

**COUNCILLOR NEIL BLAKE  
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

**1 Purpose**

- 1.1 To note the Secretary of State's minded to decision regarding Modernising Local Government in the County, and to consider the approach to making representations.

**2 Recommendations/for decision**

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| 2.1 | To note the Secretary of State's minded to decision published on the 12 March 2018 (Annex A).  |
| 2.2 | Agree to make representations to the Secretary of State on the issues identified following the debate at the Special Council Meeting.  |
| 2.3 | Agree an initial budget to support the necessary actions in making the representations.  |
| 2.4 | To delegate the final wording of the representations to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader, and to take any urgent actions that might be required after consultation with the cross party leaders group referred to in 2.5. |
| 2.5 | To reconstitute the AVDC Group Leaders Group to act as a way of communicating with all members across the council on unitary issues as they develop.   |

**3 Supporting information**

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the Council has had a long term ambition to become a unitary council, driven by the opportunities that this will give in being able to serve its residents in the best possible way into the future.
- 3.2 At the meeting of Council on 16 January 2017 it was agreed to submit a unitary bid to the Secretary of State to deliver a two unitary model for the County. In September 2016 the County Council submitted a case for a single unitary model. This report does not rehearse the bids in any way, but members are advised to read the Council report of 16 January 2017 if they require further background. The two unitary bid can be found on our website - <https://www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/modernising-local-government>.
- 3.3 Since the submissions officers and cabinet have kept Council's ambition for unitary status alive, through actions at meetings, events and presentations where suitable audiences are in attendance. We have also not let the debate distract from the day to day running of the council, meaning we have continued to make considerable strides including having a four year balanced budget, as well as a comprehensive transformation of the organisations structure designed with the customer being at the heart of everything the council does.
- 3.4 On the 12 March 2018 the Secretary of State issued a minded to decision in favour of a single county wide unitary (see Annex A for the full announcement). This announcement is followed by a representation period expiring on 25 May 2018.

- 3.5 Following the representation period, the process is then for the Secretary of State to lay orders to effect the change, assuming nothing in the representations gives him cause to reconsider. It is then a final Parliamentary decision to finally enact the process. The timings of this process are, at the time of writing the report, unclear and dependant on available parliamentary time.
- 3.6 At the meeting we will hold an open debate on the Secretary of State's announcement. Following debate we will seek to summarise the main areas of focus for the representations. The recommendations propose that submission of the full representations are delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader to ensure that our response has as much time as possible to be worked on, and also ensure it is as current as it can be before submission, taking account of the views expressed by Council.
- 3.7 As all members will be interested in the development of the unitary bids now that the minded to decision has been made, it is proposed to reconstitute the AVDC Group Leaders Group (Leader of the Council, Councillors Christensen, Cooper and Stuchbury) so that there is an informal way of ensuring members are kept appraised of any developments between formal meetings.

#### **4 Options considered**

- 4.1 None

#### **5 Reasons for Recommendation**

- 5.1 To enable representations to be made to the Secretary of State following his announcement.

#### **6 Resource implications**

- 6.1 As with all representations of this type it is likely that there will be funding required to either develop further evidence base, or to undertake supporting activities, and as such the recommendations include a preliminary budget to be made available from working balances.

## **ANNEX A – Secretary of States Statement**

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICY: Written statement -HLWS515 12 March 2018**

**My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid) has today made the following Written Ministerial Statement.**

I am today announcing how I am minded to proceed in response to the locally-led proposals that I have received for improving local government in Buckinghamshire. Currently in the administrative county of Buckinghamshire, there is a two-tier structure of Buckinghamshire County Council and the district councils of Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, High Wycombe, and South Bucks.

There is broad local consent for change in Buckinghamshire, though there have been two alternative approaches for how precisely it should be configured. In September 2016 and January 2017, I received locally-led proposals for replacing the current structure, in one case with a single new unitary council and in the other case with two new unitary councils – one for the area of Aylesbury Vale and the other for the remainder of the current county area.

Having carefully considered all the material and representations I have received, I am minded to implement, subject to Parliamentary approval and further discussions, the locally-led proposal to replace the existing five councils across Buckinghamshire with a single council for the area.

I am satisfied that this new single council, if established, is likely to improve local government and service delivery in the county, generating savings, increasing financial resilience, facilitating a more strategic and holistic approach to planning and housing challenges, and sustaining good local services. I am also satisfied that across Buckinghamshire as a whole there is a good deal of local support for this new council, and that the area of the council represents a credible geography.

Whereas, I am equally satisfied that establishing two councils for the current county area is unlikely to improve local government in the area, generate significant savings, or provide the capacity to sustain major services or to address planning and housing challenges. I believe the areas of the two councils would not represent a credible geography or clear local identity, and that there is significantly less local support for two councils than for a single council. Accordingly, I am not minded to proceed with the proposal for establishing two councils.

Notwithstanding, I am clear that in relation to establishing a single council further steps are needed to secure local consent amongst the local partners, and I hope this 'minded to' announcement will facilitate the necessary discussions to deliver this local agreement.

Before I take my final decision, there is now a period until 25 May 2018 during which those interested may make further representations to me, including that if a proposal is implemented it is with suggested modifications. The final decision would also be subject to Parliamentary approval.