

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Programme Audit – Programme Governance Overview

Introduction

SWAP was recently commissioned by the Dorset Area Programme Board to provide a high-level review of the current 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.

Our review consisted of meetings with key stakeholders (including Members), review of Shaping Dorset Council programme and Dorset County Council (DCC) LGR documentation, and consideration of recent programme activity and planned changes.

Our conclusions are based on the documentation that was available at the time of our audit (up to 20th July), including review of the Shaping Dorset Council programme SharePoint site, as well as liaising with the Programme Director for confirmations/further documentation. We appreciate that programme governance arrangements at the time of our review were still developing and as such, certain areas are likely to have changed or been addressed.

It is clear that there has been a significant amount of work delivered to bring the LGR programme to this point, with a real desire across Authorities to successfully and safely set up the new Dorset Council from April 2019. Primarily the findings below reflect areas identified for improvement; nevertheless, we recognise the significant collaborative working and achievements to date.

We have set out below our audit assurance opinion and headline conclusions from this review. We have gone on to provide further detail of our key findings, grouped as per the agreed scope of our Terms of Reference. Finally, we have summarised what we believe are the key recommendations to take forward at this stage, for consideration and agreement.

Overall Assurance Opinion

PARTIAL

In relation to the areas reviewed and the governance arrangements in place at the time of our audit, some key aspects require the introduction or improvement of processes and/ or controls to ensure the achievement of objectives.



Headline Conclusions

- Programme governance is still developing and catching up; currently it is inadequate for a programme of the magnitude and importance of LGR
- There remain a range of differing opinions and demands from key programme stakeholders in terms of the programme purpose and priorities
- 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
- Capacity of the Shaping Dorset Council programme team to effectively administer and direct the programme remains a concern
- Programme workstream planning, reporting and oversight is currently inconsistent and incomplete
- Programme decision-making arrangements, escalation channels and programme issue management & resolution require further work and clarification
- 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

Key Findings

1. Programme Purpose & Clarity

Securing agreement and clarity on the LGR programme purpose and priorities, in the context of the temporary governance arrangements at the time i.e. the Dorset Area Joint Committee and no Senior Responsible Officer (SRO), was always likely to be a challenge for an incoming Programme Director. However, based on our recent discussions with key programme stakeholders, it is apparent that differing views remain in relation to the defined purpose of the programme, along with the priorities of the various tasks associated with this. Whilst this could be expected to an extent (given the range of different stakeholders involved), it is unlikely to aid clear and timely decision-making and programme progress.

We also identified examples where key stakeholders held an expectation that through the process of LGR, there should be an element of service transformation with the opportunity to deliver services differently from 1 April 2019. Key stakeholders will need to be mindful that any changes to the currently agreed programme expectations and/ or scope, should be raised through formal change-control channels, which may in turn affect the current programme focus and plan.

Linked to the above, from our review of programme documentation, it was unclear whether the current programme plan has adequately considered and incorporated the principles and assumptions contained within the Local Partnerships Business Case.

The agreement of interim appointments to the Shadow Dorset Council is likely to have improved clarity and priorities for the programme, as well as clear reporting lines, however naturally there will remain a certain level of differing viewpoints up to (and potentially even after) permanent appointments are made in September.

2. Programme Structure, Resources & Capacity

The Shaping Dorset Council LGR programme team structure has now been agreed and implemented. However, for a period of time it has not been fully resourced, although a number of key appointments have recently been made to help alleviate the pressure. Nevertheless, staff sickness within the programme team continues to impact on the ability to deliver work and meet deadlines.

As part of this review we have not made an assessment of the capability of the Shaping Dorset Council programme team, although anecdotally there have been concerns raised in relation to the experience of programme team members in programmes of this scale. We are aware that AMEO have recently been commissioned to provide additional programme support in developing plans and programme design, which is likely to help address some of these concerns.

In relation to the wider programme related activity and set up in existing councils, there is a lack of clarity in relation to the Dorset County Council (DCC) involvement and support in terms of their contribution to the Shaping Dorset Council LGR programme. The current DCC support structure appears to have led to some confusion and potential duplication of LGR programme activity/ governance/ documentation/ reporting which needs to be effectively resolved. Without the Shaping Dorset Council programme team directing, coordinating and overseeing all programme activity, there is a risk that this confusion, duplication and potential tension will continue, which is likely to impair the delivery of centrally agreed objectives.

In relation to the governance structures of the programme, including workstreams and the service continuity forum, these continue to evolve as at the date of this report, and are likely to change further following input from AMEO. As part of our review, it was unclear in relation to the precise role and responsibilities of the Member-led Task & Finish Groups, with apparent inconsistencies in the two-way reporting channels in place. We understand that a review of these groups is currently underway.

