



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

LGR – the Journey from Vision to Reality

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Background to LGR in Northamptonshire

- Northamptonshire County Council first in 20 years to get a S114; Government appoints independent review into their failings and adverse KPMG audit report
- £60m shortfall in county council funding
- Feb 2018 Max Caller Best Value Review at the Direction of Secretary of State - recommended LGR and 3 unitary options
- March 2018 - Government asked all 8 Councils to consider LGR and submit proposal
- Summer 2018 – councils consult public then submit for two unitaries made to Government
- May 2019 - SoS final decision for two unitaries after gov consultation
- Summer 2019 – Government decides plans for separate Children’s Trust

Districts and Boroughs resentful of LGR being ‘forced upon them due to County failings’

- Over £1bn of services
- Over 5,500 staff
- 600 systems
- 1000s of contracts to transfer
- Over 300 elected members
- 8 head office locations
- Creation of two large unitary councils
- Creation of a separate Children's Trust
- Integration of health and social care
- Repatriation of external back-office services
- Implementation of four core IT systems
- **£85m Transformation and efficiency savings**

The scale of the task



Programme phases

Proposal to MHCLG
Aug 18

Design Principles

Prospectus for Change
Apr 19

Joint CEOs/Leaders Programme Planning, Governance establishment & joint principles

Discovery Stage

Design Stage

Delivery Stage

Stabilisation Stage

Ongoing improvement & transformation

Implementation of the key requirements for Day 1, new systems and new structures. Close-down of existing Councils

Ensuring all key services are stable and delivering good services with right budgets and staff

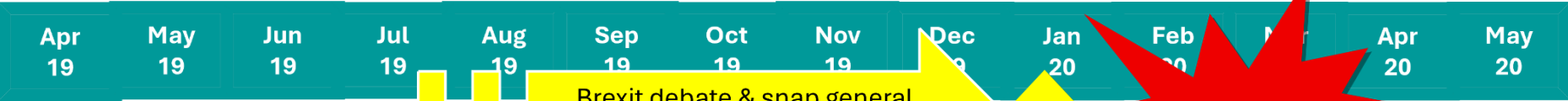
Sos Final Decision
The case for change – Vision & outcomes

baselining and mapping of services, staff, systems across all Councils for new geography

Creation of the blueprints, TOM, values and organisational design of the new Unitary Councils

