

Minutes

Meeting name	Scrutiny Committee
Date	Tuesday, 22 November 2022
Start time	6.30 pm
Venue	Parkside, Station Approach, Burton Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. LE13 1GH

Present:

Chair Councillor R. Child (Chair)

Councillors

J. Wilkinson (Vice-Chair)	S. Carter
P. Chandler	J. Douglas
C. Evans	E. Holmes
P. Posnett MBE	T. Webster

In Attendance

Leader of the Council – Councillor J. Orson
 Portfolio Holder – Councillor R. Bindloss
 Portfolio Holder – Councillor R. Browne
 Portfolio Holder – Councillor R. de Burle
 Portfolio Holder – Councillor A. Freer
 Nathan Elvery, Strategic Advisor (via remote link)
 Mark Bandalli, Mutual Ventures (via remote link)
 Andrew Laird, Mutual Ventures (via remote link)

Officers

Chief Executive
 Director for Housing and Communities (Deputy Chief Executive)
 Director for Corporate Services
 Monitoring Officer
 Senior Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer

Minute No.	Minute
39	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE An apology for absence was received from Councillor Atherton.</p>
40	<p>MINUTES The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2022 were approved.</p>
41	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST A personal interest in respect of Councillor Posnett was noted as being on record for any matter which related to Leicestershire County Council.</p> <p>The Chief Executive and the Director for Housing and Communities (Deputy Chief Executive) declared an interest in respect of Minute Number 44 in relation to the Strategic Partnership Business Case. Mutual Ventures were in attendance remotely to answer questions on the Business Case and the Strategic Advisor, Nathan Elvery, was in attendance remotely to answer questions on the proposed sharing of senior roles.</p>
42	<p>REVIEW OF THE FORWARD PLAN The Chairman introduced the Cabinet Forward Plan and invited Members to comment.</p>
43	<p>REVIEW OF THE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23 The Chairman introduced the Scrutiny Work Programme 2022/23 and invited Members to comment upon the document.</p> <p>The Director for Housing and Communities (Deputy Chief Executive) outlined the proposal to add the topic 'Leisure Procurement Strategy' on to the work programme and hold a workshop on the topic in January 2023. There was a query on whether it was prudent to make decisions that would affect a new Council after the all-out elections in May 2023. In response it was explained that for continuity reasons, the Council still need to make decisions as services affect the lives of residents irrespective of which individuals are serving Councillors. Following this question, the Committee agreed to add the topic onto the work programme and hold a workshop on the topic in January 2023.</p>
44	<p>STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BUSINESS CASE The Leader of the Council, Councillor Orson introduced the Strategic Partnership Business Case and provided the background to the document. The Chief Executive explained the context and process that been undertaken to develop the business case and confirmed that independent external expertise had been procured to assist with providing a robust assessment to meet the required deadline. Mr Bandalli then gave a presentation setting out the analysis and findings of the business case, supported by Mr Laird from Mutual Ventures and Nathan Elvery, Strategic Advisor to both Melton Borough Council and Harborough District Council. It was noted that the Strategic Advisor brings his expertise of previous partnership</p>

experiences. In addition, both Councils have consulted with other local authorities who have been through a similar experience.

In reviewing the cost apportionment for a shared Chief Executive and two Deputy Chief Executives, the comment was made that whilst the cost would be shared 50/50 there are other options to base the sharing of costs. Such as

- Population – Harborough 65%, Melton 35%
- Council Tax base – Harborough 66%, Melton 34%
- Geographical area – Harborough 69%, Melton 31%

However, the Strategic Advisor explained that as Senior Officers would split their focus equally between both authorities, then the fairest way to apportion cost would be 50/50, however other options could be used if collaboration is sought in other areas.

The Committee stated that the business case was too lengthy considering the decision that Council will be asked to make at the meeting on 20 December is whether to share a Chief Executive and two Deputy Chief Executives. It was suggested that the business case is slimmed down and focuses on the proposition and recommendations.

Members discussed their concerns that the Council would be losing half the capacity of the Chief Executive and the Deputy Chief Executive and that this could have an adverse effect upon the current standard of services. In addition, there was a concern that both Councils could lose face to face interaction with Senior Officers as they would have to cover a larger geographical area. The Committee were advised that the proposed arrangement had a number of potential benefits associated with it and that the establishment of the partnership would provide access to these, which wouldn't be available to either council if it didn't proceed. It was noted that Melton would not lose capacity because the proposal would provide transformation expertise that it previously did not have via the second Shared Deputy Chief Executive post.

Comments were made that the business case lacked the financial detail to support the claims detailed within the business case that the strategic partnership would save each Council the money it would do. It was recognised that savings would be made through sharing a Chief Executive and two Deputy Chief Executives but due to the lack of detail, the Committee were unable to comment on other proposals. A Member commented that, at least initially, Harborough District Council would disproportionately benefit from the strategic partnership. The Chief Executive confirmed that the other savings are illustrative of what could be achieved but that each proposal, as and when identified, would have its own business case in which it would be fully assessed and costed. It was also confirmed that the sharing of Senior Officers would produce greater savings for Harborough District Council initially, but that Melton Borough Council would benefit from obtaining expertise in the area of transformation. In addition to this, Officers agreed to share the background financial details related to the future opportunities with Members after the meeting.

A discussion ensued on the risk of political change after the election and the impact this could have upon the strategic partnership. It was recognised that the election was a risk, especially if a change in leadership occurred, but that the Memorandum of Agreement, which was being considered at a special meeting of Audit and Standards covered termination arrangements in greater detail.

The Committee stated that it was important for Members to retain control of the decision-making process and that this needs clarifying at the Council meeting on 20 December. The Chief Executive confirmed that the draft memorandum of agreement made it absolutely clear that full sovereign powers would be retained and a commitment was made to consult with Council as and when significant changes are proposed.

The timescales for considering the strategic partnership was questioned, as Members believe that the process is quicker than anticipated. It was explained that the Leaders of both Councils agreed the timescales and that Harborough District Council are keen to have a resolution by the end of the year, especially as they have been without a permanent Chief Executive since February 2022. It was also noted that it was important for the consideration not to go on too long as otherwise it can become a distraction and destabilise. Assurance was given that at the Council meeting scheduled in December, members will have all the information required to make a decision.

A number of members expressed they were broadly in favour of the strategic partnership as it was recognised that there is a need for change, especially in light of the political and financial challenges facing the local government sector. The priority should be the continued provision of services for residents and that the business case illustrates some of the proposals that would enable services to continue to be provided at current levels.

45	URGENT BUSINESS There was no urgent business.
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The meeting closed at: 8.36 pm

Chair