

Minutes of a meeting of the **JOINT PERFORMANCE MONITORING PANEL AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL** held in line with the Local Authorities & Police & Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority & Police & Crime Panel Meetings) (England & Wales) Regulations 2020, on Tuesday, 9 February 2021 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT

B Alcock	A C Cronin	G P Scalese
J R Astill	R A Gibson	S-A Slade
J Avery	M Hasan	A C Tennant
A C Beal	J L King	J Tyrrell
F Biggadike	J D McLean	S C Walsh
M D Booth	N H Pepper	D J Wilkinson
C J T H Brewis	P A Redgate	A R Woolf
T A Carter	G T D Rudkin	

Apologies for absence were received from or on behalf of Councillors J L Reynolds

In Attendance: Councillor A M Newton, the Head of Paid Service and Strategic Advisor, the Executive Director Commercialisation (S151), the Executive Manager - Governance, the Democratic Services Manager and the Democratic Services Team Leader.

12. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor Alcock was elected chairman for the duration of the meeting.

13. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

14. INTEGRATED SHARED MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE AND JOINT WORKING ARRANGEMENTS REVIEW - PREFERRED OPTION FOR BRECKLAND AND SOUTH HOLLAND DISTRICT COUNCILS

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Paid Service and Strategic Advisor which set out the recommendations from Stage One of the Review of the future of the Integrated Shared Management Structure and Joint Working Arrangements between Breckland and South Holland District Councils.

The Head of Paid Service and Strategic Advisor provided

Action By

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members with an overview of the report's content. Members were then provided the opportunity to feed back, and the following issues were raised:

- As many staff and members were currently working remotely, could the Authority consider the option of a partnership with another authority further afield, given the advantages and efficiencies of working remotely?
 - Officers responded that there were clearly strong arguments for being in partnership with another organisation however, as the difficulties in responding to the Covid pandemic for the two authorities across different counties had demonstrated, if the partnership was not relatively local, it made the partnership less meaningful. However, as a result of having to work differently, there had been additional learning that could be taken forward.
- Members responded that with regard to remote working, it was important to evaluate how the current arrangements had worked, and to learn from both the negative and positive aspects of this, should this way of working continue.
- Members felt that it was not clear where the figures quoted within the report had come from. It was felt that it was weighted towards the preferred option, with not much background – how had the weightings been arrived at? How could the Authority measure its ambitions within a new partnership when the type of partnership was not yet known?
 - Officers stated that there had been a lot of work undertaken that supported the report, and this process was explained. Initially, an appraisal had been undertaken by the Directors individually within both organisations, which had then been considered by them, together with the Head of Paid Service and Strategic Adviser, to compare and contrast the information and to provide some substance. Each option had been ranked against criteria, as either high, medium or low, and these had then been converted to the final scoring of 3, 2, 1. This information has been brought together with political weighting, initially undertaken separately by the Cabinets at each authority, with an agreed political weighting and consensus then being arrived at during a joint meeting of both. The purpose had not been to assess a particular partnership or stand-alone model, rather to evidence what was required,

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and what it would be expected to deliver. This was done by looking at what had already been achieved by the current shared arrangements, case study information from across local government, and the organisations' aspirations with regard to taking the preferred option forward. With regard to the quantity of data currently available, this could not be elaborated upon until a detailed business case stage was arrived at. At the current stage therefore, the report could only include assumptions of what could be achieved, to take forward to any future proposed partners. In summary, what was laid out within the report reflected what was achievable with having a partnership that was closer to home, based on case studies and the authorities' own experiences of working together. There was currently no business case for what was set out within the report however, the recommendations within the report were to explore the option at this stage, not to implement. The expectation when negotiating a new partnership would therefore be, to lay out the criteria, that it was believed that this was the right option for South Holland going forward, and that any preferred partners would be expected to deliver to this level of aspiration.