Go Live – Vesting Day

Elections



Brexit debate & snap general election

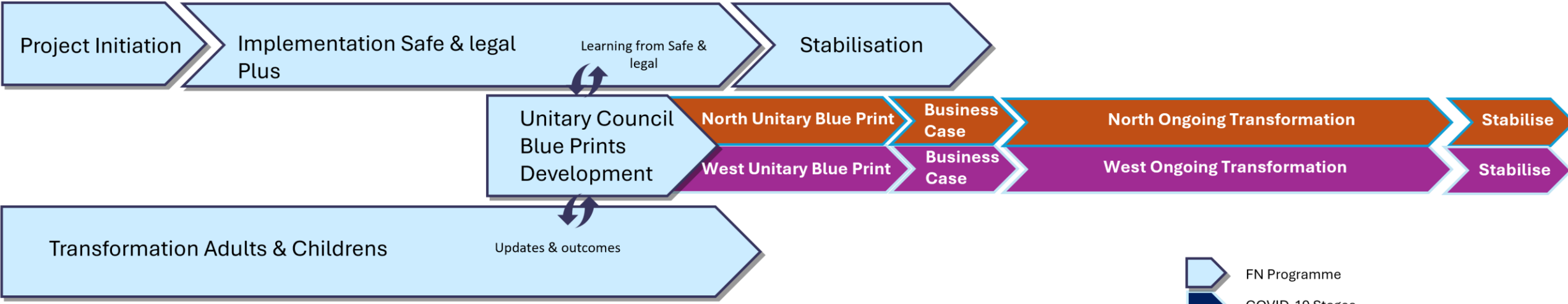
Brexit

COVID

The revised 12-month plan

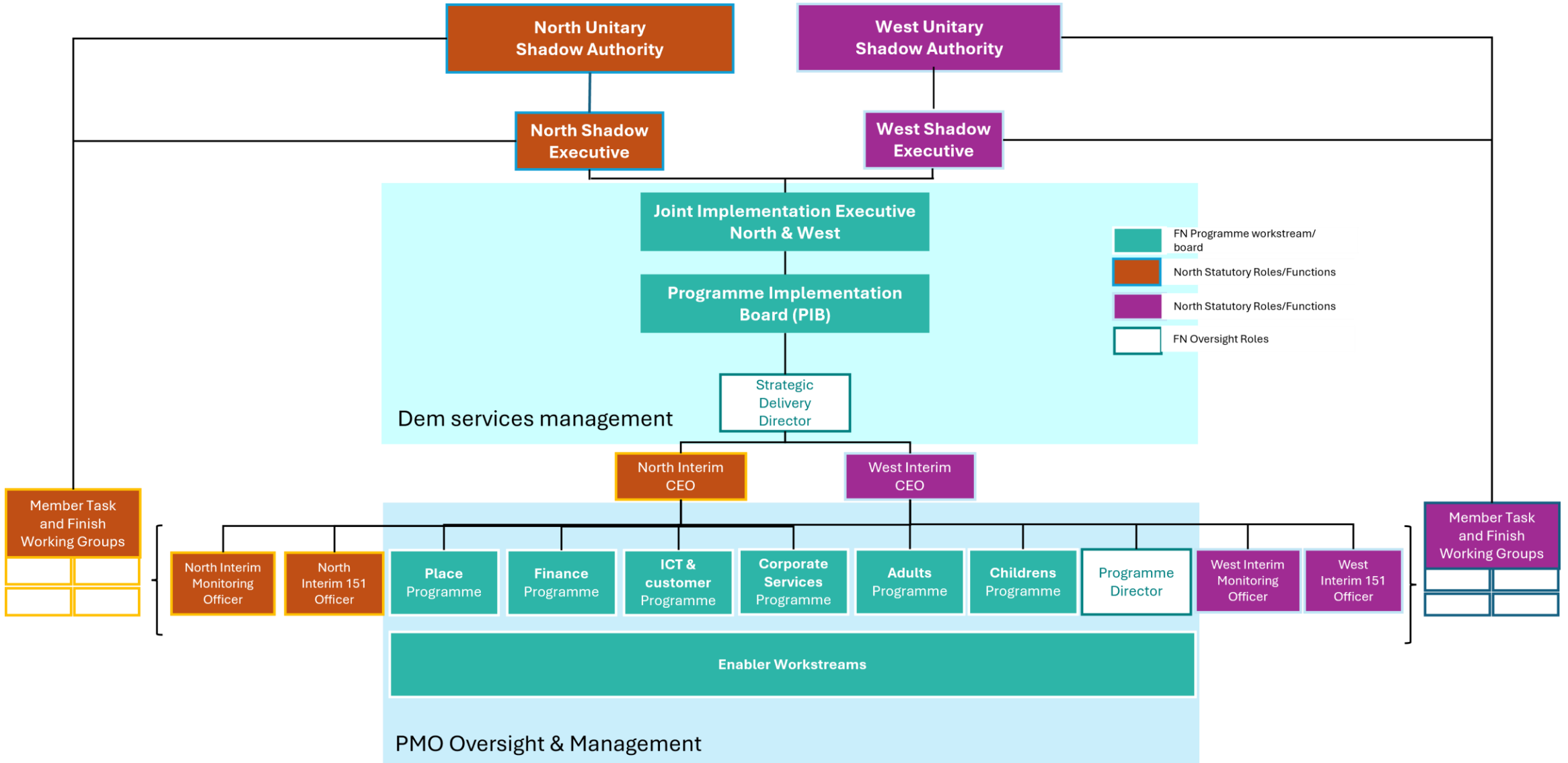
April 20 Jul 20 Sept 20 Dec 20 Mar 21 May 21 Q2 21 Q3 21 Q4 21 Q1 22

