

Council Minutes

Date: 26 November 2018

Time: 6.30 - 8.21 pm

PRESENT: Councillor A R Green (in the Chair)

Councillors Mrs J A Adey, K Ahmed, Z Ahmed, M Asif, D H G Barnes, Ms A Baughan, S Broadbent, Miss S Brown, H Bull, M Clarke, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, A D Collingwood, C Etholen, R Farmer, R Gaffney, S Graham, G C Hall, M Hanif, M Harris, C B Harriss, A E Hill, A Hussain, M Hussain, D A Johncock, Mrs G A Jones, M E Knight, D Knights, Mrs J D Langley, A Lee, N B Marshall, H L McCarthy, I L McEnnis, B E Pearce, G Peart, S K Raja, R Raja, S Saddique, J A Savage, R J Scott, D A C Shakespeare OBE, N J B Teesdale, Mrs J E Teesdale, A Turner, P R Turner, Ms J D Wassell, D M Watson, C Whitehead, L Wood and Ms K S Wood and Honorary Alderman J M Blanksby.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs S Adoh, M C Appleyard, D J Carroll, M A Hashmi, M Hussain JP, Mrs W J Mallen, R Newman and R Wilson and Honorary Aldermen E Collins, Mrs K Peatey and R Pushman.

50 MINUTES SILENCE FOR TONY ROBINSON & CHAUDHARY DITTA

The Meeting held a minute's silence in respect of the recent deaths of ex-District Councillors Tony Robinson and Chaudhary Ditta.

Councillor Robinson had served on the Council from 1974 to 1991 whilst Councillor Ditta had served from 2003 to 2015.

Both had represented High Wycombe Town Wards and had served as Mayor of High Wycombe.

51 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Members declared that they were also serving Buckinghamshire County Councillors, but all remained in the chamber took part in the debate and voted on the recommendations:

Councillor Mrs L Clarke OBE
Councillor A Collingwood
Councillor C Etholen
Councillor C Harriss*
Councillor A Hussain*
Councillor D Shakespeare OBE
Councillor Mrs J Teesdale*
Councillor Ms J Wassell

Councillor D Watson
Councillor Ms K Wood

*additionally declared that they held Deputy Cabinet Member posts at Buckinghamshire County Council.

52 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW DISTRICT UNITARY COUNCIL

The Leader of the Council outlined that the Report before Council represented a sad day as in taking the Single Unitary Authority for Buckinghamshire forward signalled the demise of the District Councils (including Wycombe District) and the County Council. But the project represented an exciting opportunity to shape and input into the future of local government in Buckinghamshire. It was emphasised that this was a merger of the 5 councils not a takeover.

The Report before Council sought approval for the process for agreeing the wording of the Council's representations to be made to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government in respect of the implementation of the new District Unitary Council for Buckinghamshire. It also sought to ensure that sufficient resources were available to enable the authority to respond to the requirements of the proposed orders and to support transition within the Council.

The Leader handed over to Ms K Satterford (Chief Executive) and Ms C Whitehead (Head of Democratic, Legal & Policy Services) for their presentation on the project. This outlined:

- The journey to date;
- The written ministerial statement, within which was the key 'New Unitary **District** Council' wording;
- The choice between 147 or 98 members on the new council;
- The option to cancel District Council elections due May 2019;
- Additionally in the ministerial statement, that the new authority was 'not a continuing authority' (detail was then given on how Continuing Authorities (not what was happening in Buckinghamshire) had been effected in Durham, Cornwall and Wiltshire);
- A Non-Continuing Authority example effected in Dorset. The Orders being laid before Parliament for Buckinghamshire would be much like the Orders for Dorset;
- The role of the Shadow Executive;
- The options for choosing the Leader of the Shadow Executive; and
- The planned Transition cost sharing and the key future dates.

The Leader gave notice that she wished to withdraw recommendation (v) from the report. Additionally recommendation (ii) was to be amended in that reference to 'discussions with the County Leader, Ministers and other parties' should read 'discussions with the County **and District** Leaders, Ministers and other parties'.

Questions, comments and debate followed as outlined below. During that debate, a motion was proposed and seconded to adjourn the meeting for 30 minutes. Upon being put to the vote, the motion was lost.

- It was confirmed that there was still the option of a legal challenge to the Written Ministerial Statement;
- It was seen as a sensible cost-effective move to put off the District Council elections due for May 2019;
- Officers indicated that in respect of job losses, it was too early to give detail on these, senior management were most at threat. How much was done before 2020 was open to debate. A number of staff may well transfer over en bloc. Liaison and communication with staff, HR departments and Trade Unions was being initiated;
- It was confirmed that using the current County Council Divisions (be it for 2 or 3 members each) would ensure roughly the same number of voters represented per Member. A subsequent Boundary Review after the establishment of the New Council would remove any discrepancies;
- The set-up of the Shadow Executive Board would be on the basis of current Governance legislation appropriate to the Authorities in that Executives were not subject to political balance;
- The ministerial statement contained both decisions of the Minister and issues where the 5 authorities were invited to comment. The date of implementation of 2020 was the former; a decision;
- It was confirmed that a team to support the Shadow Executive was to be set up including an Interim Head of Paid Service, a Section 151 Officer (Finance Head) and a Monitoring Officer (Legal Head). Additionally extra capacity was likely to be needed across authorities for all the extra work generated by the merger on top of continuing to deliver current services seamlessly;
- A member queried whether the pension funds were paid up to date across the 5 authorities, seeking assurance that WDC funds would not be utilised to pay shortfalls elsewhere. The Leader agreed to provide a written response in relation to this;
- Members noted that to start the new authority with 147 members could be the best course of action, cutting down member numbers thereafter was easier than increasing them in terms of public acceptance;

- The need to treat staff uniformly and fairly in terms of reorganisation across the 5 authorities merging was acknowledged;
- Possible names for the new authority were discussed;
- It was acknowledged that Public Consultation had been considered by the Secretary of State and accounted for in his decision;
- It was outlined that equal proportionality for the Districts despite their size ensured the best share of input across the 5 authorities going forward;
- The importance of the scrutinising role of the Member Group on Modernising Local Government was emphasised, the Membership of the Group was also noted; and
- The need to postpone Parish & Town Councils alongside the District Councils to ensure future elections for various tiers could be scheduled together to minimise costs was noted.

The Leader agreed to circulate to Members the representations that would be submitted to the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government in response to the Written Ministerial Statement and the proposed content of the Structural Change Orders.

RESOLVED: That:

(i) delegation of the wording of the representations to be made to the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government in response to the Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) and the proposed content of the Structural Change Orders on single tier arrangements for Buckinghamshire be given to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader;

(ii) it is noted that the Leader of the Council will continue to take part in discussions with the County & District Leaders, Ministers and other parties with a view to taking forward the implementation, provided that where decisions were required from this authority these will be made in accordance with existing governance requirements;

(iii) meetings of the Member group on Modernising Local Government be re-established to act as a consultative body on the wording of representations and implementation; and

(iv) it is noted that there is a need to set aside a provisional budget in 2019/20 for the delivery of the implementation to include the proportion of the costs of the Shadow Authority as may be required; such as project management resource and any other costs in 2019/20 that may fall directly to WDC subject to a review at year end by the Head of Finance and

Commercial in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance & Resources.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

Peter Druce	- Democratic Services
Ian Hunt	- Democratic Services Manager
Karen Satterford	- Chief Executive
Catherine Whitehead	- Head of Democratic, Legal & Policy.