

## Report to Cabinet

**Subject:** Consultation on local government reorganisation in Nottinghamshire

**Date:** 8 November 2018

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### Wards Affected

Borough-wide.

### Purpose

To seek approval to conduct a consultation exercise to obtain the views from residents and businesses in the Borough on the appropriate local government structure in Nottinghamshire.

### Recommendation

**THAT** subject to budget approval, a specific consultation exercise to obtain the views of residents and businesses in the borough on the appropriate local government structure in Nottinghamshire be approved.

### Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision.

### Background

1.1 On 12 July 2018, Nottinghamshire County Council considered a motion about reorganisation of the local government structure in Nottinghamshire and:

- a) agreed that the current 'two-tier' structure of the County Council and seven district councils is an inefficient and ineffective way to deliver services in Nottinghamshire, especially at a time when local government finances are under severe pressure;
- b) agreed that forming a unitary council for Nottinghamshire would pool all existing resources and release approximately £20-£30 million pounds of public money annually, currently tied up in bureaucracy;
- c) agreed that a unitary authority would achieve economies of scale and deliver a more responsive service to residents by:-
  - i) creating a single headquarters and management team for the new council to replace the eight headquarters, chief executives and senior management teams currently serving the County Council and the seven district councils;

ii) bringing all council services in Nottinghamshire together under one roof, removing duplication and requiring fewer buildings, which would also deliver capital receipts for reinvestment by disposing of surplus property;

iii) retaining two councillors per electoral division to serve the principles of localism, but removing the confusion caused by 'two-tier' local government where residents are frequently unclear whether they should raise issues with district councillors or county councillors;

iv) establishing single systems for council tax collection, waste management, housing and planning;

v) providing a proactive solution to the current budget challenges facing the County and district councils and thereby protecting critical services, such as adult social care, potentially avoiding steep and prolonged increases in council tax and other charges;

d) instructed officers to continue their work preparing a formal case for a unitary authority and bring forward a report to a future meeting of Full Council setting out the Business Case;

e) On approval of this Business Case agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government formally stating Nottinghamshire County Council's support for a unitary council for Nottinghamshire.

1.2 Following this decision, a cross party members working group has been established by the County Council to consider preparation of the case for change and associated work streams for the potential establishment of a unitary authority for Nottinghamshire.

1.3 The County Council's Policy Committee has endorsed a two-phased approach to stakeholder engagement and community consultation to enable residents and stakeholders to have their say on local government re-organisation in Nottinghamshire. Phase 1 of the consultation commenced on 3 October and closed on 31 October 2018; the purpose of which was to gain initial insight and views on the options at a formative stage to help inform the case for change. This was by way of an online survey only although the County Council indicated that it intended to also talk to stakeholders. A copy of the questions asked as part of the phase 1 consultation exercise appear at Appendix 1. It is understood that County Council will consider the responses at its meeting on 13 December 2018 and proposals for a phase 2 formal consultation will be agreed.

## **Proposal**

2.1 Given the impact of local government reorganisation, it is important that the Borough Council understands and is able to properly represent the view of residents and businesses in the Borough during the process. The final decision on the future of the local government structure will be made by the Secretary of State, and whilst the current legislative framework does not require all councils in Nottinghamshire to unanimously agree on proposals put forward by the County Council, he will consider the level of agreement that has been achieved when making that decision. It is therefore proposed that the Borough Council carries out a specific consultation exercise to obtain the views

of residents and businesses within the borough and this feedback will inform the Council's response to any reorganisation proposals. It is well established that any consultation exercise must take place at a formative stage in the decision making process and with those affected by the proposal, provide sufficient time and information to provide for an intelligent response, and the outcome of the consultation must be conscientiously taken into account.

2.2 It is not intended that the Borough Council replicates the consultation exercise which has been conducted by the County Council. Indeed the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity specifically states: 'If another public authority, such as central government, has issued publicity on a particular topic, local authorities should incur expenditure on the same matter only if they consider that additional value is achieved by the duplication of that publicity. Additional value might be achieved if locally produced publicity gives a local context to national issues'. Instead it is proposed that a consultation document is issued in hard copy to all residents and businesses in the borough (rather than an online survey only) and asks a specific question which is not asked as part of the County Council Consultation; namely whether they agree Gedling Borough Council should be replaced by a larger authority that funds all Services and makes all decisions for the whole (or half) of Nottinghamshire. Officers are currently working on the content of the proposed consultation document which will be circulated to Cabinet in due course.

2.3 The Council regularly surveys residents as part of the biennial Gedling Satisfaction Survey and it is proposed that the same format is used on this occasion. We intend to:

- Print and distribute hard copies of the consultation document to each household in the borough, which can be returned via freepost. This will ensure that all households in the borough are made aware of the proposals and have an opportunity to respond even if they do not have access to a digital device.
- Encourage online completion.
- Use social media and 'Keep me Posted' in order to maintain continual promotion of the consultation and share information to a wide audience that will capture both urban and rural area and target age groups which have been under represented in previous Gedling satisfaction surveys.
- Employ technical measures to identify whether multiple responses come from the same computer and ask for a postcode to be supplied.
- Employ a research agency to manage the response handling and data input of the surveys, plus produce initial calculation tables. This will enable the Customer Insight Officer to produce a report soon after all feedback is received.

2.4 It is proposed that the consultation will be progressed in accordance with the indicative timetable below. The outcome of the consultation will be reported back to Members in due course.

Action	Timescales
Survey designed	Prior to Cabinet
Print	12 – 23 Nov (10 working days)

Live on-line	From 26 Nov
Distribution of hard copies	26 Nov – 7 Dec (10 working days)
Consultation period	26 Nov – 21 Dec (4 weeks)
Postal replies handling; Data input for paper copies initial cross tab analysis	Ongoing up to 11 January 2019 (3 weeks)
Report compiled by Customer Insight Officer	12 – 18 Jan 2019 (5 working days)

### **Alternative Options**

- 3.1 The Council could decide not to carry out its own consultation exercise but, given the importance to seek and be able to properly represent the views of residents and stakeholders views on the significant issue of local government reorganisation this is not the preferred option.
- 3.2 A consultation exercise could simply be carried out online. This would not incur the additional cost set out below, but will not come to the attention of all residents and businesses in the Borough and from previous experience will not generate the same response level as a hard copy document.

### **Financial Implications**

4. The estimated costs of printing and delivering consultation document to residents and businesses within the borough and collating the results is £20,000. This cannot be contained within existing consultation budgets. A budget for this proposal can be established by approval of a virement from underspends identified in quarter 2 budget monitoring. A virement proposal for this purpose is included in the Quarterly Gedling Plan Performance and Monitoring Report which appears elsewhere on this agenda.

### **Appendices**

- 5.1 Appendix 1- County Council consultation questions.
- 5.2 Appendix 2 - Proposed Consultation document – To follow.

### **Background Papers**

6. None identified.

### **Reasons for Recommendation**

7. To enable the Council to obtain the views of residents and businesses in the borough, which will inform the Borough Council's response to the County Council's proposals for local government reorganisation.