of ICT position.

13. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that this was the last meeting of the Shadow Scrutiny Committee and the Chair thanked members and officers for their involvement.

The meeting ended at 12.15 pm