Relaunch Integrating Transforming Normalising



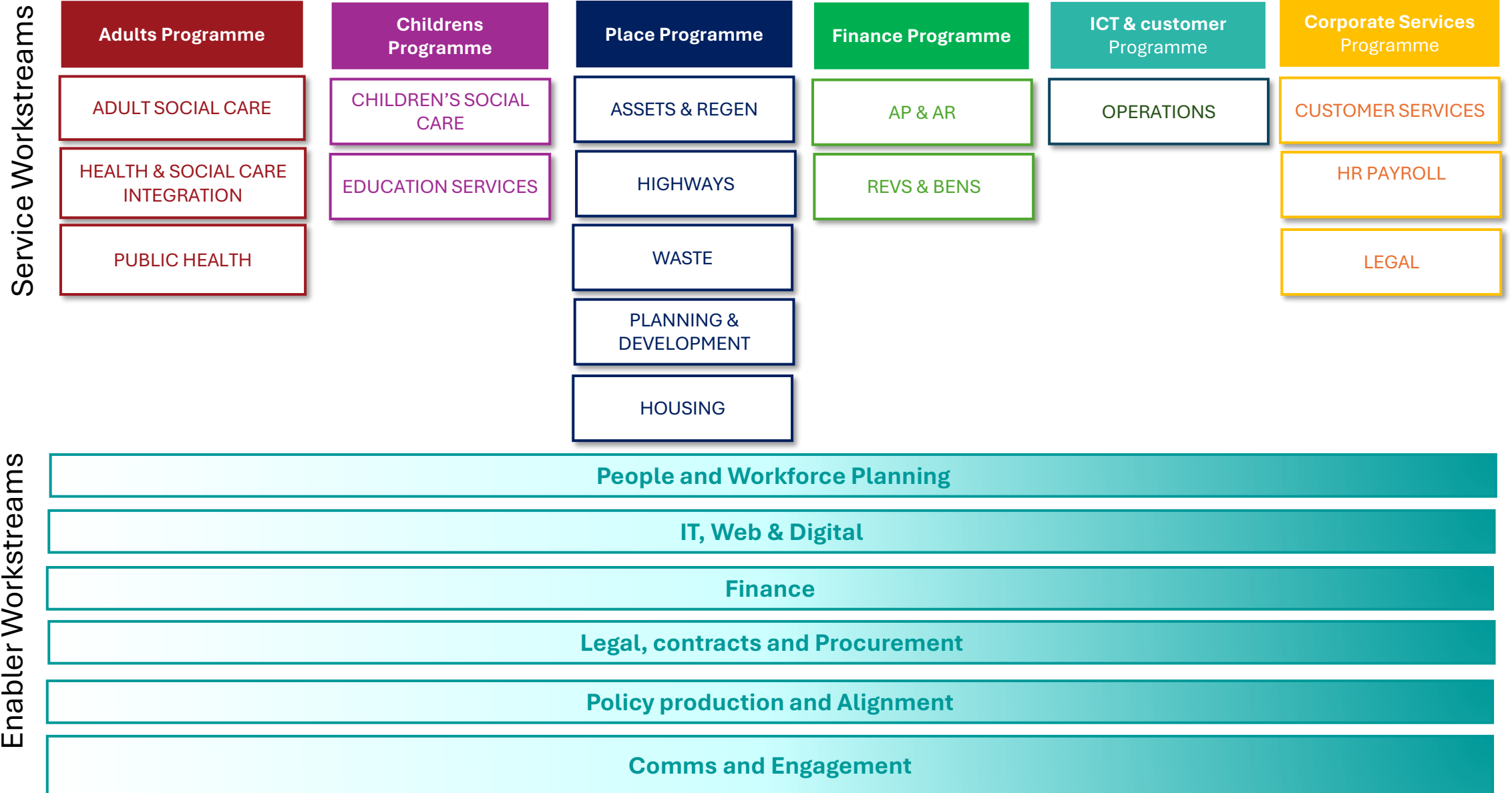
-  FN Programme
-  COVID-19 Stages
-  North Programme
-  West programme

Running the LGR programme



Creating Buy-in

Day 1 Delivery Programme – EACH WITH A CHIEF EXECUTIVE AS SRO



Over 500 critical actions for Safe and Legal on Day One



BASELINE AND DUE DILLIGENCE

Work to ensure that staff, budgets, systems, contracts, buildings, assets, policies and liabilities are understood before we design our new Councils



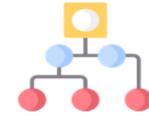
BUDGETS & FINANCE

To oversee the budget preparations and Medium-Term Financial Plan for each unitary authority and split of liabilities, loans, balance sheet and debt



DISAGGREGATION

to determine how Northamptonshire County Council services and their related budgets will be split to the new unitary authorities.



