

REPORT OF THE
Cabinet
PART I

253. FURTHER UPDATE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW

1. At its meeting 14 November 2016, Cabinet received a Report reviewing the national and local context to the devolution and local government re-organisation position in Hampshire, including a summary of the immediate findings and implications of public consultation carried out by the County Council on options for the future of local government in Hampshire, and recommendations regarding the same.

2. Cabinet welcomed the Report and its focus on keeping Hampshire together and resolved that:

Having considered the balanced and complex results of the Serving Hampshire consultation, the feedback from engagement with Hampshire businesses and the workshops with the Town and Parish Councils;

And recognising that there is little appetite on the part of the residents of Hampshire for yet more tiers or layers of Government;

Nor the expense associated with such a change during times of austerity;

Nor the inevitable disruption to services and decision-making that would be experienced by residents whilst such a reform is being implemented.

The Cabinet

a) Recognises the lack of support from residents for the County of Hampshire being divided into multiple Unitary or Combined Authorities, nor for services being provided at County level being split into smaller fragments.

b) Reaffirms its determination to respect residents' wishes by keeping Hampshire intact and maintaining the strong preference for the existing local government system as long as that remains viable.

c) Aims not to split or weaken service delivery which could negatively impact on the quality of services and decision making being provided to Hampshire residents. This would also deal a significant blow to the scale and efficiency of the highways service provided by the County Council in the rest of the county, and unnecessarily complicates maintenance arrangements at a time of reducing resources and rising demands.

d) Agrees that there is at this stage no imperative to submit proposals to Ministers for a Unitary Council for Hampshire, but that this remains open as an option.

e) Agrees that any of the following would necessitate further proposals to be considered by the County Council:

i) a decision by the proposed Solent Combined Authority, or any other Combined Authority, to extend its geography into Hampshire;

ii) evidence that there is no longer support among District and Borough Council Leaders in Hampshire for sustaining the current multi-tier system;

iii) a further deterioration in the County Council's financial prospects particularly in relation to sustaining services to vulnerable residents, which the Serving Hampshire consultation identified as residents' top priority;

iv) evidence of a significant increase, objectively measured, in public support for local government reorganisation;

v) a clear indication from Ministers that local government reorganisation is their preferred outcome in Hampshire;

f) Confirms that, in considering the invitation to join the proposed Solent Combined Authority, the County Council should not be party to any agreement that goes against its residents' wishes by breaking up its services or which is not open to the whole County.

g) Confirms that the County Council strongly opposes Hampshire District Councils joining the proposed Solent Combined Authority unless all such Councils are admitted, which would provide for a Hampshire-wide solution.

h) Agrees that the proposal for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Combined Authority (or Hampshire County Combined Authority) be revisited in discussion with partners, all of whom were party to signing the original proposal to Government.

i) Offers that the County Council shall continue to discuss these matters with Government, local partners and the community of Hampshire.

j) Notes that separate reports will be brought to a future Cabinet meeting regarding improved engagement with businesses and Town and Parish Councils in Hampshire.

The full Report considered by Cabinet is attached as an Annex to this Council Report and can be viewed at: www.hants.gov.uk/councilmeetings.htm by typing in the relevant reference number (7904). It should be noted that the Cabinet resolution reflects amendments to the recommendations in the attached report made on the basis of discussion at the Cabinet meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

That the County Council notes the progress made on Local Government Review and supports the resolutions of Cabinet as set out above.