

Agenda Item 6.

Stakeholder Update on Local Government Reform progress for the West Northamptonshire area – covering the Daventry, Northampton and South Northants areas

December 2018

Latest timetable for creation of a new unitary council

The Government has now begun its own formal consultation on the proposal for Northamptonshire, to replace the seven districts/boroughs, and the county council with two new unitaries. It will run for 8 weeks, through till 25 January. You may have received a letter directly from the Secretary of State seeking your views, but if not, you can feed in your views to them online at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/SWTGHD8>

The Government has also indicated that they will shortly lay before Parliament, a negative order delaying borough/district elections, and also parish and town council elections, from May 2019 to May 2020.

With the Government's LGR consultation closing in January, they will then want to think about the responses. Should they press on with the proposal, – as many anticipate – the next stage is for them to lay before Parliament a technical document called a Structural Change Order. We understand that this wouldn't be ready to be laid much before Easter.

On that timetable, if Parliamentary approval were then given, the Shadow Authority for the West would come into being sometime around the early summer 2019, and the new Council in April 2020. As the end date isn't shifting, this means that the time available to the Shadow Authority would be compressed to less than a year.

Of course, then there is Brexit. If Government business and Parliamentary timetables are thrown into the air, there will be consequences on all sorts of things, potentially including this. The Local Government finance settlement has already been delayed.

As there is a huge amount to do before a new Council can come into being, and start off smoothly, we are simply pressing ahead with the preparations, though obviously that work would stop if either the Government or Parliament does not decide to proceed.

This delay is far from ideal, but we're pleased the Government has now started their consultation. As ever, we are making the best of what we have to work with.

Informal consultation on the name for the proposed new West unitary council

We in the West have just completed our own informal public consultation on what the proposed new unitary council for our half of the county. It closed on 3 December, and hasn't been formally considered yet by the Programme Board or Steering Group, but the feedback indicates that West Northamptonshire Council is broadly the favoured name, and this is already our working title.

What's the new unitary council going to look like?

The honest answer is: we don't yet know.

There are literally thousands of important decisions to work through in bringing together three districts/boroughs with half of a financially-strapped county council.

We are though, as indicated above, getting on with this work, even before the proposed council has been given the formal go-ahead, as there is no time to spare.

A programme structure has been put in place, and key figures from the four authorities in the west are meeting each week (as well as meetings across the whole county, to ensure coordination where appropriate), and eight work streams have been established too, to get into the detail.

These initial 8 work streams cover: Finance, Legal, Customers and Services (other than social care), Social Care services, Communications, Data and Information Governance, ICT, HR/workforce, and Future Organisation

We'll shortly also add in a number of Task and Finish groups of district/borough/county councillors, to help shape the process.

We're also holding a series of workshops, including inviting Members from each authority to develop some strategic design principles – the values and principles that will shape and inform all the thousands of decisions that will follow as services are shaped.

Two seminars have been held already, where elected members and senior officers heard speakers from other councils all over the country who have been through local government reorganisation processes, so we can learn from their experiences,

successes and challenges. Two further workshops will happen in January, at which point we will also be reaching out to our partners to invite you to help shape those strategic design principles.

More detail and more regular updates

There is a lot of detail of which this summary update only scratches the surface.

There are also sometimes fast moving updates. You can continue to keep up to date on our website at www.southnorthants.gov.uk/LGR