

Present: Councillor Stephen Woodliffe (Chairman), Councillor Anton Dani (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Tom Ashton, Alison Austin, Alan Bell, David Brown and Judith Skinner

In attendance: Councillors Paul Skinner, Leader, and Nigel Welton, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder.

Officers –

Chief Executive, Interim Deputy Chief Executive (People), Assistant Director - Assets, IT Projects and Development Officer, Senior Democratic Services Officer and Democratic Services Apprentice

## **8 APOLOGIES**

There were apologies for absence from Councillors Martin Howard, Frank Pickett and Yvonne Stevens.

## **9 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None.

## **10 PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

None.

## **11 WORK PROGRAMME**

The date of the next meeting, to consider a community governance review, was confirmed as 19<sup>th</sup> August (subsequently changed to 17<sup>th</sup> August).

The Chief Executives of United Lincolnshire Hospitals Trust (ULHT) and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), and other relevant representatives, would be invited to attend the Committee's September meeting, though consideration would be given to arranging a joint meeting with East Lindsey District Council.

Members were urged to submit questions in advance to enable guests to have relevant information available. There was a request for the representatives to provide information regarding the knock-on effects of the loss of the urology service on other emergency services.

## **12 SOUTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCILS PARTNERSHIP**

The Chief Executive presented a report, which outlined a proposal to extend the Council's existing strategic alliance with East Lindsey District Council (ELDC) to include South Holland District Council (SHDC). The draft Business Case was attached to the report at Appendix A and the Memorandum of Agreement at Appendix B.

On 28<sup>th</sup> June 2021, Full Council had agreed 'in principle' to explore the opportunity to create a three-Council strategic partnership, resolving that the Business Case be presented at a Member Briefing and forwarded to the Committee for scrutiny. The all-Member Briefing had taken place on 14<sup>th</sup> July.

The Chief Executive gave a PowerPoint presentation of the draft Business Case and Memorandum of Agreement. The model proposed was, essentially, an extension of the existing two-Council alliance model, with each Council retaining its political independence and public accountability, supported by a shared workforce. It was proposed to call the new partnership the 'South East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership'.

Reviewing the draft documents as part of the scrutiny process gave Members the opportunity to provide feedback to shape the documents so that they would be acceptable to Full Council.

In addition to the Committee's scrutiny, a joint scrutiny panel between the current alliance Councils, Boston and ELDC, was being formed to scrutinise the draft Council report and associated documents.

Members were asked to review the draft documents and provide their findings and recommendations for inclusion as an Appendix to the report to Council on 2 August 2021, to order to inform the debate and ensure the governing documents were satisfactory to allow Members to progress with the partnership. They would also be forwarded to those Councillors at BBC and ELDC involved in the joint scrutiny exercise.

The Chief Executive concluded by informing Members that the partnership would be the largest in the country and was arousing national interest. Moving ahead with the proposal would put the Councils in a good position in terms of any forthcoming Devolution proposals. It was noted that each authority would retain its workforce; therefore, recruitment would be carried out to fill any vacancies that arose.

Following the Chief Executive's presentation, Members' comments included:

- Recognition of the significant opportunities the partnership would present in terms of economic development and speaking as a region with one voice
- The important increase in resilience that a larger workforce would provide and the ability to access more experienced staff to achieve more ambitious projects and attract more funding
- The chance to improve marketing to increase tourism and attract more businesses to the area
- The opportunities for staff to advance their careers and specialise
- Appreciation of the pace the process was taking

Concerns raised by Members included:

- The Council could risk losing its individual identity; it needed to be strengthened, not simply retained
- Customer service staff should have local knowledge
- The whole of the borough's offer should be promoted more visibly

- The financial projections appeared speculative; other partners seemed to benefit more than Boston; and staffing costs could increase

In response to these and other questions, the Chief Executive advised Members that:

- The Business Case set out indicative financial contributions, but it was for Members to decide the structure and costs
- Experience indicated that joining workforces produced savings; reducing the number of officers from the top layer of management provided resources for more operational staff, resulting in improved resilience
- Portfolio Holders were to discuss the South East Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Plan with the Assistant Director – Planning
- The alliance between SHDC and Breckland DC had come to a mutually-agreed ending on an amicable basis as both authorities recognised it would prevent them taking up opportunities that might arise from the progression of Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

**Action: AF**

Advise Councillor Dani of the value of income from the Council's assets. [The value of assets was given as approximately £36m]

The Leader advised Members that the proposal would increase the Council's capacity significantly and provide more financial resources. There had been extensive partnership working between the authorities' leaders since the outbreak of the pandemic and there were several service areas already operating in partnership with the other two authorities, so trust already existed between them. Extending the alliance would increase opportunities for improvement for the Council; the alternative would be cuts.

During debate, Member's main comments and suggestions were as follows:

- Name the proposed partnership the "East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership"

This would more accurately reflect the wide area covered and differentiate it from the South East Lincolnshire partnership formed between SHDC and BBC previously to establish a Joint Local Plan.

- Add the following to Section 4 Scope of Services, to populate the list of Boston's Lead Specialisms and Highly Performing Services:
  1. Success in the delivery of affordable housing through various partnerships – 750 new affordable homes over the last five years, one new home every 2.43 days.
  2. Securing external funding for community benefit – for example, Towns Fund, Housing Infrastructure Fund, Controlling Migration fund, Community Champions fund
  3. Strategic partner engagement – for example, with Boston College, Port of Boston, Platform Housing Group
- In Section 9: Programme Governance & Management, remove the self-evident responsibilities from the list for Programme Board Members

**RESOLVED: That the Committee's main observations be reported to Full Council on 2<sup>nd</sup> August.**

The Meeting Closed at 8.52 pm