

NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

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| Report Originator | Councillor Jonathan Ekins Paul Goult | <i>Fwd Plan Ref No:</i> N/A | |
| Wards Affected | ALL | 16 th January 2020 | |
| Title | Governance Working Group – Interim Report | | |

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

For Members to receive an interim report from the Chair of the Governance Working Group regarding progress made to date on the compilation of a draft Constitution for the North Northamptonshire Shadow Council.

2. BACKGROUND

The North Northamptonshire Joint Committee agreed at its meeting on 24th June 2019 to establish a working group to draw-up a draft Constitution for adoption by the Shadow Council. Any draft Constitution would need to be referred by the Joint Committee for consideration by the Shadow Council at its inaugural meeting (likely to be May 2020).

Councillor Jonathan Ekins (NCC) was appointed Chair of the Working Group. The other members of the Group include – Cllr Bob Eyles (CBC), Cllr Andy Mercer (ENC), Cllr Lloyd Bunday (KBC) & Cllr Barry Graves (BCW). The Group is supported by officers from CBC, NCC, ENC & BCW.

The Group has met in Wellingborough on 8th August 2019, 3rd September 2019, 26th September 2019 & 24th October 2019.

Due to the unscheduled UK Parliamentary Election the meetings scheduled in November and December were cancelled. Since the conclusion of the election period work has resumed on the draft document.

3. REPORT

The Group have been working to a Scoping Report agreed at its inaugural meeting, and previously reported to the Joint Committee.

The Group noted that a large part of the draft Constitution's text would be dictated by law and statutory guidance, therefore it was keen to concentrate on "exceptions", those areas of the Constitution where there could be "local choice".

These "local choice" items included –

- Committee Structure

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- Overview & Scrutiny Arrangements
- Public Participation and Access to Information
- Member Officer Protocol
- Code of Conduct for Members
- Standing Orders
- Financial Procedure Rules

It was noted by the Group that the section relating to Member Allowances was being considered by a separate body, but would eventually need to be included in the Shadow Council's Constitution.

It was further agreed by the Group that it would utilise recent examples of other Shadow Council Constitutions e.g. Dorset Council, whilst ensuring that any content was compliant with the likely requirements of the Northamptonshire Structural Change Order (SCO).

Discussions on “local choice” issues

At the previous meeting of the North Northamptonshire Joint Committee, Members received an update of the discussion undertaken by the Working Group on:-

- Committee Structure
- Overview & Scrutiny Arrangements
- Public Participation

Since the last report, the Group have considered:-

- Shadow Executive Procedure Rules
- Responsibility for functions
- Meeting Procedure Rules
- Overview & Scrutiny Procedure Rules
- Access to Information Rules
- Financial Procedure Rules

In relation to the Financial Procedure Rules, the Group did consult partner Chief Finance Officers as part of the process. The Chief Finance Officers were satisfied to sign-off the draft Financial Procedure Rules at this stage.

One element for discussion by the Working Group related to the scheduling of Shadow Council meetings. It is currently proposed by the Group that the following apply:-

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- Shadow Full Council meetings to normally commence at 2:00 pm. It is currently intended to schedule in at least 5/6 meetings into the Municipal Timetable.
- Shadow Executive Committee meetings to normally commence at 6:00 pm. It is currently intended to schedule in monthly meetings, however this will be subject to review as fortnightly meetings may be more appropriate.
- Shadow Overview & Scrutiny Committee meetings to normally commence at 6:00 pm. It is currently intended to schedule in monthly meetings.

It is suggested that meetings of the Shadow Full Council, Executive Committee and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee are scheduled for Thursdays, thus minimising any potential impact on current meeting arrangements for principal authorities.

Meetings of the Senior Appointments Committee and the Standards Committee would be ad hoc.

Working Groups or “Task & Finish” Groups established by the Executive Committee or the Overview & Scrutiny Committee would be agreed in consultation with the membership of the respective groups.

Further work to be undertaken

The Group will consider the following areas at its next meeting:-

- Articles of the Constitution
- Code of Conduct for Members
- Member Officer Protocol

The Group intend to meet to finalise the draft document, prior to its circulation to the Joint Committee membership.

4. Financial Implications

There are currently no direct additional costs related to the work of the Working Group. Officer support will continue to be drawn from partner authorities.

5. Legal Implications

The Working Group is tasked with compiling a draft Constitution for the Shadow Council, incorporating all relevant laws and statutes. The Northamptonshire (Structural Changes) Order 2019 currently being considered by Parliament

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tasks the inaugural Shadow Full Council meeting with adopting a Constitution, to include executive governance arrangements.

6. **Conclusion**

The Working Group has made good progress in identifying the key issues of “local choice” and commencing consideration of those items. Officers have been requested to draft documentation, based upon preferences expressed at the Working Group.

The final consultation and sign-off on the draft Constitution will need to be made by the Joint Committee, prior to its submission to the inaugural meeting of the Shadow Full Council. It is intended to submit the draft Shadow Council Constitution to the Joint Committee meeting in February 2020.

7. **RECOMMENDATION**

- i) Note the progress made by the Governance Working Group and agree to receive a copy of the draft Shadow Council Constitution at the Joint Committee meeting on 10th February 2020.