

**Publication
Date:
6 December
2018**

CHILTERN DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Extraordinary CABINET Meeting held on 27 NOVEMBER 2018

PRESENT Councillors I Darby - Leader
M Stannard - Deputy Leader
P Martin
M Smith
E Walsh
F Wilson

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors J MacBean and L Smith

144 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors I Darby and P E C Martin declared a personal interest in Item 4 (Implementation of a New Unitary District Council) being Members of Buckinghamshire County Council.

145 CURRENT ISSUES

Councillor F Wilson – Customer Experience Strategy: Presentation by GOSS Interactive

On Monday 26 November 2018 Members were invited to meet the Council's technology partner GOSS Interactive. The demonstration showed how the Council's new digital platform would operate and the functionalities that would be provided to customers. It was noted that organisations that had redesigned digital services had demonstrated how reliance on other communication channels such as telephone could be significantly reduced.

Councillor P E C Martin – Chiltern and South Bucks Annual Business Event 2018

The Council's Annual Business Event took place on 19 November 2018. It was noted that 100 businesses were present and feedback received had been very positive with 96% of attendees saying that they would attend a similar event in the future. Thanks were expressed to the Economic Development team for the event.

146 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW DISTRICT UNITARY COUNCIL

On 1 November 2018, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, James Brokenshire announced a decision in favour of a single new unitary District Council, for the whole of the current administrative area of Buckinghamshire County Council, in a Written Ministerial Statement (WMS). The new authority would be implemented on 1st April 2020 and elections to the Council would take place on 7th May 2020. The statement included some matters which are decided and other matters which he intends to consult on before reaching a decision.

The report requested that the Cabinet recommend to Council the process for agreeing the wording of representations to be made in response to the WMS in time for the deadline on 30 November 2018. It also sought to ensure that sufficient resources were available to enable the authority to respond to the requirements of the proposed Structural Change Orders and to support transition within the Council. The amount of financial resources required for implementation was unknown at this stage, but this was something the Council would need to make provision for.

The Leader presented the report and asked that the words "other District Leaders" be inserted after the word "Leader" in recommendation 2.

The Leader then reflected on the background to the WMS. Reference was made to the previous Pathfinder project involving sharing services across the Districts and County Council; the Secretary of State's "minded to" decision announced in Parliament on 12 March 2018; and the snap General Election held on 8 June 2017.

Whilst it was sad that the Council would no longer exist from 1 April 2020 this also provided a fantastic opportunity to build a new Unitary District Council. It was therefore important to make sure that the new Council was the very best that it can be.

The timescales for its implementation, set out by the MHCLG, were very short. The draft Orders were based largely on those from the Dorset local government reorganisation. The draft Orders were due to be laid in Parliament on 14 January 2019 which meant that the final content needed to be agreed in early December, and representations from Councils on the detail of those draft Orders were required by 30 November 2018, at the latest. As a result there had been many discussions between Council Leaders over the past few weeks on the detail of the proposed Orders. There was already agreement on some areas, but not all, and the aim was to reach agreement on all areas, if possible.

The Districts all had Council meetings scheduled to consider making submissions to the Secretary of State before 30 November 2018.

The Leader then sought Members' views on a number of items. With regard to the local elections due to be held in 2019 it was generally agreed by all Leaders that these should be postponed until May 2020 to coincide with elections to the new authority to avoid new District Members being appointed for just one year. The Town and Parish Council elections in 2019 would also be postponed until 2020.

Regarding the size of the new District Unitary Council it was noted that the Secretary of State had reflected on this and was considering 147 Members (3 Member Wards). The Cabinet referred to the volume of representations sent to the Secretary of State following the "minded to" announcement which highlighted the level of local concern. The proposal for 147 Members represented a significant reduction in Members and yet there would still be the same number of residents in the area and the same services would still need to be provided. Councillors were often residents' first point of contact and it was therefore important to ensure there were enough Councillors to respond to residents' queries.

It was felt that 147 Members were required in order to adequately represent residents' views, and that fewer Members would not be sufficient. The Cabinet, after noting that the Local Government Boundary Commission would review Council size and ward boundaries during the Council's first term of office, endorsed the proposal for 147 Members.

The Cabinet noted that there was currently no agreement on the composition of the Shadow Executive and that discussions on this item were ongoing, however the Districts agreed that there should be equal representation from each Council which the Cabinet supported.

The election of the Leader of the Shadow Executive was discussed. The options included election by: Members of the Shadow Authority, Members of the Shadow Executive, or appointment by the Secretary of State which would be specified in the draft Orders. The implementation timetable was very tight so it was important to have good representation and broad support for the Leader from across the membership of the Shadow Authority. The Council's Leader and Chief Executive were suggested as ideal candidates for leading the new District Unitary Council.

Currently, there was no agreement on whether “twin hatted” Members who were both a District and County Councillor should have one or two votes on the Shadow Authority. This was therefore still subject to further discussion.

It was also important to note that the Shadow Authority only has to have “regard to” the proposal put forward by Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC). This was significant since it meant that the way the Council operated could be different to BCC’s proposals which was already 2 years old and did not reflect recent technological advances. The impact of digital transformation on service delivery was highlighted. The Council had already demonstrated experience of utilising technology, making savings and implementing shared services since the proposals were made. It was therefore important to keep all options open and consider how technology can help the new District Unitary Council deliver better services to its residents.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

1. That the wording of the representations to be made in response to the Written Ministerial Statement and the proposed content of the Structural Change Orders on single tier arrangements for Buckinghamshire be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Leader.

2. That it be noted that the Leader will continue to take part in discussions with the County Leader, other District Leaders, Ministers and other parties with a view to taking forward the implementation provided that where decisions are required from this authority these will be made in accordance with existing governance requirements.

3. That a provisional budget be set aside in 2019/20 for the delivery of the implementation to include the proportion of the costs of the Shadow Authority as may be required, project management resource and provision for potential redundancy costs in 2019/20 that may fall directly to Chiltern District Council subject to a review at year end by the Director of Resources in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Support Services.

The meeting ended at 5.05 pm