

MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF THE AYLESBURY VALE DISTRICT COUNCIL

16 JANUARY 2017

This meeting was webcast. To review the detailed discussions that took place please see the webcast which can be found at:

<http://www.aylesburyvaledc.publici.tv/core/portal/home>

PRESENT: Councillor J Bloom (Chairman); Councillors S Renshell (Vice-Chairman), B Adams, C Adams, J Blake, N Blake, A Bond, S Bowles, Branston, B Chapple OBE, J Chilver, A Christensen, A Cole, S Cole, M Collins, P Cooper, M Edmonds, B Everitt, P Fealey, B Foster, N Glover, A Harrison, M Hawkett, K Hewson, T Hunter-Watts, A Huxley, P Irwin, S Jenkins, R Khan, R King, S Lambert, A Macpherson, T Mills, L Monger, G Moore, H Mordue, C Paternoster, C Poll, G Powell, M Rand, E Sims, M Smith, M Stamp, Sir Beville Stanier Bt, P Strachan, R Stuchbury, D Town, J Ward, W Whyte and M Winn

APOLOGIES: Councillors P Agoro, M Bateman, J Brandis, S Chapple, T Hussain, N Lewis, B Russel and A Southam

WEBCASTING

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Chairman reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the internet and be capable of repeated viewing.

Members of the audience who did not wish to be on camera were invited to move to a marked area at the side of the chamber.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of Council held on 7 December, 2016, be approved as a correct record.

2. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were none.

3. MODERNISING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Members were invited to consider making a submission to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and Section 15 of the Cities and Devolution Act 2016.

In January last year, legislation had been enacted in the form of the provisions in the Cities and Devolution Act which allowed the Secretary of State to make Regulations with consensus or if that was not achievable, with the consent of at least one relevant authority. On 27th September, 2016 Buckinghamshire County Council had made a submission which proposed the creation of a unitary council to cover the existing administrative area of the County Council.

The four leaders of the District Councils had previously determined that they would commission a report from Deloitte to consider the range of options available for the future of local government in Buckinghamshire. The Districts' Strategic Options Case had been published in October, 2016. The report had indicated a timetable for the

preparation of a business case following stakeholder engagement on the Strategic Options Case. The stakeholder engagement had subsequently been completed which had been supportive of a unitary model different to that which had been proposed by the County Council, and whilst finely balanced had been more supportive of a north and south unitary.

On 28 November, 2016, the Leader of the Council had received a letter from the Secretary of State stating that he intended to consider the submission from the County Council and to avoid uncertainty, the decision would be taken without delay. A telephone conversation had taken place with Civil Servants which had indicated that the timetable of the end of February, 2017, which the Districts had set out for completion of their business case, would be too late. Several attempts had been made to establish the exact timetable for a decision but no clear indication had been given.

On 19 December, the Leader had received a further letter from the Secretary of State which had indicated that if a submission were to be made before he had reached a preliminary decision on the County Council's proposal, he would carefully consider it. In the circumstances, the Leaders of the four District Councils within the County had prepared a draft Executive Summary (attached to the Council report) which had been submitted to the Secretary of State before the end of the year, together with a covering letter stating that a formal submission would be presented to each of the four District Councils on 16 January, which if approved would be submitted the following day.

Members were aware that the County of Buckinghamshire had been the subject of a number of previous attempts to move from two tier to unitary governance. In 1997, Milton Keynes had become a unitary council whilst the remainder of the County continued to be two tier. The financial climate and the difficulties it was facing in presenting a balanced budget had prompted the County Council to actively pursue the establishment of a unitary council for the whole of its current administrative area. It had announced early in the year its intention to look at the single option of a unitary council based upon its own administrative area. Later in the process, the Council had felt it necessary to include alternative options in its submission. After the submission had been presented, it had also produced a strategic options case similar to that which had been prepared by the Districts which attempted to consider options afresh, although by this stage the business case for the original sole option had been submitted to the Secretary of State.

The Districts had started with the view that the answer was not clear and had undertaken the work towards the preparation of a Strategic Options Case to help them to make an informed decision. As an internal report would be prepared by those who would be directly impacted by the decision, the report had been commissioned from Deloitte. It had been felt that independent verification by each of the District Councils was not sufficient to ensure genuine independence in the process.

