



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	<b>EXECUTIVE – 6 MARCH 2024</b>
Subject	<b>PUBLICA REVIEW- LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS TRANSITION UPDATE</b>
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Andy Graham, Leader of the Council Email: andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Email: Giles.Hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Email: Giles.Hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To consider the Local Partnerships report and to consider the findings and recommendations therein.
Annexes	Annex A – Local Partnerships Report
Recommendation(s)	That Executive notes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. the findings and recommendations set out in the Local Partnerships report; and</li><li>2. that the Interim Programme Director shall prepare a detailed transition plan, building on the recommendations set out in the Local Partnerships report, for subsequent consideration by Executive, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Council.</li></ol>
Corporate priorities	Putting Residents First by ensuring that all services delivered by the Council are delivered to the highest standard.
Key Decision	NO

Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Director of Governance Interim Managing Director of Publica

## **I. BACKGROUND**

- I.1** Council services are delivered through Publica, a joint vehicle owned by the Council together with Cotswold District Council, Cheltenham Borough Council and Forest of Dean District Council. An options appraisal review of Council services and the way in which they are delivered was undertaken by a company called Human Engine in 2023. The final report recommended that a significant number of services should move from Publica and return to being under greater control of the Councils. This would leave Publica delivering a range of support and customer services for the Councils.
- I.2** Following the Human Engine report and its recommendations work begun to recruit an Interim Programme Director who would support the Chief Executives of the Councils and elected members in implementing the transition.
- I.3** An Interim Programme Director has now been appointed, following a two-stage interview process involving both officers and Leaders and is working on behalf of the Councils, under the leadership of the Chief Executives, to develop and implement the transition. Whilst the recruitment of a programme director was taking place, it was important to maintain momentum. Local Partnerships was therefore asked to support the councils, commissioned by Cotswold District Council as part of its South West transformation grant funding programme, in the development of a 'bridging report' that built on the work undertaken by Human Engine and to inform the preparation and implementation of a detailed transition plan that will be presented by the Interim Programme Director and Chief Executive later in the year.
- I.4** The Local Government Association runs a Transformation Fund programme through its partner organisation Local Partnerships. Local Partnerships LLP is a consultancy firm jointly owned by the LGA, Treasury and Welsh Government, delivering value for the public purse. Local Partnerships come with a wealth of experience and are well placed to be able to refer to the wider public sector's experience of insourcing to provide illustrations of governance, organisational design and service transformation, having been involved in undertaking service reviews for a number of councils in the past. This knowledge and approach facilitates bringing services back in-house following best practice, rather than simply 'lift and shift'.
- I.5** The brief agreed with Local Partnerships was for the provision of a high-level set of recommendations, following those set out in the Human Engine report, to enable the councils to take the project forward. The Councils were granted the equivalent of 20 consultancy days to provide high-level advice based on their experience of supporting councils with transition plans and from evidence gathered from other insourcing projects across the sector. Therefore timescales set out are indicative but realistic based on previous experience. Furthermore, the Local Partnerships report did not intend to seek to identify all service areas to be transferred, but to give a high level overview of and suggest key phases of services as part of the transition. It will be for the Interim Programme Director to develop this further with more specific detail

in due course. It is envisaged that the detailed transition plan will be completed by the end of April, with subsequent reporting back through the Council's scrutiny and decision-making meetings.

- 1.6** The Local Partnerships commission was undertaken in a similar way to a Peer Review. The Local Partnerships team carried out interviews with the four CEOs, Interim MD of Publica and the Interim Programme Director to understand the current position from their perspective and their views and ambitions for the insourcing project.
- 1.7** In addition, a half-day workshop took place with key staff from both the Councils and Publica, to understand more about the views of the wider stakeholder group regarding the transition. This information was then used to develop an outline framework for the transition of services to enable the programme team to take this forward. Their report covers key governance, risk and structural principles to support the transition from Publica back to the Councils.

## **2. NEXT STEPS**

- 2.1** With a Programme director recruited, the next stages of the transition will involve considering and implementing the recommendations set out in the Local Partnerships report, continuing to develop the necessary governance arrangements, and member and staff engagement processes and the presentation to Executive, Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Council of the Programme Director's Transition Plan.

## **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1** There are no financial implications associated with this report. The Local Partnerships work was grant funded by the Local Government Association at no cost to the Councils. As set out in earlier reports, the financial impact of the proposals will be developed as part of the due diligence process over the coming weeks and included in the detailed transition plan.

## **4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1** There are no legal implications associated with this report. As per financial implications, the legal implications associated with the Publica Review have been previously reported and will remain a key part of the due diligence process.

## **5. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1** The commissioning of Local Partnerships and their subsequent report provides additional independent advice and recommendations associated with the return of services to the Council. The recommendations are based on assessment of the original Human Engine report, conversations with key officers and their experience based on best practice elsewhere. As such their report is beneficial in terms of providing additional assurances to the Council on the key elements of the review, phasing and the direction of travel. This approach of risk management will continue as the service review develops. In addition, clarity around the

transition plan will also help to minimise risks associated with staff feeling unsettled and unsure of their future, which in turn should minimise risks around day to day service delivery.

## **6. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

**6.1** Under equality legislation, the Council has a legal duty to pay 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality in relation to:

- Race
- Disability
- Gender, including gender reassignment
- Age
- Sexual Orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Religion or belief

When considering this recommendation, no barriers or impact on any of the above groups has been identified.

## **7. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

**7.1** This recommendation has no climate change implications.

## **8. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Annex A Local Partnerships report and recommendations.

(END)