

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Programme – Programme Governance Follow Up Report

Introduction

SWAP was recently commissioned by the Shaping Dorset Council Programme Board to provide a high-level review of the LGR programme governance, to form an opinion on the adequacy, design and integrity of the arrangements in place to deliver the intended outcomes of the programme. We issued our initial report, including our audit opinion of ‘Partial’, on the 26th July.








In our report we recognised certain aspects of the programme were in development, with changes being implemented at the time of our review. As such, the Programme Director produced a paper on the 27th July that sought to respond to and provide context to our findings, including where changes and improvements had recently been completed.

It should be noted, that since our initial report, there have been a number of changes to the overall governance arrangements of the programme, including the formation of three Theme Boards (comprising Place, People & Corporate), the introduction of the ‘Wider Programme Board’, incorporating tier two officers, as well as changes to the previous Task & Finish groups.

In advance of the Shadow Executive Committee meeting on the 21st August, SWAP was asked to provide a follow up assessment of the headline conclusions identified in our initial report to provide assurance that these areas had been adequately addressed. This report has not assessed the new programme governance arrangements agreed since our initial report, but instead has sought to follow up on the findings of our previous report; as such no audit assurance opinion has been offered.

We have set out below the headline conclusions from our initial review, along with our current assessment and direction of travel, based on the findings of this follow up review. We have gone on to provide further detail of our follow up findings, for reference.

Follow Up Assessment

Headline Conclusion as at 26 th July	Follow Up Assessment as at 10 th August	RAG Rating & Direction of Travel	
Programme governance is still developing and catching up; currently it is inadequate for a programme of the magnitude and importance of LGR	Significant activity undertaken to address some of the gaps in the programme governance. Still an element of catching up required, to ensure recent proposals and templates are effectively applied and embedded	Yellow	
There remain a range of differing opinions and demands from key programme stakeholders in terms of the programme purpose and priorities	The updated implementation plan report being presented to Shadow Executive Committee clearly sets out the relevant areas in and out of programme scope, along with the reasoning for these decisions	Yellow	
There is a lack of clarity in relation to the DCC involvement and support in terms of their contribution to the Shaping Dorset Council programme, which has led to some confusion and potential duplication of LGR programme activity, governance and documentation	There remains a level of confusion in relation to how the work of the DCC team dovetails with and supports that of the Shaping Dorset Council programme team. Further work is required to ensure this is clarified and appropriately actioned	Red	
Capacity of the Shaping Dorset Council programme team to effectively administer and direct the programme remains a concern	Resource available to the programme team has improved, along with the support that AMEO are providing. However, there are still vacancies in the programme team, with the overall workload set to increase	Yellow	
Programme workstream planning, reporting and oversight is currently inconsistent and incomplete	New workstream reporting templates agreed; to be implemented September. Improved understanding and documenting of the specific workstream tasks and deliverables required for service continuity on Day 1	Yellow	
Programme decision-making arrangements, escalation channels and programme issue management & resolution require further work and clarification	Now slightly greater clarity and structure around decision-making, as well as an improved record of decisions made. However, there is still work required to populate historical decisions taken, complete the current programme decisions log, as well as retaining the corresponding documentation for decisions taken	Yellow	
The record of programme activity, documentation and decisions taken requires improvement on the programme SharePoint site to provide a consistent and accessible repository for stakeholders and wider Dorset area staff	Documentation on the SharePoint site continues to improve, with the backlog of documents and records that were absent being addressed. However, still further work required. Staff site significantly improved	Yellow	

Key Findings from Follow Up of Headline Conclusions

1. Overall Programme Governance

Since the date of the fieldwork of our initial LGR programme governance work, there has clearly been significant activity to address some of the gaps in the programme governance, including those that we emphasised in our report.

