



CABINET – 6TH JULY 2018

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

EAST MIDLANDS STRATEGIC ALLIANCE AND UNITARY GOVERNMENT IN LEICESTERSHIRE – TIMETABLE FOR CONSIDERATION

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Cabinet, following the decision of the Conservative Group to agree in principle that the County Council should develop proposals for a unitary structure for Leicestershire, of the timetable for consideration of these matters.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that -
 - (a) The Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources be requested to work with counterparts in the region in the development of a Strategic Alliance for the East Midlands;
 - (b) Work be undertaken on the development of a unitary structure for local government in Leicestershire;
 - (c) The following timetable for consideration of the above be approved:-

Cabinet	16 th October	to consider outline proposals and agree to engage with stakeholders on options
Scrutiny Commission	14 th November	to comment on the outline proposals
Cabinet	23 rd November	to consider the outcome of stakeholder engagement and the way forward
County Council	5 th December	to debate the proposed way forward recommended by the Cabinet.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. To provide a framework and timetable for consideration of proposals for a unitary structure for Leicestershire in the context of a Strategic Alliance for the East Midlands.

Timetable for Decision (including Scrutiny)

4. The Leader has discussed with the Leaders of the Opposition Groups the question of scrutiny consideration of the proposals and it has been agreed that they will be considered by the Scrutiny Commission and the scrutiny committees. As per the proposed timetable in paragraph 2(c) above, it is proposed that the Scrutiny Commission consider the proposals at its meeting on 14th November 2018 with the timetable of meetings for scrutiny committees to be considered further.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

5. In November 2015 the Cabinet considered a report on the proposed establishment of a Combined Authority for Leicester and Leicestershire, comprising the County Council, Leicester City Council and the seven district councils. The proposal was submitted to the Government in December 2015. Despite widespread local support, this proposal was considered 'unambitious' by the Government, which indicated that it was looking for an arrangement which would make a greater impact on regional economic growth as advocated by some MPs and representative bodies of commerce and industry.
6. A letter has been sent from the Leaders of Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Lincolnshire to the Secretary of State, seeking a meeting to discuss the proposed East Midlands Strategic Alliance.

Resource Implications

7. In 2013 the Council commissioned Ernst and Young (EY) to report on unitary local government. All members of the County Council and the District Council Leaders were provided with a copy of that report. The cost of that work was reported to the Council in February 2014 as £45,000. The Leader asked officers to review the EY report and the consideration which has been given to unitary status by other County Councils. That work was undertaken within existing budgets. Further work will now be undertaken on this matter with a view to reporting the outcome to the Cabinet in October. It is anticipated that work will be undertaken within existing budgets.

Legal Implications

8. Matters now under consideration are deemed to be 'Executive Functions' and therefore for the Cabinet to determine. However, given the significance of the decision it is advised that the matter should be referred to the full Council for consideration and debate, as is the wish of the Leader of the County Council.

The Director of Law and Governance has been consulted on the content of this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

9. As this is a matter which will affect all areas of the County, a copy of this report is being circulated to all members of the County Council.

Officer to contact

Mo Seedat
Head of Democratic Services
Tel 0116 305 6037 Email – mo.seedat@leics.gov.uk

PART B

Background

10. The Leader of the Council has advised that at a meeting of the Conservative Group on Tuesday, 26th June 2018 a decision was taken to agree in principle that the County Council should develop proposals for a unitary structure for Leicestershire. This was in the context of developing a Strategic Alliance for the East Midlands to counterbalance the growing power and influence of the West Midlands Combined Authority.

Next Steps

11. At the request of the Leader, officers of the County Council will work with counterparts in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire County Councils to develop a Strategic Alliance and the powers it would be seeking as part of a devolution agreement with the Government. The three unitary cities in the East Midlands will be consulted along with other stakeholders including MPs and the LEPs. With regard to proposals for a unitary structure officers will now build on the initial work undertaken and draw up proposals for consultation. The outcome of this work will be reported to the Cabinet in October.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

12. In developing the proposals for a Strategic Alliance and proposals for a unitary structure, officers will need to have regard equality issues and how the proposals might impact on those groups with protected characteristics.

