

Martin Whiteley and Kim Sawyer
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority
By email

24 August 2018

Dear Martin and Kim,

At the meeting of the Cambridgeshire Public Service Board (CPSB) on Friday we had a very wide ranging and open discussion about a number of issues relating to the Combined Authority (CA) which I need to share with you both.

The agenda had a number of items relating to forward plan of CA business and programmes to use CPSB as the first airing of items/papers as we have previously agreed, but unfortunately no-one was able to attend. In your absence I approached your team for briefings and without exception they were all really helpful in giving updates on the matters upcoming in the September round of Leaders' Strategy Sessions, and I am grateful for the time that they put in to helping us through these items. The following is no reflection on them or their input but it was clear that during the discussion CPSB members had limited or incomplete information on a number of major items coming to the Leaders Strategy Sessions in early September.

As you know, as a collective and as individuals the members of CPSB are ambitious for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and keen to lend our collective weight and influence to the challenging agendas ahead of us. Those of us who are constituent members of the CA are also collectively responsible for ensuring that the CA makes good evidence based decisions in an open and transparent manner.

We have discussed a number of times the need to be involved at an early stage on significant issues coming before the CA, but the lack of on-going productive engagement and the way some decisions are being handled is now causing real concern. In the absence of senior officers at CPSB to discuss these issues directly, we decided collectively we needed to put some of our concerns in writing to you.

Let me be specific:

Overall governance:

We understand that the CA is not a local council and so does not have exactly the same governance structure as the constituent councils, however many of the same principles and rules apply. It is still a public body and so has fiduciary duties relating to the spend

of public money and the principles of good governance relating to decision making, including properly defined checks and balances.

There is an increasing concern that the rules of operation that you are using are not clear or widely understood.

Constitutional issues:

We are concerned that decisions are being made which do not align with the requirements of the CA Constitution. For example, the portfolios to which the Mayor appoints need to be agreed by the CA before the Mayor appoints to them. The Constitution needs updating following the July Board (the delegation is with Kim) in order to capture the correct portfolios that the Mayor is now seeking to appoint to; without that update the Mayor has a different range of portfolios recorded and so should be appointing to those rather than the list recently circulated to Leaders of councils. Reports to Leaders are often framed in terms of what the Mayor wishes to do when, constitutionally, the Mayor is not the decision maker, it is the CA. For example the recent note outlines the Mayor's proposals on appointment to committees, but as they are committees of the CA, the power lies with the Board to make those appointments.

Investment Strategy:

There has been no discussion with CPSB on this and the direction of travel and it is being suggested a draft report will not be available until 4 September for Leaders to consider on 6 September.

The lack of visibility of this work is concerning.

Housing spend:

Decisions have been and continue to be made about the allocation of funding without criteria being agreed to guide those investment decisions; this is a basic protective device of good governance in the allocation of public money particularly as in this instance it is often being used to subsidise developer activity. A business plan was agreed in March 2017 and in March 2018 draft criteria were appended to a report allocating money, but were not agreed at that meeting. In between we have had housing presentations to informal meetings of the Leaders. We are concerned that in the absence of fully agreed criteria that consistency and transparency of decision making cannot be guaranteed. An item is scheduled for the September meeting of the Board, but it does not appear on any informal meeting agenda, is this an oversight?

Sharing of information:

As we have all acknowledged the informal strategy sessions are not working effectively. Most Leaders prefer to have papers in advance so that they can properly reflect on the issues that they are being invited to have a view on, and where necessary seek advice of their respective officers; in spite of repeated requests the practice persists of on the day presentations. The informality of these and the fact many have not been minuted, makes it very hard to see the audit trail of what Leaders have said and agreed to and what they have simply been shown, but not necessarily given agreement.

Local Industrial Strategy:

We understand consultants are in the process of being appointed to lead this work. We have not seen any terms of reference for this work and are not clear when this was agreed.

Skills Strategy:

A central plank of the deal that was negotiated for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough was around providing the means by which the fantastic growth of the area can be supported into the future, and skills lay at the heart of that. Having been deferred from the July cycle of meetings this item is now becoming urgent. As of today, there has been no direct input from CPSB individually or through the constituent councils at a senior level. There is a low level of confidence that this work will be ready.

New Co:

Some members of CPSB have been told that a company is being set up as a delivery vehicle for the skills agenda and for market towns strategies (the delivery of actions coming out of them, we assume). There was some suggestion that this company has already been registered, though this point was not very clear as different members of CPSB had heard slightly different things and some had not been briefed or consulted on the issue at all. We would ask for this paper to be withdrawn from the Leader's workshop on 4 September as it would be premature to bring to Leaders without the input of officers of the constituent councils in advance. The CPIER report is important in this context as a number of the items we are discussing would be 'framed' by the final CPIER report so it seems odd to be deciding issues such as economic delivery vehicles before Leaders have had chance to understand the Commission's recommendations.

As far as we are aware the CA does not appear to have made a formal decision to set a company up nor agreed the terms of reference for it, so if a company has been registered this would appear premature at best. Some of the suggested purposes of the company would seem to cut across the activities of existing organisations so we would expect that that the constituent councils would be fully involved in agreeing and endorsing a decision to set-up a trading body as a solution to a properly defined problem.

Observers' access to information:

Neither of the observers to the CA are routinely copied into informal correspondence from the CA or the Mayor, and whilst some of this may not be relevant, the omission of the observers does raise a question of their overall status and their ability to meaningfully engage with the formal agenda once it emerges.

LEP geography:

The Government set deadline for submissions of views on geography is very short and this is quite rightly being recognised within our own LEP as well as those across the country. However, whilst efforts have been made to seek the views of those councils currently within the LEP but not the CA, no similar approach has been taken with the constituent councils of the CA. Any decision on the LEP geography has a direct link to the CA geography and the CA in this instance is the constituent councils who, as you are aware, each agreed to set up the CA on the current geography following a full governance review.

Secondly, despite the issue being raised at a Leaders' Strategy Session some time ago, there has been no assessment by officers on the risks and opportunities for the CA from an expanded geography. Nor has there been any agreement of criteria by the CA might assess any proposals coming forward from the wider geography.

Given the deadlines we are working to here this matter is urgent and we risk a partial debate without fully understanding the choices and options open to us.

There was a universal recognition of our need to express our concerns in writing and I hope that you take them in the spirit that they are being offered, which is that we all need to be at our best for the people of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, they deserve no less. The hope is that this will bring about some actions and all members of CPSB are keen to create space so that we work as efficiently and effectively as we can. To this end there was a suggestion that now that your permanent team is taking shape that an informal officer meeting with your Directors and CPSB would be a helpful way to build relationships. As a final sign off, all members of CPSB, with the exception of John Hill, have agreed to the contents and sentiment of this note and we look forward with interest to your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joanne Lancaster', with a large, stylized initial 'J'.

Mrs Joanne Lancaster
Chair of CPSB

And on behalf of:

Antoinette Jackson, Cambridge City Council

Alec Wood, Cambridgeshire Constabulary

Gillian Beasley, Cambridgeshire County Council / Peterborough City Council

Chris Strickland, Cambridgeshire Fire & Rescue Service

Jess Bawden, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group

Paul Medd, Fenland DC

Rachel Stopard, Greater Cambridge Partnership

Dorothy Gregson, Police & Crime Commissioner's Office

Beverly Agass, South Cambridgeshire DC