COUNCIL GOVERNANCE

To oversee the development and delivery of the governance arrangements for both the shadow and unitary councils, including committee structures.



DAY 1 ACCOMMODATION

To ensure the unitary authorities have the required accommodation to meet their safe and legal responsibilities from Day One.



DAY 1 STRUCTURE & TOM

Creation of a blueprint setting out the staffing and functions that would come together and where they would sit



SENIOR APPOINTMENTS

To ensure that agreed leadership structures and statutory officer appointments are in place for the unitary authorities.



INNOVATION & DIGITAL

Key new critical systems Adults, Finance, systems that joined up customer contact, new websites and MS365 rollout



COMMS & ENGAGEMENT

To oversee the development and development of an engagement plan for staff, union, customers and stakeholder .



VISION & CULTURE

to establish a high-level vision and values statement for each unitary authority..



TRANSFORMATION

To develop a programme to drive transformation that's embedded in officers' and members' day jobs in the new organisations.



COUNCIL TAX HARMONISATION

to develop a process whereby within an agreed period, council tax rates in all areas within a unitary authority will become the same.

The need for a clear and shared vision

- **Our prospectus for change** - created early understanding of where we were heading, what will be different and better and plan of how we will get there:
 - Design principles
 - Priorities
 - Ambition for the future
 - Transformation delivery
 - Delivery plan
 - Cost
 - What would be better!
- **Members set the tone for public and staff**
- 300-member workshop – “what a good council looks like” setting visioning and design principles
- Member involvement sustained throughout our journey – Leaders Design board, Joint implementation Executive, members working groups for knotty issues

Managing change from within

- Early decision to staff and lead the programme with internal staff
 - Greater ownership
 - Being part of exciting change
 - Less cost
- External consultants kept to minimum in key roles for skills and capacity only
- Strategic Delivery director from County Council – no future aspiration
- Each programme workstream headed by a Chief Exec of Ds & Bs
- Frontline staff heavily engaged to ensure two-way feedback via 200+ change champions
- Senior staff stepped up to lead specialist areas in the programme – ownership of the future - Backfill in the day job
- Tier 3 & 4 managers critical in the last 3 months before vesting day, they will be needed to work on the detail and preparing their services to go live

Engaging colleagues on the journey

- Consistency and co-ordination key
- Familiarity + visibility = reassurance
- Cascade comms through existing channels where possible
- Communicate the timeline and milestones
- Use comms to tackle assumptions – particularly made by D&Bs
- Involve and engage to bring people on the journey – Change Champions
- Always consider tone and language and avoid the transformation jargon
- Fill the comms vacuum, reduce the rumour mill
- You can never have too many FAQs
- Make change feel good!

Developing a One Council culture

- Developed vision and values as early as possible before Day One
- Cross-party member task and finish group engaged focus groups of staff, members, community groups and young people
- Build the values into your culture early on – eg staff awards, performance framework, employer branding
- Engage and empower colleagues in building the culture by setting up staff networks for Day One
- Embed the vision and values in all your comms messaging

Communicating and engaging communities

- A simple, collective LGR identity that can evolve with your journey
- Dedicated and strong online presence for the programme and shadow authorities supported by all councils
- A clear comms and engagement strategy regularly reviewed at each stage in line with changing stakeholder needs
- Shift in focus closer to Day One - 3-month build-up emphasised residents need-to-knows:
seamless service continuity,
all services under one roof, customer signposting
- Regular Day One prep updates through existing councils comms channels then closed down at 'go live' and switched to new unitary feeds
- Major rebranding exercise delivered in-house – essential all services are involved and Day One principles established

Addressing assumptions and concerns

Assumption: “There will be significant redundancies on Day 1 and job changes.”

Reality: No significant redundancies except at top tier/senior officers. All councils had significant vacancies.

TUPE moved staff over on existing terms and conditions.

Majority of the workforce saw little change on Day One – same line reports, sat in the same offices. County council staff were predominantly affected through workforce disaggregation (North or West), many did not move locations.

Assumption: “My team will be restructured and its services transformed on Day 1.”

Reality: Hundreds of actions were required to achieve Day One Safe and Legal so focus on restructure and transformation came afterwards. Service harmonisation and disaggregation can be a lengthy process in some areas.

Addressing assumptions and concerns

Assumption: “LGR will just be done to us, it’s a takeover by the larger council and the other councils will just merge into it and fill in the gaps.”

