

Evenley Parish Council

Minutes of the virtual meeting held on 18th January 2021

Appendix one

10/21 i. Local government reorganisation

Councillor JM reported that she had attended a Zoom call with Anna Earnshaw, the newly appointed Chief Executive to West Northamptonshire Council (which is vested on 1st April 2021). This was organised by Northants CALC and chaired by Danny Moody.

Anna was previously Deputy Chief Executive at Northamptonshire County Council (NCC), and before that was Director of Adult Social Services, and so she is familiar with the whole county.

Anna outlined the four main challenges facing West Northants Council (WNC) at the moment:

- Business rate pooling
- Having just a one-year settlement from Government
- Covid
- The lack of permanently elected members until the next elections (scheduled for Thursday 6th May 2021)

In addition, there are legal requirements to follow, in particular harmonising council tax and council tax support schemes across the whole area- this needs to be agreed before vesting day.

In particular, cllr JM highlighted the following areas as being of interest to councillors:

Elections in May 2021 - the assumption is that these will go ahead, and measures are being devised to ensure they happen safely in Covid secure environments. Counts may last over more days, for example. Alternative dates have been considered, including September, October and November 2021. If this were to happen, existing councillors would have their tenure extended.

Transfer of services to town and parish councils - there are no plans for immediate wholesale transfer, and there would be consultation and engagement with town and parish councils if this were to be proposed.

Highways - the contract monitoring team was moved from Kier to NCC last autumn, and the contract is being re-tendered with a start date of 1st July 2021. Penalties for poor quality work are being increased in the new contract. There is the option for a contractor to bid for the WNC contract, or the NNC contract, or both (ie the whole county).

Planning process - Anna was asked if this would be more centralised in future. There will be centralised systems across WNC, with governance arrangements (area committees?) to be discussed at the next two meetings of the shadow executive.

Assets - these will be reviewed in due course, and the new council will want to maintain a presence in the West Northants towns in particular. Existing offices could be used in part by local businesses, including start-ups.

Councillors are also keen to establish a fund for local community priorities which organisations, in particular town and parish councils, could bid in to - this is obviously subject to resources and would be medium term.

Anna concluded by saying that her main challenges in the immediate future are Covid, setting a new culture of engagement with communities, ensuring there is no disruption to services in April, and being a catalyst for the economic recovery of the area.