

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 29 JUNE 2016
DEADLINE FOR CALL-IN: 7 JULY 2016

CABINET

Meeting - 28 June 2016

Present: Mr Bagge, Mr Naylor, Mr Eggleton, Mrs Sullivan and Mr Kelly

6. LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE- EXPLORING FUTURE OPTIONS

The Cabinet received a report considering the current developments regarding unitary local government in Buckinghamshire and seeking authority to fund joint working in order to enable the Council to participate fully in the debate.

The debate concerning local government structures in non-metropolitan “two-tier” areas has gained momentum over recent months in several parts of the Country including Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Hampshire and elsewhere. The national context of this debate has been in terms of The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 which is a major tool for the Government in putting into practice its devolution agenda, including the devolution of powers to any newly created Combined Authorities. Late amendments to the then Bill gave the Secretary of State considerable new powers which allow the Minister to bring about change to local government structures or boundaries in relation to a non-unitary district council area, if at least one local authority in the area agrees.

In 2015 AVDC published a study of the opportunities arising from a 2 unitary model for Buckinghamshire. In May of this year, Bucks CC agreed to fund the production of an outline business case which explores the benefits of a new single unitary model of local government for the geographical area of Buckinghamshire. The Leader of BCC has since written to the District Council Leaders to invite them to collaborate with the County Council in discussions on how local government in Buckinghamshire might be modernised.

Members agreed that there was a need to enter into a debate around local government structures in Buckinghamshire. Initial discussions had taken place between the 4 district Leaders and an agreement reached to work collaboratively to examine the potential options for changing local governance arrangements in Buckinghamshire in the best interests of residents and other stakeholders.

Members considered Cllr. Tett’s suggestion to join the County Council; however the County’s review appears to have a pre-determined outcome of a single unitary council for the whole (excluding Milton Keynes) of Bucks. Given this, it was felt not to be in the residents’ best interests to engage on this basis beyond the open and transparent two-way sharing of financial and other data between the County and Districts

It was agreed that there was a requirement to undertake a significant amount of detailed and specialised work over the coming months, and to jointly commission consultancy assistance to produce a detailed and costed business plan and analysis which tests the various options for structural change.

Members discussed the importance of considering the best interest of the residents when looking at all options.

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It was suggested that BCC be invited to join the Districts in exploring future options within Buckinghamshire. The Leader advised he would discuss this at the Chief Executive and Leaders meeting which was being held on 29 June 2016.

After discussing the report, it was

RESOLVED

1. That work with the other Bucks Councils and any other relevant parties to explore further the potential for unitary local government in Buckinghamshire or other potential governance models be agreed.
2. That independent consultants be appointed, where appropriate in partnership with one or more of the other Bucks Councils, to undertake a detailed feasibility study into the viability of potential changes to local governance in Buckinghamshire including a costed business plan.
3. Authority be delegated to the Acting Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader to commission such further research or studies as may be expedient in the light of future developments concerning local governance proposals.
4. To release up to £50k from reserves to fund the above recommendations.

The meeting terminated at 6.12 pm