

Council



Forest Heath
District Council

Title of Report:	A Single Council for West Suffolk – Draft Business Case	
Report No:	COU/FH/17/013	
Report to and date/s:	Council	14 June 2017
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Purpose of report:	On 30 May 2017, both Cabinets commissioned Officers to test the option of a single council for West Suffolk against the potential alternatives. This report provides that analysis and seeks the consent of both Councils to undertake a public engagement exercise on the option of a single district-level council.	

<p>Recommendation:</p>	<p>It is recommended that Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Agrees in principle that the draft business case attached at Appendix A demonstrates that a single district-level council for west Suffolk represents the most effective governance arrangements moving forwards; (2) Agrees to test the draft business case through an engagement exercise with the public and other key stakeholders in accordance with the approach set out in para 1.2 below; (3) Notes that the detailed considerations required in forming a single council will continue to be assessed by the Future Governance Member Steering Group set up for this purpose; and (4) Notes that a further report will be brought to both Councils in September, containing the final business case and incorporating the outcomes of the engagement exercise.
<p>Key Decision:</p>	<p><i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i> No, it is not a Key Decision - <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Consultation:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The intention to consider future governance arrangements for local government in West Suffolk was widely communicated on 9 May 2017. Members were briefed individually or through group leaders in advance. The communication also included notification to key stakeholders, and the views expressed in response have been taken into account in the drafting of this report and the business case. • The report sets out the proposed engagement plan which will take place should both Councils agree to the proposals.
<p>Alternative option(s):</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The alternative options are explored within the draft business case

Implications:			
Are there any financial implications? If yes, please give details		Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cost of the public engagement exercise is approximately £20,000 to be jointly funded across the West Suffolk Councils and will be funded from within existing budgets. 	
Are there any staffing implications? If yes, please give details		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Are there any ICT implications? If yes, please give details		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Are there any legal and/or policy implications? If yes, please give details		Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The draft business case needs to take account of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government's tests for changes in governance arrangements and the requirements of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England 	
Are there any equality implications? If yes, please give details		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An equality screening opinion has been undertaken, and attached at Appendix B to this report, which has indicated that there are no negative impacts 	
Risk/opportunity assessment:		<i>(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)</i>	
Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
The opportunity to examine the most effective model of local government for west Suffolk is missed.	Medium	The business case attached at this report demonstrates that a single council is the best option when compared to the alternatives and should be examined by members.	Low
Stakeholders do not understand the proposals and the coverage and conversations cause confusion.	Medium	A robust engagement plan has been prepared to enable effective communication of the key benefits of the proposal.	Low

<p>The opportunity to avoid additional costs to the shared service partnership through diverging financial strategies is missed.</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>The business case attached to this report demonstrates that a single council would create the opportunity to protect shared service savings achieved to date, avoid additional costs through diverging financial strategies, and generate additional cashable savings.</p>	<p>Low</p>
<p>Ward(s) affected:</p>		<p>All Wards</p>	
<p>Background papers: <i>(all background papers are to be published on the website and a link included)</i></p>		<p>Scoping paper presented to Joint Informal Cabinet meetings 30 May: https://democracy.westsuffolk.gov.uk/documents/s20546/CAB.FH.17.026%20The%20Future%20of%20Local%20Government%20in%20West%20Suffolk.pdf</p>	
<p>Documents attached:</p>		<p>Appendix A: Draft Business Case for a Single Council for west Suffolk Appendix B: Equalities Impact Assessment</p>	