- Members asked why there was not more of a marked difference between a stand-alone scenario, and a new partnership?
 - Officers advised that many of the areas to be achieved could be done as either a stand-alone authority, or as a new partnership. However, a local strategic partnership would provide extra capacity and impact to deliver the required improvements, as had been demonstrated by South Holland's partnership with Breckland.
- With regard to political weighting, why was there a difference between South Holland's and Breckland's figures?
 - Officers referenced table 6 within the report, which set out the weighting of the options appraisal criteria – the outcomes from the separate informal Cabinet meetings had shown that although there was a lot of similarity, there had been some slight differences in some of the weightings for each authority. When each option was then scored, as seen in tables 7 and 8 and the appendices, if it was of political

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importance, it increased its score. With regard to table 6, the differences between Breckland and South Holland's weighting figures reflected the differing priorities for each authority – not all areas could be high priority and choices therefore had to be made. The objective scores and the political weightings were two separate influences.

- Members questioned, when considering the information within tables 7 and 8, and the 'as is' option being the last, why was it being proposed that the joint arrangements end?
 - Officers explained that the 'as is' situation had received a low score in the evaluation because the opportunities from the joint arrangements had largely been achieved. In addition, it had become clear that issues around partnership and place could be stronger if the strategic partnership was within the same area. The current partnership involved authorities in two separate counties, which would be involved with community partners from within their respective areas. In addition, the current partnership was 10 years old, and opportunities could now be achieved in different ways, i.e. there were opportunities for efficiencies where authorities shared the same providers of some Council services. Members were assured however that the partnership with Breckland could in no way be seen as a failure, and it had achieved savings of almost £0.75 million per year.

- In response to members' comments with regard to the low amounts of funding received by authorities in rural areas, the Head of Paid Service and Strategic Adviser commented that South Holland had a reputation for seizing the agenda and making it its own, as borne out by its successful partnership with Breckland Council. Until such time as increased funding may occur, the authority had the opportunity to move forward and gain greater opportunities for its local community by working together with closer neighbours.

- At what point would the relationship between South Holland and Breckland be severed, and what would be the cost to South Holland if a new local partnership was not entered into immediately?
 - When the partnership was established in 2010, the Memorandum of Agreement had set out a number of responsibilities each authority would have to each

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- other if the partnership were to end. The timeframes set out for a termination clause to be activated, followed by a period of 6 months. It did not, and could not have specified the situation with regard to what to do next as an individual organisation. The reasons for including some flexibility in the recommendations was to accommodate the situation where the process was able to move at a faster pace, and thus to bring the time frame forward. However, as it stood, the Memorandum of Association laid out that the separation would take place six months from the date of decision. This flexibility gave the opportunity for both authorities to support each other in a mutual fashion, with the under-pinning of the existing relationship in place until it was no longer required.
- With regard to any new, future partnerships, it was important to signal serious intent by ensuring that the previous partnership was ending by activating the termination clause.
 - In relation to structure and costings (these were subject to a decision being taken regarding appointment of a Chief Executive – currently a Chief Executive had not been appointed until the situation was clearer), all costs were within budget provision. With regard to the cost in the interim, these were being worked on but would not cost more than the current cost for South Holland. The only difference would be if the decision was made to appoint a stand-alone Chief Executive. In relation to existing systems and contracts, these would be continued with both organisations through agreement in the Memorandum of Association, until they could be taken in a new partnership by one of the authorities, or the contracts came to a natural end.
- Members had concerns with regard to future joint working with local authorities. Previous attempts to enter joint arrangements with local authorities, and more recently the Devolution agenda, had not been successful – had relationships improved?
 - The Head of Paid Service and Strategic Adviser commented that he was not familiar with any legacy issues. However, he stated that the local government landscape had changed dramatically. Financial challenges were great, necessitating the need for authorities to work together to be more

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efficient. In addition, opportunities had to be taken with regard to the Devolution agenda - district councils had to make their case as part of local government reorganisation, and based on geography within the area, single organisations would not meet MHCLG's criteria for population size. There was therefore now more pressure, and a greater appetite for authorities to find different ways of working, in a meaningful way.

