

# Northamptonshire Commissioners

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Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP  
Secretary of State  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

Ref: Update 8

Date: 5 January 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

We write to give you a progress report on our work in Northamptonshire since our last update at the end of September. This is a short, penultimate update for this intervention. The Authority will cease to exist on 31 March 2021, at which point we will deliver a final more expansive update alongside our Lessons Learned report.

We observed in September that the governance arrangements of the Authority remain sound, and this continues to be the case. We have continued to ensure that decision-making remains robust, evidence-based and transparent, but this is now in the context of the growing influence of the two shadow unitary authorities as they continue the work of establishing themselves. The County Council is aware of the need to avoid making decisions that would unreasonably fetter the discretion of the two emerging authorities. Where it is necessary to make decisions now the County Council is doing so in close collaboration with the two shadow authorities.

We also reported that in our overview of the wider governance arrangements of the County Council we were keen to satisfy ourselves that it operates in a manner that is inclusive and supportive of these new authorities, in order that the transition of powers, services, finances, assets and staff may be fully effective. We are pleased to confirm that this remains the case.

In all other respects, we have focused on ensuring that the Council maintains attention on those matters that remain critical to the delivery of its responsibilities as it approaches closedown. Most particularly during this period these have been to: -

- Respond to the Covid-19 emergency;
- Maintain a balanced financial position;
- Deliver the planned local government reorganisation programme; and
- Deliver the Children's Trust,

## **Respond to the Covid-19 emergency**

The Council has continued to respond effectively to the emergency. As the Public Health Authority, it has given leadership to the range of services within the Council and amongst partner agencies in the NHS and District Councils so as to effectively contain the transmission of the virus when outbreaks have been identified. In respect of its wider community leadership role, the Council has worked with all partners and the community at large to ensure that clear and effective messages have been presented to the people of the county. Organisation of staff resources and response activity has been well planned and effectively organised. The Council is prepared for the pressures of winter and mindful that those pressures are likely to increase.

## **Maintain a balanced financial position**

The Council's overall outturn forecast, as at the end of September, is an underspend of £3.6m. It is important to note that in addition there is a contingency within the budget of £4.1m, which to date has not been used.

The external audit of the 2018/19 Accounts and Financial Statements remains incomplete. We have worked closely with the Chief Financial Officer, and with the external Auditors, and we expect the audit to be completed towards the end of the financial year. Regardless, the 2019/20 Accounts and Financial Statements will not be signed off by external auditors by 31 March. Provision has been made to transfer responsibility for ensuring completion of all outstanding accounts, financial statements and audit matters to one of the new authorities.

## **Deliver the planned local government reorganisation programme**

The work to ensure that reorganisation of local government in Northamptonshire has remained on schedule, and the County Council remains central to this project.

Since the recruitment of statutory officers for the new authorities has been undertaken and all are now in post, it is clear, and correct, that the bulk of planning and organising for the transfer has moved to these individuals to lead.

The detailed work to transfer County Council staff, finances and other assets to the new authorities is proceeding as planned, and to timetable.

We continue to maintain a close overview of this work and remain confident that its implementation will be effective.

An emerging and significant concern developing within the county is whether or not the ongoing pandemic will impact the safe and effective running of local elections for the two new unitaries. This is a legitimate concern in that it has already been 6 years since local elections at district, borough or county level have taken place and would mean the new authorities would begin without an election of Members.

## **Deliver the Children's Trust**

The Northamptonshire Children's Trust was initiated on 1 November 2020. This critical implementation was achieved as a result of considerable and intensive work by the Council and by representatives of the Trust.

We were closely involved in ensuring this given the significant risk posed to the delivery of the LGR programme if the transfer had not taken place at this time.

With the Trust now live it has moved into a period of stabilisation until the end of January, whereupon it will then move into a transitional phase to the two new authorities for 1 April 2021. We will continue to be involved in this work and continue to work closely with the DfE Commissioners.

## **Our activity over the final period of the Intervention**

All of the fundamental elements within our Directions remain fully on track for successful delivery. The Council is operating well within the standards and norms of a competent local authority. We are focused on maintaining this position

In respect of Local Government Reorganisation, we meet regularly with the leadership teams of the two shadow Authorities, as well as with the County Council's leadership team in order to ensure that the transfer of County Council operations and assets is a smooth and effective operation.

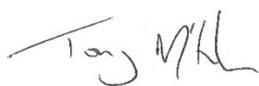
With regard to the Children's Trust we continue to work with the Council in order to establish strong procedures and processes for contract and performance management of the Trust, in order to set the appropriate relationship and to create the right platform for the unitaries to build upon.

The arrangements for formal close-down of the County Council continue to be well-planned and organised.

## **Summary**

We are confident that the County Council can continue to deliver its responsibilities and services effectively, and within budget, until transfer to the new Councils on 1 April 2021.

Yours sincerely



Tony McArdle  
Lead Commissioner



Brian Roberts  
Finance Commissioner