



## Cabinet 20 December 2011

### Recommendations from the Shared Services Steering Group: 6 December 2011

*Cabinet Member:*  
*Cllr John Griffiths*

*Chairman of the Steering Group:*  
*Cllr David Ray*

#### 1. Communications Shared Service

***RECOMMENDED: - That***

- (1) the Business Case for a Shared Communications Service for Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council, attached as an Exempt Appendix to Report SSG11/005, be approved; and***
- (2) the allocation of £17,000 transitional funding for 2012/2013 be approved.***

On 6 December 2011, the Shared Services Steering Group considered Report SSG11/005, supported by an Exempt Appendix which was the Business Case. As a result, the Steering Group endorsed the recommendations detailed above.

Attached to this report is a copy of Report SSG11/005 and the Exempt Appendix that was considered by the Shared Services Steering Group.

# Forest Heath District Council St Edmundsbury Borough Council

**SHARED SERVICES  
STEERING GROUP**

**6 DECEMBER 2011**

**SSG11/005**

Report of the Chief Executive (Forest Heath District Council) and Chief Executive (St Edmundsbury Borough Council)

## **COMMUNICATIONS SHARED SERVICE – OPTIONS AND FULL BUSINESS CASE**

### **Synopsis:**

This report summarises the full Business Case, attached as an Appendix, for a shared Communications Service between Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council. The Business Case includes exploration of a number of options, with the preferred option being a single West Suffolk Communications Team covering both Councils. This will result in a shared saving of £43,000 each year. The Business Case also includes a request for transitional funding of £17,000 for 2012/2013 to cover increased communication demands over a period of major change for both partners and to help provide specific support and training to services over this period.

### **Commentary:**

1. Effective external and internal communications are essential elements of service delivery. Every council service at some point needs to inform and encourage two-way engagement with people in the area, including Council Tax payers, businesses, visitors and each service's stakeholders.
2. Currently, each Council runs a broadly similar communications function covering media relations, website content, customer service, corporate and service communications, such as publications and events, internal communications with staff and councillors, project planning, crisis management and business continuity. There are differences in the way the service is delivered between the two authorities, especially at strategic level.
3. A number of options for the delivery of the Communications Service were considered:
  - ◆ a single integrated communications service for both councils;
  - ◆ status quo;
  - ◆ third party supplier;
  - ◆ two separate teams operating under a single manager; or
  - ◆ a public services partnership.

4. These options are outlined and appraised in more depth in Appendix A of the full business case and were considered by the Shared Services Project Board in June 2011 who confirmed a single integrated team as the preferred option. Other options, such as sharing communications with other public sector agencies, are future possibilities.
5. The main drivers for change are:
  - **delivering savings** – the overarching business need for sharing services is to cut costs during a period of public sector financial austerity;
  - **resilience** – a shared communications team formalises and extends the resilience arrangements currently in place between the two teams;
  - **improvement** – technology and social interaction are changing rapidly and organisations need to be able to use modern methods of communications to reach new audiences whilst maintaining contact with traditional audiences; and
  - **organisational change and transformation** – successful change management is more likely to occur if effective communication is informing internal and external stakeholders of the reasons for the change and the benefits of successful implementation, as well as the details of the change.
6. The vision for the shared communications service is to use strategic involvement to provide a proactive and cost-effective service which meets the communications needs of both councils' internal and external stakeholders.
7. The preferred option is that there should be one communications team operating under a Strategic Communications Manager with communications staff dealing with queries, issues and projects relating to either council individually or as a joint agenda. A staff presence would be maintained at both main sites. There would be some change in emphasis in relation to certain aspects of communications work. In particular there would be a strengthened approach to strategic issues to enable communications to be more proactive and services would play a greater role in relation to operational communications within their own areas with the communications team in an enabling and advisory role.
8. The West Suffolk Communications Team will enable services to improve their own communications with customers and also help both councils to maintain their individual identities and, when appropriate, speak together as an authoritative voice for West Suffolk. If approved, a single team should be in place by 1<sup>st</sup> May 2012 at the latest. The move to one West Suffolk Communications Team will result in staffing reductions.

### **Transitional Arrangements for 2012/13**

9. Over the course of the next year there will be additional internal and external communications demands because of the major internal structural changes, changes to the delivery of council services in response to the need for cost-saving as well as the Government's legal requirements and a need to effectively engage with services to enable them to move towards the different approach to communications outlined above. A request is thus made for transitional funding of **£17,000** for the year 2012/13 to allow the staffing reductions to be phased in. Without that support there will be gaps in the delivery of communications training

and development to services and support for the overall internal and external change management process.

10. The implications of a single management and service delivery structure between St Edmundsbury Borough Council and Forest Heath District Council on the workload of a West Suffolk Communications Team will become clearer after the new structures and operations are bedded in. Further opportunities for savings in communication spend may occur at this point.

#### **Finance/Budget/Resource Implications**

11. The preferred option would result in budget savings of £43,000 per year.

#### **Environmental Impact/Sustainability/Community Impact**

12. No major environmental impacts other than the impact of moving away from printed material towards more online delivery.

#### **Policy Compliance/Power (including Human Rights Act/Diversity/Consultation)**

13. A shared Communications Service will further investigate different means of communicating with individuals and groups of people. An Equality Impact Assessment and Customer Needs Assessment are included as Appendices C and D of the business case)

#### **Legal Implications**

14. A shared Communications Team will need to comply with the requirements of relevant legislation and codes of practice eg Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

#### **Risk Assessment**

15. A risk analysis has been undertaken and is shown in Appendix B of the Business Case.

#### **Council Priorities/Corporate Objectives**

16. Effective communication with internal and external stakeholders contributes to all priorities and objectives

#### **Recommendation:**

17. **Members of the Steering Group are recommended to:**
  - 1) **Approve the Business Case for a shared Communications Service for the two Councils.**
  - 2) **Approve the allocation of £17,000 transitional funding for 2012/2013.**

## Documents Attached

Appendix – Full Business Case for a Shared Communications Service (to be considered in the Confidential part of the meeting)

David Burnip  
Chief Executive  
Forest Heath District Council  
24 November 2011

Geoff Rivers  
Chief Executive Officer  
St Edmundsbury Borough Council

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