Background Papers

Media release Friday, 29th June

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/news/right-time-to-start-'new-council'-conversation>

Report to the Cabinet 18th November 2015 - "Combined Authority" and minutes of that meeting

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=135&MID=4232>

CABINET**FRIDAY, 6 JULY 2018****DECISIONS****Published on: Monday 9 July 2018**

Set out below is a summary of the decisions taken at the meeting of the Cabinet held on Friday, 6 July 2018. The wording used does not necessarily reflect the actual wording which will appear in the minutes.

The Constitution allows for the call-in of non-urgent Key Decisions. Action to implement these decisions will be taken on the expiration of 5 working days from the date of this decision sheet unless they have been called-in. This document will be amended as soon as a decision has been called in.

If you have any queries about any matters referred to in this decision sheet please contact Anna Poole (Tel. 0116 305 2583).

ITEM 20**URGENT ITEM - EAST MIDLANDS STRATEGIC ALLIANCE AND UNITARY GOVERNMENT IN LEICESTERSHIRE.**

- (a) That the Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources be requested to work with counterparts in the region in the development of a Strategic Alliance for the East Midlands;
- (b) That work be undertaken on the development of a unitary structure for local government in Leicestershire;
- (c) That the following timetable for consideration of the above be approved:-

Cabinet 16th October	to consider outline proposals and agree to engage with stakeholders on options.
Scrutiny Commission 14th November	to comment on the outline proposals.
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County Council 5th December	to debate the proposed way forward recommended by the Cabinet.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

To provide a framework and timetable for consideration of proposals for a unitary structure for Leicestershire in the context of a Strategic Alliance for the East Midlands.

Unitary authority proposal NWLDC communications plan

V1

Last updated: 20 July 2018

Background

- In June 2018, Leicestershire County Council's (LCC) Conservative Group agreed in principle that LCC should develop proposals for a unitary structure for Leicestershire
- The implications of public sector reform proposals are complex and there is a need to ensure regular, clear communication to our staff, members, community and stakeholders and partners from the outset of the proposal through to a decision
- A communications and engagement plan has been drafted to ensure good communication throughout the process. This is an evolving document that will be used to guide our communication as the process develops
- This version of the communications plan focusses on responding to the County Council proposals and will develop as the project progresses.

Key messages (as at July 2018)

1. The idea of unitary authorities is not new – other authorities have investigated the possibility and some have gone through the process
2. The proposal for Leicestershire is in its very early days
3. NWLDC would like more evidence and investigation into the options before it decides which option it will support
4. NWLDC will not dismiss any model until we assess the evidence showing benefits and risks for North West Leicestershire communities
5. Any decision made by NWLDC on this will be in the best interests of people living and working in North West Leicestershire
6. Our focus will be to continue to provide quality services to our community
7. We will engage and communicate with our communities, key stakeholders and partners in an open and transparent way to help explain and demystify any proposals to change the way local government works in Leicestershire

*** (All subject to change as NWLDC develops its position):**

Spokespeople

Councillor Richard Blunt – Leader of NWLDC

As the political lead, Councillor Blunt will be the main spokesperson and will carry out the majority of media interviews and other publicity opportunities

Councillor Alison Smith MBE, Deputy Leader of NWLDC

As Deputy Leader, Councillor Smith will be quoted and will carry out media interviews where Councillor Blunt is not available

Bev Smith – Chief Executive

As the project lead, Bev will also be available for media interviews and publicity opportunities where the councillor is unavailable, or where the nature of the interview requires particular technical knowledge. Bev will be the person responsible for communicating with staff and members.