The Strategic Options Case (also attached to the Council report), provided information which had enabled the Districts to carefully consider the delivery options, and models of social care which would help to bring about transformation alongside structural change. In particular it had been considered that it was essential to ensure that any future model would be sustainable.

The Districts paper had considered a number of key factors:-

- The economic geography and structure most likely to support growth and provide the housing required.
- The arrangements which would provide the greatest accountability and transparency and ensure that the voice of residents was heard.

- The model that would best support the improvement of services, particularly those that were currently failing.
- The arrangements that would provide services which offered the greatest value for money.

The draft submission from the District Councils set out the analysis of those key areas.

A statement in relation to the stakeholder engagement conducted by the District Councils was submitted. The draft submission proposed that the five councils that currently operated on a two tier basis should be abolished and examined two models for unitary governance across the whole of Buckinghamshire, namely one new unitary and Milton Keynes and two unitary councils and Milton Keynes. In the two unitary model, one unitary council would cover the north of the County and the other would cover the existing area of the three southern district councils.

A copy of the detailed submission prepared by the County Council and a copy of the latest draft submission prepared by the District Councils were submitted. Both options proposed savings. The County Council proposal included greater savings than that provided by the Districts, but the Districts model provided better value for money through reducing the cost of provision and increased revenue from economic growth. The savings proposed over a five year period were £72.9 million and £57.4 million respectively. The savings were set within an overall budget across the County of £6.8 billion over the same period. The proposed savings remained small at 1.1% and 0.8%, respectively.

As previously mentioned, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 set out the procedure for the creation of a unitary authority. Section 15 of the Cities and Devolution Act 2016 allowed the Secretary of State to make Regulations to modify the procedure where there was consensus between authorities. Where consensus did not exist, the Act also gave the Secretary of State the power to impose solutions, provided at least one authority consented. The Act did not set any criteria for the imposition of a solution on an area, and did not require any specific consultation with the local population or interested parties before a decision was made.

The Secretary of State had made it clear that he intended to consider whether Buckinghamshire should move to a unitary form of governance and abolish the existing two tier arrangements. He had also indicated his intention to consider both proposals before a final decision was made. He had however said that if the Districts submission was not received before he had formed a view about the proposal already before him, he would proceed to reach an initial view on that proposal.

Having given a resume of the position culminating in the report now before Council, and having reminded Members of the detailed discussions at the Seminar held on 11 January, 2016, Councillor N Blake proposed the following which was seconded by Councillor Mrs J Blake:-

- “(1) That the Strategic Options Case, attached as Appendix 2 to the Council report, be endorsed.
- (2) That the submission prepared by the District Councils be supported.
- (3) That the Leader of the Council be given delegated authority to make minor amendments and to make the submission on behalf of the Council to the Secretary of State.”

It was thereupon proposed by Councillor Monger and duly seconded:-

“That the original proposition be replaced by the following:-

- (1) That the Strategic Options Case, attached as Appendix 2 to the Council report be endorsed, and the submission prepared by the District Councils be supported, and that the Leader of the Council be given delegated authority to make minor amendments and to make the submission on behalf of the Council to the Secretary of State.
- (2) That a Steering Group be established to work with the Leader of the Council, officers and consultants to further develop and subsequently implement the strategic business case through to the formation of the new council.”

Councillor N Blake, with the consent of Council, agreed to withdraw his original proposition in favour of the amendment, which now became the substantive motion.

Having debated the principal issues relating to the future of local government in Buckinghamshire, the substantive motion was put to the vote and declared to be CARRIED. It was accordingly,

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Strategic Options Case, attached as Appendix 2 to the Council report, be endorsed, and the submission prepared by the District Councils be supported, and that the Leader of the Council be given delegated authority to make minor amendments and to make the submission to the Secretary of State.
- (2) That a Steering Group be established to work with the Leader of the Council, officers and consultants to further develop and subsequently implement the strategic business case through to the formation of the new council.

NOTE: Councillors W Chapple and A Huxley each asked that their abstention be recorded in the Minutes.