Reality: LGR in Northants was a level playing field across all 8 councils, with shared responsibility for design and delivery of the two new unitaries. Buy-in from all councils absolutely essential for success.

WNC new leadership team a mix of former county, D&B and new colleagues – reflected across the organisation.

Language is very important – not ‘merging or combining’ councils but ‘abolishing and replacing’ with brand new organisations.

Need to start early on developing new vision and values to shape culture.

Same opportunities for everyone, encourage colleagues to get involved and focus on appreciative enquiry in designing and delivering the new councils.

Assumptions versus reality

Concern: “More people are going to leave the councils and workforce stability will get worse.”

Reality: We built a strong team and workforce culture – a place and organisation people love to work

- improved turnover from 17% to 8.5%
- Reduced agency spend from £14m to £7m
- increased staff satisfaction
- Sickness reduced

Better opportunities and development for D&B staff, greater and wider networks of support.

Some people got impatient that change didn't happen fast enough!

Assumptions versus reality

Assumption: “We’re going to lose our identity under LGR”

Reality: In the earlier days of the new Council staff from D&Bs felt a loss – smaller councils felt more personal, it was a big adjustment.

- being in a larger organisation, more ‘red tape’ and longer ‘faceless’ working processes such as IT and HR until familiarised, - could no longer ‘pop round and sort’
- Unfamiliarity with more layers of management to know who you need to speak to.

This changed once staff were familiar with new working practices, open offices and collaboration spaces. Staff surveys now say that our workforce, joint working and team culture is strong.

Staff and members from the smaller councils initially felt they lost that close colleague network and personal touch & the “tea trolley.”

But it was important to mark the legacy and end well so they could ‘mourn’ and move on.

Assumptions versus reality

Assumption: “We’re going to lose our local identity under LGR”

Reality: local identity does not change with LGR, only the councils change.

Residents didn’t really mourn the loss of the councils.

Place identity has been strengthened with the unitary bringing together closer civic links between the towns and parishes, a new chairman across all areas etc.

With a single new council area there’s more of a concerted effort across the organisation to build and develop the identity of the area and promote every part of it.

Residents in the districts had a perception about dilution of local decision-making, reduced planning meetings removing their voice – this did not materialise. Strong locality voice in town and parishes and more engagement on planning, transfer of assets and dedicated relationships leads and contact points.

Reflections on our Journey

- Stabilisation and transformation journey can take longer than anticipated
- Members elected to unitary who had been in Ds and Bs regretted some of the actions and decisions they made before Day One:
 - transferring assets that stopped major regeneration, were expensive to buy out or created ransom strips
 - Saw with hindsight had blocked out opportunities and benefits for residents – at the time thought they were “protecting their legacy and residents from the evil new Council”
 - Agreeing to last minute schemes that turned out not to be feasible
 - Putting in place 999 year leases
- Consider a section 24 notice which deals with the control of disposals, contracts and the reserves of authorities to be dissolved by orders
- Government departments didn't all know we had changed!

Reflections on our Journey

- Better public knowledge and perception of who delivers all their services, less confusion, more consistency, less hand-offs and we can help tackle multiple issues in one place
- We have seen lasting benefits from having housing, children's, adults, communities, planning and public health under one roof, benefits on prevention, reducing costs, maximising income and better resident outcomes
- Better joint working with health and other partners
- Better comms and engagement with the public - we can communicate more clearly with fewer layers of cllrs and councils all trying to shout the loudest to residents
- 70% of KPIs are better than vesting day – the ones that aren't relate to Public Health and school exclusions both national trends post COVID

The last word(s)

What has been achieved in the past four years is nothing short of phenomenal. You picked up the biggest pile of rubble and ashes and managed to create a cohesive organisation with four completely different cultures.

We have pulled this together literally from ground zero and built an organisation we can be proud of on solid foundations.

Council programme manager September 25

There is absolutely no doubt that you are leaving this part of the county in a far better state than you took it on and from this significant rate payer!

CEO Silverstone Circuit

There is a positive culture across the council, with a tangible upbeat energy Staff told us that they are keen to work at WNC and that its growing, positive reputation as a new organisation means new people are keen to join the council, both from other local authorities and from the wider employment market

Corporate Peer review LGA Mar 2024



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Thanks for listening

Becky Hutson

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