Objectives

- To remain well briefed on the project and feed information to the right people at the right time
- To be clear internally and publically about NWLDC's position
- To ensure our key partners in the district councils and LCC / Leicester City Council understand NWLDC's position at any given time
- To keep all stakeholders well informed about the process and progress, with particular emphasis on staff communication – ensuring they are well informed and reassured throughout the process
- To share information from partners with all stakeholders in North West Leicestershire
- To ensure residents, staff, members and other stakeholders are well informed and have the opportunity to take part in consultations

Scope, tools and evaluation

Scope

- Proactive communication with staff and members
- Proactive communication with partners and stakeholders
- Proactive communication with the media
- Responsive communication to media and individual enquiries
- Sharing partner information (e.g. consultation details) using NWLDC communication tools (e.g. social media channels) and networks (e.g. parish liaison group)

Communication tools

- Internal i-Net articles
- i-Net blogs
- Staff Roadshows
- Staff FAQs
- Member bulletin
- Media statements
- News releases
- Website
- Social media

Evaluation

Outputs monitored

- Number of news releases
- Number of media statements
- Number of staff updates
- Number of member updates
- Amount of social media activity

Messages received

- Media coverage and social media activity is accurate and balanced / positive

Messages understood

- Misinformation is minimised
- People understand NWLDC's position

Communication principles

We will communicate with the right people at the right time in the right way.

We will make members and staff know of upcoming progress and decision points ahead of time.

Following decisions or progress, we will update staff and members at the earliest opportunity with an overview and the NWLDC position.

We will liaise with the media in an open and transparent way to ensure NWLDC's position is clear and residents are made aware.

We will share information from ourselves and other authorities on the matter using all our communication tools, including social media and our website.

Key dates

Tuesday 16 October: LCC Cabinet to consider outline proposals

Tuesday 16 October: NWLDC Cabinet to meet to consider outline proposals (later start time)

Tuesday 13 November: NWLDC Cabinet meeting (may be rearranged)

Tuesday 13 November: NWLDC Full Council meeting to consider outline proposals and LCC decision

Wednesday 14 November: LCC Scrutiny Commission to comment on outline proposals

Friday 23 November: LCC Cabinet to consider stakeholder engagement and agree way forward

Wednesday 5 December: LCC Full Council to agree way forward recommended by Cabinet

Tuesday 11 December: NWLDC Cabinet to meet to discuss decision made by LCC

Early 2019: LCC proposed full public consultation on more detailed proposals

May 2021: LCC suggested implementation date (when LCC elections are due to be held)

Risks

Risk

Staff morale, recruitment and retention is negatively impacted due to level of uncertainty.

Members do not understand the process and feel disengaged in consideration of any proposals.

Lack of information or two way communication between NWL officers / members and authorities proposing public sector reform leads to misrepresentation of information to members impacting on final decision making process.

Mitigation

Internal communication plan developed and implemented at all key decision points. Staff FAQs developed and publicised. 'Open door' policy for staff who have questions.

Senior management / politicians to stay close to the project to remain aware of progress.

Communication plan in place with key dates scheduled. Regular, consistent communication around decision making meetings (e.g. LCC Cabinet, Full Council).

Opportunities for scrutiny at key decision points through Policy Development Committee.

Open and transparent communication with the LCC and district councils through leaders meetings and 1-2-1 meetings.

Risks

Risk

Lack of understanding of NWL position leads to misunderstanding amongst partner organisations which in turn negatively impacts future relationships.

Partner organisations work independently and NWLDC is kept out of the loop on information

Leaked information leads to misunderstanding of NWLDC position

Members / staff hear about progress with the proposal before hearing NWLDC position

Mitigation

Open and transparent communication of NWL position and considerations at key points.

Regular communication with district leaders and LCC / City leaders as appropriate.

Senior management / politicians to stay close to the project to remain aware of progress.

Good links with Communications Team to ensure responsiveness to any issues.

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Latest position statement always in draft form ready to issue if necessary.

Senior management / politicians to stay close to the project to remain aware of progress.

Communication plan in place with key dates scheduled. Regular, consistent communication around decision making meetings (e.g. LCC Cabinet, Full Council)