

Report of the Managing Director

Options for the future of local government in Northamptonshire

1 Purpose of report

To seek approval to contribute up to £25k from revenue reserves towards the cost of the joint appointment (with other districts and boroughs) of a consultant (Deloittes) who are currently analysing alternative options for unitary governance in Northamptonshire.

2 Executive summary

The report considers the risk that the county council will pursue a single unitary authority for the county, and the implications for the borough council in continuing to stand outside the ongoing discussions taking place between other borough and district councils in the county.

3 Appendices

None.

4 Proposed action:

The council RESOLVES to:

- 4.1 Agree that the Borough Council of Wellingborough be included as a joint client of Deloittes in the production of a report on the alternative options for unitary governance in Northamptonshire, currently commissioned by the other six district and borough councils;**
- 4.2 Agree that up to £25k from revenue reserves be set aside to contribute towards this analysis and final report.**

5 Background

- 5.1 Unitary governance for the county has been continually raised by all Northamptonshire Members of Parliament, calling for the current governance structure in Northamptonshire to be abolished and replaced with unitary governance in the light of the current financial challenges facing all councils, and in particular the county council.
- 5.2 District and borough council leaders and chief executives/managing directors have been meeting to discuss the options for unitary governance in

Northamptonshire. The leaders have already determined that a unitary authority based around the current county council is not an option they wish to pursue, judging it to be too remote from local communities to properly reflect their diverse natures and interests.

- 5.3 The other six district and borough councils decided in 2016 to commission work by a consultant, Deloittes, to look into alternative governance structures and proposals to counter the county council's single unitary proposal. This work is nearing completion, and - although currently BCW is not an official client – it has been agreed that the managing director and leader attend some of the meetings over the past few months.
- 5.4 The recent budget announcements by the county council on the level and depth of service cuts proposed, given their increasingly difficult financial position, has caused increasing concern amongst the leaders of all district councils.
- 5.5 The finance settlement recently announced did little to help the county council's position, and it is now becoming apparent that significant change is needed to ensure that services for the residents of the county are delivered to those that need them and provide value for money for all tax payers of the county.

6 Discussion

- 6.1 In order to get to a position of consensus and to achieve a reliable proposal a suitably qualified consultant, Deloittes, was engaged to investigate the options for unitary governance in Northamptonshire. Each authority was asked to contribute an initial sum of no more than £25k to fund the costs of the research and final report and recommendations.
- 6.2 The county council was not invited to take part as it has clearly set its agenda around itself as a single unitary authority. However, the previous chief executive was interviewed as part of the research.
- 6.3 All other district and borough councils in the county have agreed to contribute to the report and have set aside the required level of funding. It is now evident that the districts and borough councils need to have one voice on the unitary position for the county in relation to any proposals that may be considered by the government. It is therefore essential that, in the opinion of the managing director, BCW now joins its district and borough colleagues, and asks for members to formally make the commitment to be involved in the development of options, and to contribute towards the funding of the work.

7 Legal powers

- 7.1 Whilst the restructuring of local government in the area would have fundamental legal implications, there are none arising directly from the advice. Amongst other powers, the work can be carried out under s1 of the Localism Act 2011 (power of general competence).

8 Financial, value for money and resource implications

- 8.1 The cost of the proposed work will be capped at £25k for each contributing authority. Background information, research and discussion with the consultants will be undertaken by existing staff.

9 Risk analysis

If this council wishes to influence the county wide review and any proposals that may come from it, it is important that we have a place at the table. It will not be possible to influence the outcomes or comment on the draft report prior to publication if the authority has not contributed to its production. The alternative would be to distance this council from what the other district and borough councils in the county are doing, and potentially be embraced by a proposal that does not produce the best alternative governance model for the residents of this borough.

10 Implications for stronger and safer communities and equalities

None at this time. Further exploration of these issues will be considered in depth if any changes are proposed.

11 Author and contact officer

Liz Elliott, Managing Director

12 Consultees

Senior Management Team

13 Background papers

None

