

MODERNISING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Officer contact: Catherine Whitehead Ext. 3980
Email: catherine.whitehead@wycombe.gov.uk

Wards affected: All

PROPOSED DECISION

Subject to Cabinet approval, Members are recommended to agree that:

- (i) the wording of the representations to be made to the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government in relation to his 'minded to' decision on single tier arrangements for Buckinghamshire be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader;
- (ii) an allocation from the corporate contingency as reasonably necessary be made to contribute towards the four District Councils duty to raise awareness amongst residents and organisations in the District about the opportunity to make representations; and
- (iii) a Member group on Modernising Local Government be re-established to act as a consultative body on the wording of representations and awareness raising activity.

Reason for Decision

To respond to the announcement of the Minister and to seek to secure the best arrangements for the delivery of services to the residents of the Wycombe District.

To ensure that suitable resources are available to ensure that residents and others are aware of the opportunity to make representations and to ensure that the representations are informed.

Corporate Implications

1. This report has some financial implications which will be determined individually as work progresses.
2. The resource allocation is also being used to ensure that appropriate legal advice is available to the four Districts on the proposed decision.

Executive Summary

3. This report was due to be considered at the Special Cabinet meeting held on Monday 16 April 2018.
4. This report seeks members approval for the method by which the wording of the representations to be made to the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government. It also seeks to ensure that sufficient resources are available to enable those representations to be properly informed and to ensure that residents and others are aware of the opportunity to make representations.

Background and Issues

5. Members will recall that on 17th January 2017, the Council of Wycombe agreed to submit a proposal to the then Minister for Communities and Local Government for a single tier arrangement for the existing two tier part of the County of Buckinghamshire to comprise of two new Councils one in the North covering the current area served by Aylesbury Vale District Council and one in the South covering the areas served by Wycombe, Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils.
6. Members will also recall that in September 2016 the County Council for the current two tier area submitted a proposal for a single tier arrangement which comprised of a single council covering the area currently administered by Buckinghamshire County Council.
7. The Minister delayed consideration of both proposals until after the general election which took place in June 2017 and further until 12th March 2018 when he announced his intention to support a single tier council but to have only one council covering the whole of the current administrative area of the County Council. The statement of the Minister is attached at Appendix A.
8. The statement sets out that the Minister will not make a decision until after a period of representations has concluded which will continue at least until 25th May 2018. The Minister further announced that this would be a new Council.
9. There is no decision on the future of Local Government in Buckinghamshire and it is not anticipated that any decision will be made until there is further detail agree about any single tier arrangements. Nevertheless the Council has been given the opportunity to make representations and in order to do so arrangements need to be put in place to enable the wording of those representations to be agreed.
10. Throughout the period in which the submission was prepared a working group of Members received information and presentations about the progress of the work being carried out across the four Districts to prepare the Strategic Options Case, the stakeholder engagement and the submission. It is suggested that this working group should be reinstated to consider proposed representations.
11. In order that final adjustments to any wording can be made quickly and in order to comply with the timetable set out by the Minister it is proposed that the Chief Executive have the ability to finalise the wording in consultation with the Leader.
12. Throughout the earlier work leading up to the preparation of the submission and beyond Wycombe District Council has continued to work closely with the Leaders of the four Districts of Buckinghamshire and there has been a clear consensus that the interests of the residents of Buckinghamshire would be better served by the proposal for single tier arrangements set out by the District Councils. It is proposed that we continue to work with the other District Councils and to develop our responses together. It is therefore necessary that there is an ability to have some flexibility to amend the wording up to the last minute if necessary.

13. The four District Councils have agreed to jointly procure some legal advice about the proposed decision of the Minister. The legal advice has made it clear that Wycombe District Council along with the other District Councils has a responsibility to ensure that residents and others are aware of the opportunity to make representations. Some resource is therefore being allocated from contingency to ensure that awareness raising can be carried out.

Conclusions

14. The Chief Executive will ensure that Wycombe District Council is able to make appropriate representations and will consult with the Modernising Local Government Members Working Group and the Leaders of the four District Councils for Buckinghamshire as appropriate. (If appropriate, e.g. if a particular option is favoured and, in any event, the reason for the proposed decision.)

Next Steps

15. The proposed approach and wording of the representations to be made to the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government will be presented to the Member Working Group on Modernising Local Government and also to the four Leaders of the District Councils for consideration and agreement.

Background Papers

Council Report 17th January 2017

Submission of the District Councils to the Minister