3. Programme and Workstream Planning, including Interdependencies

An overall programme plan has been developed, first formally presented at the June 2018 Shadow Executive meeting, incorporating the high-level workstream plans. This overall plan has been set out in three key programme phases. Whilst some of the deadlines within the high-level implementation plan are broad i.e. May 2018 to December 2018, this is supported by a more detailed programme team document, although visibility of key programme timescales and deadlines could be improved.

As part of our review, we noted that the programme work of Phase 1 has been identified as substantively complete but have not yet seen evidence of formal gateway reviews planned to confirm all programme activity has been adequately completed for this phase. At the date of reporting, we were informed that this had recently been completed and agreed.

In relation to the detailed planning of individual workstreams, whilst this is clearly progressing with a range of work successfully delivered, as of the week commencing 23rd July there remained varying formats of plans and documentation across the various

workstreams, contributing to a lack of consistent and robust assurance over the progress of these workstreams. We were notified that the programme team were addressing this weakness, with each workstream soon to have a scope statement and detailed plan agreed.

Linked to the above, we evidenced a lack of comprehensive resource planning across the workstreams, including any pinch points of resource and/or skills in the lead up to April 2019.

As part of our review of workstream activity, we noted that additional workstream documentation was being held (or duplicated) on a separate DCC SharePoint site to that of the Shaping Dorset Council programme. This could lead to potential confusion and a lack of central oversight from the Shaping Dorset Council programme team.

Work on programme interdependencies has been captured and there is evidence of these interdependencies being monitored and actioned where possible. This area will need further development once consistency around the planning of programme workstreams has been embedded, and draft service continuity implementation plans have been collated.

4. Programme Decision-Making and Escalation Arrangements

Programme decision-making arrangements appear to be in their infancy. From our review, documents clarifying and supporting programme decision-making appeared to still be in draft, and there were only six decisions recorded under the decisions section of the SharePoint site.

As part of our audit review, we could not evidence that workstream and/ or individual council escalation arrangements to the Programme Board had been consistently defined, agreed or communicated. Along the same lines, decision-making and the relevant authority of, and delegation to, individual workstreams was not clear. The lack of defined decision-making and escalation arrangements has potentially contributed to DCC developing their own LGR programme governance arrangements and activity.

The programme issues log documented on the programme site was not clear, up-to-date, and only included four current issues. The process of issue management and resolution clearly requires further work to ensure that there is adequate oversight and transparency of how programme issues are addressed and responded to.

5. Programme Reporting and Stakeholder Management/ Engagement

Programme reporting and documentation, at the admission of the Programme Director himself, has to date not been robustly completed, and in many areas is in the process of catching up. This includes the key programme depository, the Shaping Dorset Council programme SharePoint site which at the time of our review had recently gone live and was being populated and updated with key programme documentation. Currently navigating the site is problematic in terms of the date, version and completeness of the documents contained there.

Programme Board papers and Agendas are now routinely administered within a rhythm, with improvements recently agreed in relation to how key meetings and papers will be organised. This will help to ensure that decisions are consistently and accurately captured, implemented and monitored, as well as helping to improve the wider visibility of these aspects. Previously the capture and publication of minutes had been sporadic. Regular programme highlight reports are being produced to help consistently explain and document programme progress.

As part of our review we noted that the Shadow Dorset Council WordPress site was adequately clear and populated with the relevant information for this audience.

Recommendations

We have set out in the table below, the key recommendations arising from this first programme overview audit. We believe further and ongoing assurance activity in relation to the developing governance arrangements and direction of travel of the programme is crucial. As such, we would recommend that we revisit the areas contained within this report on a monthly basis and report back on progress.

Reference	Proposed Action
1.1	Agreeing, defining and consistently communicating the programme purpose and priorities over the next eight months at the appropriate Committee and Board levels
2.1	Clarifying the exact role and purpose of the DCC LGR programme activity, to ensure that this is actively supporting the Shaping Dorset Council programme, rather than duplicating programme activity, governance and reporting/ documentation
2.2	Ensuring capacity of the Shaping Dorset Council programme team is reviewed and regularly confirmed by the Programme Board as being adequate to deliver the necessary outputs
3.1	Clarifying final ownership and plans of programme workstreams, to improve the consistency, visibility and management of workstream activity
4.1	Finalising and clarifying programme decision-making arrangements, as well as workstream delegated authority and escalation arrangements
5.1	Ensuring that the Shaping Dorset Council SharePoint site is adequately populated, maintained and monitored, to ensure that this is the one, consistent place where all programme documentation is held and accessed. Ensuring all other LGR documentation remotely held in individual council's is transferred onto the Shaping Dorset Council site

As per the key findings above, there are a range of further areas that we believe require attention and action. We understand that the majority of these are currently being addressed and as such we have only included those recommendations that we deem to be higher-priority in the table above.