As highlighted in the table above, this follow up review has concluded that all of the headline areas identified in our initial review are showing a positive direction of travel, in order to help bring the governance up to speed for a programme the magnitude and importance of LGR. Nonetheless, the governance of the programme still has an element of catching up, to ensure recent proposals and templates are effectively applied and embedded.

2. Differing Opinions & Demands on Programme Purpose & Priorities

In relation to the differing opinions and demands on the programme from key stakeholders, ongoing discussions are being held with what now appears to be a greater understanding across the programme with regards to the exact work comprising the three key phases. The updated implementation plan report, due to be presented to the Shadow Executive Committee on the 21st August, clearly sets out the relevant areas in and out of programme scope, along with the reasoning for these decisions.

Subject to the agreement of the principles within this implementation plan report, as well as a robust system of programme change control moving forwards, it is likely that there will be improved clarity and agreement on the programme direction and scope.

3. Lack of Clarity in Relation to the DCC Involvement and Support

Discussions are ongoing in relation to the DCC LGR programme structure and support, although there remains a level of confusion in relation to how the work of this team seamlessly dovetails with and supports that of the Shaping Dorset Council programme team. The introduction of the wider Shaping Dorset Council programme board, as well as the three themed boards will potentially help clarify the wider support needed, although further work is required to ensure this is appropriately actioned.

4. Capacity of the Shaping Dorset Council Programme Team

There is broad consensus amongst key programme stakeholders that the appointment and commencement of a Programme Office Manager has improved the previous capacity issues within the Shaping Dorset Council programme team. Furthermore, the commissioning of AMEO to provide support in programme design, as well as assistance in identifying further programme resource, has helped to mitigate some of the resource gaps. However, there remain vacancies within the programme team, and with the workload in the lead up to April 2019 set to increase, effective arrangements with the staff working on service continuity arrangements will need to be established.

5. Programme Workstream Planning, Reporting and Oversight

Proposals have recently been agreed in relation to a new format of workstream reporting. These proposals include a consistent template for workstream reporting and oversight, including key achievements, planned activities and next milestones. In practice, these will start to be used and reported to Programme Board and Shadow Executive from September.

Workstream planning has been developed since our initial report, with a far greater understanding with regards to the specific tasks and deliverables required for service continuity on Day 1.

6. Programme Decision-Making Arrangements, Escalation Channels and Issue Management & Resolution

Programme decision-making arrangements have been discussed and agreed by the Shaping Dorset Council Programme Board since our initial report. There is now slightly greater clarity and structure around decision-making, as well as an improved record of decisions made. That said, there is still further work required by the Shaping Dorset Council programme team to populate historical decisions taken, complete the current programme decisions log, as well as retaining the corresponding documentation for decisions taken.

Issue management and escalation arrangements are likely to improve through the new workstream status updates referred to above, which will consistently and regularly capture key items for attention and/ or resolution.

7. The Record of Programme Activity & Documentation on the SharePoint Site

The record of programme activity and the overall documentation on the SharePoint site continues to improve, with the backlog of documents and records that required populating being rapidly addressed daily. That said, there are still areas where documentation requires updating, and therefore we have left our assessment as Amber for this area.

We note that the workstream documentation held on a duplicate SharePoint site, identified in our initial review, has now been addressed and transferred over to the Shaping Dorset Council SharePoint site.

The Shaping Dorset Council SharePoint site will require continuous monitoring and effective administration to ensure that documents are consistently titled, filed and structured, to ensure that the site is easy to navigate and use.

Further Assurance Work

As highlighted in the introduction above, there have recently been several changes to the governance arrangements of the programme, including the formation of the three new Theme Boards, the introduction of the 'Wider Programme Board', incorporating tier two officers, as well as changes to the previous Task & Finish groups. Furthermore, as some of the above initiatives have only recently been developed or are pending full implementation, it is recommended that a further full review of programme governance is undertaken in the near future. We would also recommend scheduling assurance work with the Gateway 1 – Discovery Complete stage in September.

SWAP Internal Audit Services

13th August 2018