

Minutes of an **Interim Council Meeting** of Buckingham Town Council held at 7pm on **Monday 31st October 2016** in the Council Chamber, Cornwalls Meadow, Buckingham.

Present: Cllr. Ms. J. Bates
 Cllr. T. Bloomfield
 Cllr. P. Collins
 Cllr. Mrs. M. Gateley
 Cllr. P. Hirons
 Cllr. D. Isham
 Cllr. A. Mahi Mayor
 Cllr. H. Mordue
 Cllr. Ms. R. Newell
 Cllr. L. O'Donoghue
 Cllr. M. Smith
 Cllr. Mrs. C. Strain-Clark
 Cllr. R. Stuchbury
 Cllr. M. Try

Also Present: Mr. P. Dart Communities Service Director
 Mr C. Wayman Town Clerk
 Cllr. W. Whyte County Councillor
 Mrs. N. Stockill Committee Clerk

527/16 Apologies

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr. Cole, Cllr. Mrs. G. Collins and Cllr. Harvey.

528/16 Declarations of Interest

Cllr. Stuchbury declared an interest as a County Councillor in item 3, Modernising Local Government in Buckinghamshire.

529/16 Presentation - Modernising Local Government in Buckinghamshire

Members received a presentation on Unitary Authority proposals from Phil Dart, Communities Service Director at Buckinghamshire County Council.

Mr. Dart explained that his team were attending 80 meetings across Buckinghamshire's 168 Parish and Town Councils to give elected Members an opportunity to hear the County Council's proposals.

Mr. Dart referred to the County Council Business Case [*available online at [www.buckscc.gov.uk/about-your-council/our-plans/modernising-local-government/.](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/about-your-council/our-plans/modernising-local-government/)*]

and highlighted the following points:

- Buckinghamshire County Council and all four District Councils agree that the existing two-tier structure of local authority is not the best model for addressing the future needs of the County. Town and Parish Councils are considered key in delivering a new Local Government provision.
- Emerging local plans identify a need for 50,000 new homes in Buckinghamshire by 2033. This growth will increase demands on health, social care, local infrastructure and the environment.
- By the end of 2016/17, the County Council will have delivered £145m savings since April 2010. The County and District Councils need to deliver further savings in excess of £30m by 2020.
- There has been a series of public consultations and focus groups across the county to help shape the Business Case. The internal document has been created and verified by consultants Grant Thornton.

- The removal of multiple tiers of local government removes a level of bureaucracy and potential confusion over each Council's service responsibility. Mr. Dart stated that it cost the County Council £34,000 a year to redirect enquiries to the appropriate department in District or Parish/Town Councils.
- Unitary Government offers Town and Parish Councils the opportunity to take ownership of more services, where appropriate.

Mr. Dart said that the three options available for consideration were:

1. One Unitary Authority - A county-wide unitary responsible for delivering the full array of local authority services across Buckinghamshire. The Business Case states that this option offers the potential for the greatest level of savings; quoting £18.2m savings a year for a similar total investment cost. Return on investment (ROI) is estimated at around 99% with an estimated overall £45.4m net saving over the five year period.
2. Two/Three Unitary – This option would either see the county divided into North and South, or would follow a similar division to the current district boundaries. The Business Case states that this option offers the 2nd highest level of annual revenue savings (£10.3m) for an investment of £16.1m; with ROI of 54% and a net saving of £17.3m over the five year period.
3. Three Unitary with Combined Authority - Three unitary authorities with strategic services pooled into a combined authority that would deliver these services county-wide. E.g. include health and social care and strategic planning and transport. The Business Case states that this option scores the lowest with savings of £5.5m (from an investment £15.5m) resulting in 33% ROI.

Mr. Dart said the County Council were in favour of the One Unitary Authority model as it offers the highest level of savings, whilst offering clear accountability, simplified arrangements for partners, and a strategic focus to maximise opportunities for local communities and businesses.

He also explained that a new County-wide Unitary Authority offers the potential for County and District to devolve services and assets to Town and Parish Councils. This would be a flexible opportunity with tailored packages to support their ambitions and priorities. Mr. Dart noted the following two key features of a Unitary Council at a local level:

- 19 Community Boards – A formal committee of elected members. The Board would have delegated decision making powers and a delegated council budget for local projects.
- 5 Planning Committees – Planning decisions would be taken by a formal committee comprising elected local Councillors and offering more powers to Town and Parish Councils. Aylesbury Vale's planning decisions would be divided into two separate Planning Committees.

Mr. Dart explained that the Business Case has been sent to the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and a decision is expected by January 2017. The proposed timeframe would see a new Unitary Authority in place by 2019.

Members made comment/asked the following questions with replies in italics:

Cllr. P. Collins' view was that residents of Buckingham would be better served by a two-tier Authority, stating that Buckingham could be subsidised by the income gained from higher levels of income tax paid in the more affluent towns in the South of the County.

Cllr Hirons asked if the final decision would be put to local referendum.

We investigated this idea but felt that the £500,000 cost to run a referendum would not be money well spent.

Members expressed dissatisfaction that without a referendum there would be no democratic accountability and local people would not have a final say on where their Council will be and how it would be run.

During the summer there were a large number of Parish and Town events for the public to comment and influence the draft Business Case. It has been to the County Council for scrutiny and they are the representatives of the people.

How will high demand services such as Adult Social Care and Children Services be funded and delivered within a County-wide Unitary Authority?

The business case is built on 80% of services being commissioned by County Council and the vast majority wouldn't change provision. Large contracts such as Transport for Bucks would be renegotiated when contract comes up for review. Local Authorities account for 70-80% of service delivery and the proposals offer an opportunity to empower communities and work better with families and social groups. Our vision is that regardless of the service the individual comes from, they work in a multi-agency capacity to deliver the same vision of service integration. The current funding gaps need a radical change to release potential savings back into services. Doing things right first time, all of the time, is the way ahead!

Cllr. Mordue questioned how the County Council would deliver a Unitary model when he believed they were deeply in debt. There would be a housing allocation of 50,000 homes that would not be split between the North and South of the County as the majority of the South is greenbelt.

Phil Dart said that the County Council was not in debt and that page 72 of the Business Case show a total of £44m reserves across all five Councils.

How much was Grant Thornton paid to produce this report?

The Grant Thornton invoice was £13,000 for auditing and assessment of the report. However, a lot of Officer time was spent shaping the document.

Phil Dart explained that Members could contact the DCLG and express a wish to have a referendum on the Unitary decision. However, the DCLG would come back and mandate the need for a referendum if they had not consulted properly.

There is no mention of service integration with Milton Keynes.

We are in discussion with Milton Keynes Council about sharing community safety and planning arrangements and you can be reassured that we will partner the right people to get the right outcomes.

Members thanked Mr. Dart for attending.

19.45 Mr Dart left the meeting.

530/16 Chair's Announcements

None

531/16 Dates of next meetings

Full Council - Monday 21st November 2016

Interim Council - Monday 19th December 2016

Meeting closed at 7.45pm

Signed Date