

Extract of minutes of Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 7 November 2018

Proposed Call to Account

The Chairman introduced an item to ask the committee to consider a proposed Call to Account with regard to the decision of the Shadow Executive Committee on 17 September 2018 on the transfer of services and assets in West Dorset. If agreed, the Call to Account would be considered at a future meeting of the committee and the relevant people would be required to come to the meeting to provide information in respect of the decision taken.

Reference was made to the principles for the transfer of assets to town and parish councils, which had been agreed by the Shadow Executive Committee on 20 July 2018 and the amount of work that had been undertaken in West Dorset. The recommendations put forward by West Dorset District Council had been considered by the Shadow Executive Committee, but had not received support from the committee. A point was raised that when the Shadow Dorset Council came in to being there was a wish to empower people by enabling local communities to be in charge of their own assets. A report had subsequently been considered by West Dorset Full Council which sought to leave the door open for future discussions, within the principles agreed by the Shadow Council and which had received cross party support.

The Chairman noted that the purpose of the discussion at this meeting was to determine whether there was committee support to proceed with a Call to Account.

Members discussed the issues arising and during discussion the following points were raised:

- A lot of time and effort had been put into negotiations with town and parish councils in West Dorset and it was felt that the Council had been caught out by the principle that a proposal must not exceed £100k value
- A point was made that market towns should be treated differently, similar to the exception provided to Weymouth Town Council and Portland Town Council. The point was made that many councils had low tax bases
- It was felt that there was not a uniform process in place across the county
- In response to a point raised it was noted that there could be a need for clarification with regard to the £100k cap that had been put in place and whether this was per town or parish council or per individual asset, or whether it was in place for all transactions proposed by a district council
- A question was raised as to what action could be taken as a result of undertaking a Call to Account? It was noted that the committee could make recommendations to the Shadow Executive Committee

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- The Interim Monitoring Officer noted that the Shadow Executive Committee had agreed a set of principles for this area. It was the view of the Shadow Executive Committee that the proposals put forward by West Dorset, did not fit with the agreed principles
- Clarification was sought as to whether the Call to Account related to the specific decision with regard to the transfer of assets and services in West Dorset or whether it was with regard to the wider issues with the consistent application and implementation of the principles?
- A point was raised that the decision made by the Shadow Executive Committee in September 2018 could mean that there were no transfers of assets or services and this could have implications for the councils relationship with town and parish councils
- It was noted that some transfers had been agreed, for example in Purbeck
- Reference was made to the recognition by the Shadow Executive Committee of the unique circumstances of Weymouth Town Council and Portland Town Council and that these were to be considered separately. It was noted that this was an amendment to the principles which had been agreed by the Shadow Executive Committee in order to recognise the unique circumstances in forming a new town council for Weymouth. A point was noted that Portland Town Council although already formed, had also been included
- The committee was reminded that they were here as Shadow councillors and the suggestion made that the issue was not so much to do with the specific West Dorset decision but instead with regard to exploring the suggested inconsistencies in how the agreed principles had previously been applied and would be applied in the future. The Call to Account, if agreed, could therefore seek to gain an understanding of the situation in terms of how the principles were applied and the perceived inconsistencies. It was suggested that the position in West Dorset was the case that had triggered the request to undertake a Call to Account
- Reference was made to work undertaken by the county council to devolve services
- A point was raised that it was felt that there were inconsistencies in how the principles were being applied with Weymouth and Portland being treated differently. The point was made that there were a significant number of market towns with low council tax bases which would have an impact. It was felt that the policy was not working to a fair degree and therefore should be subject to a Call to Account
- Clarification was provided in respect of the asset transfer agreed in Purbeck which was six car parking spaces for residential use with only a small amount of income attached

Following the discussion, it was proposed by T Jones seconded by J Sewell that a Call to Account with regard to the transfer of assets to town and parish councils be supported and considered at the next meeting of the committee in December. Members discussed the people who would be called to account and it was felt that this should include the Leader, relevant Portfolio Holders, the Interim Monitoring Officer and Interim S151 Officer.

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Decision

That a Call to Account with regard to the transfer of assets to town and parish councils be supported and considered at the next meeting of the committee in December. The Leader, relevant Portfolio Holders and Interim Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer to be asked to attend the meeting.