1. Key issues and reasons for recommendation(s)

1.1 The case for a single council for west Suffolk

- 1.1.1 On 30 May, the Leaders of both Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils jointly presented a scoping report to an extraordinary meeting of both Cabinets, proposing that work be commissioned from officers to test their lead option of a single district-level council for west Suffolk against the other options available. This followed an announcement by both Leaders on 9 May of their intention to begin a process to explore the best option for council organisation in west Suffolk, focusing on a single district council.
- 1.1.2 The Cabinet report recognised that both councils are working in a more challenging and complex environment than before. There is now the opportunity to reflect the way that the councils work together, to make sure they remain financially and structurally resilient in the long term, and can continue with a strong base from which to invest in and support communities and businesses, and deliver services to customers in the next decade.
- 1.1.3 The Cabinet meeting recognised that any move towards a single council must be subject to a business case, to test the options available that are within our control. This required the testing of whether a single council would be better than continuing with the status quo of two separate councils.
- 1.1.4 This draft business case is now attached for Council consideration and approval at Appendix A, and concludes that a single council does represent the most efficient and effective form of district governance for the future in that, compared to the other options available, it would (see p6-8 of Appendix A):
- deliver greater value for money for residents, generate savings and enable increased self sufficiency;
 - be simpler for residents, officers and partner organisations;
 - maintain democratic accountability;
 - enable the Councils to increase their scale and influence as a district council; and
 - improve resilience compared to the current position.

A new single council would also be better able to play its part in delivering the strategic goals and benefits shared by all public services in Suffolk.

- 1.1.5 The draft business case has been subject to an equalities screening impact, attached at Appendix B, which has concluded that there are no negative impacts from the proposals and therefore no specific action required to be compliant.

1.2 Engagement plan

- 1.2.1 Should the draft business case be agreed by both Councils, a formal period of public and stakeholder engagement will be undertaken to ascertain if there is support amongst the communities, businesses and partner organisations in west Suffolk for the proposals as required by DCLG, before the Final Business Case is presented to Councils in September.

- 1.2.2 Key stakeholders have already been informed of the proposals, via formal communications on the day that the Leaders' intentions were announced (9 May 2017). The announcement was accompanied by a media briefing, which significantly increased the profile of the issue in the local and regional media and drew it to attention of many residents.
- 1.2.3 A full engagement programme over forthcoming weeks has been developed, which includes:
- Dialogue between Members and residents, businesses and community organisations in their Wards. Members are encouraged to raise the profile of the proposals and how to feed back views;
 - An online survey;
 - Identification of existing programmed community events where the single council proposals can be discussed and public attention drawn to the survey;
 - Formal communication to stakeholders, identifying the Councils' intention to proceed and why this is the case, offering opportunities to discuss the proposals and raising awareness of the online survey;
 - A 'phone poll, to be commissioned from a specialist nationwide polling company. The company will independently survey a representative sample of randomly selected electors across both Councils' areas to capture their views towards the proposal. The methodology used will give a statistically robust set of results, in line with industry standards; and
 - A separate section on the Councils' website, explaining why the Councils wish to proceed with the proposals. The website will also include "frequently asked questions" that have been raised through the process which should serve to allay any concerns or misunderstandings about the proposals.

1.3 **Progressing the proposals**

- 1.3.1 As set out above, subject to the agreement of both Councils, the draft business case will now be subject to engagement before it is presented back to Councils in September. If agreed, the final Business Case will then be presented to the Secretary of State for the Department for Communities and Local Government to assess and ultimately approve via the issue of a Draft Order, creating a new district council for West Suffolk.
- 1.3.2 Once the Order has been created, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) will undertake a review to establish the new ward structure, and a transition authority may come into immediate effect to oversee the implementation plan to create the new council.
- 1.3.3 As is highlighted within the draft business case, if the single council proposal does not receive Council approval, the LGBCE will be undertaking a full electoral review of the number of councillors and ward boundaries anyway and, as such, a review due to single council would not create any additional process for any party.
- 1.3.4 The timetable set out in pages 20-21 of the draft business case is ambitious, and in practice there are many technical aspects involved in creating a new council that members will have to consider – the name of the council, its status and governance arrangements, the number of councillors required, and how

the transition will operate.

- 1.3.5 We are aware that, for many members, the technical issues may be of significant importance as to whether they can support the final proposals. There are actually very few aspects of how a new council would work in future that are dictated by the Secretary of State's Order, but resolving these key issues at the earliest stage gives us the greatest opportunity to influence the decisions of the Secretary of State, and give clarity to our communities on exactly how a new council for West Suffolk would operate.
- 1.3.6 With this in mind, the Cabinets have formed a Future Governance Steering Group, to help inform debate on the technical issues required in order that proposals can be taken to Councils in the Autumn should the Final Business Case be agreed.