- There were concerns regarding the overall cost to the Authority, as, dependent on which authority officers chose to work with, it was likely that there would be some vacancies. Vacancies (in the short term) and workloads had to be covered. In addition, part of the role of the Chief Executive had to be covered. Members were sceptical that these issues could be contained within the existing budget, and that the workload involved in entering another partnership could be dealt with.
 - Officers responded that within the termination clause, there was a fair and reasonable approach to how joint staff (47 across both authorities) would be allocated. It was important that both organisations were capable of running their services effectively. Informal engagement with staff was being undertaken where they could indicate their preference of authority, and this information was being considered against an interim structure. There was a high degree of correlation between the posts on offer at South Holland, and the number of staff who would want to work there. However, the formal consultation process was not yet finished, but it was hoped that at implementation stage, there would not be a high number of vacancies.
- Members responded that issues such as the potential loss of some skills that were available within the current partnership were a concern. In addition, leaving the partnership with Breckland could be the first in a three stage process, to be followed by the search for a new local partner and then potentially devolution in the future. These were all large and difficult situations to manage in a period where staffing was stretched and there were concerns regarding capacity. These processes required a high degree of expertise to manage, potentially over a number of years, and in addition to managing the high workloads involved in the day to day running of the authority.
 - Officers responded that the challenges and staff

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capacity were recognised by both organisations, and there would be additional resources to support the ambition. Some capacity could be brought in but this would not satisfy all areas. Making decisions for the future at an early stage would put the authority at the forefront, and put it in control of the way forward. In addition, undertaking the various hurdles ahead in stages would make the process more manageable and put the authority in the best possible situation for future changes.

- Members asked whether the report being presented was a fait-accompli?
 - The Head of Paid Service and Strategic Advisor confirmed that he had been brought into the organisation as an independent individual, with no pre-determined view of the options being presented. Both Cabinets had been clear that it was his role to provide an independent assessment, and view of the organisations' options going forward, and to take both through this process. Some options within the report did appear obvious, whilst others may not have been available at the time but were now.

- Members questioned why the authority would wish to leave a relationship where savings were already being made, to enter another relationship that had not yet been established.
 - Officers confirmed that the savings quoted did not stop being available as they were included within the base budget. In addition, there could be future savings available, that were not being made in the partnership currently. With regard to ending the current arrangements before a new one was in place, officers explained that under the current shared management arrangements, most of the 47 shared staff were employed by Breckland. It was important for South Holland to establish their staff, and that with regard to future negotiations, to signal that the old arrangements were ending, and that affected staff were engaged in those discussions.

- Members commented that by triggering the situation, the authority should not rush into another arrangement as a result, and be operating to another authority's agenda.
 - Officers agreed, and pointed out that the reason for changes detailed at recommendation 2, to extend

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the termination clause, was to assist with this situation. Both organisations had to agree what was to the mutual benefit of the existing partnership, and the correct arrangement had to be in place for a new partner.

AGREED:

That, subject to the concerns raised by Panel members with regard to the overall cost of the process, the following recommendations, as detailed within the report, that had been supported by the Cabinet for consideration by Full Council, be supported:

- a) To approve the preferred option for the future of the integrated shared management structure and joint working arrangements between the two Councils as set out in paragraph 1.8 of this report;
- b) To activate clause 8 of the memorandum of agreement between Breckland District Council and South Holland District Council and authorise any extension or shortening of the timeframe set out in clause 8.6A by mutual agreement between the two parties, so far as may be considered appropriate by the Leaders, following consultation with their respective Cabinets;
- c) To approve for consultation the interim structures to support and enable the achievement of the preferred option for both Councils; and
- d) That subject to there being no material changes to the senior management structure following consultation with officers, delegated authority be given to the Head of Paid Service in consultation with the leader to implement the said structure.

15. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT

There were none.

(The meeting ended at 7.45 pm)

(End of minutes)