



Cabinet

Tuesday, 13 November 2018

Potential Reorganisation of Local Government in Nottinghamshire

Report of the Chief Executive

Council Leader Councillor Simon Robinson

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. In December 2017 Council adopted a resolution which included the following: “that as a Council we welcome full engagement and discussions with Upper Tier Authorities on the reorganisation of Local Government on the strict understanding any reorganisation must not negatively impact growth in the Borough and the focus on delivering the highest quality of services to our residents.”
- 1.2. In July 2018, Nottinghamshire County Council adopted a resolution instructing officers to produce a business plan to demonstrate the advantages of unitary status for the county. In response Nottingham City Council has indicated that if a bid was submitted to the Secretary of State by Nottinghamshire County Council they would request consideration to be given to widening the City boundaries. If pursued both proposals would clearly have an impact on Rushcliffe Borough Council, its residents and businesses.
- 1.3. Currently there has been no official governance arrangements put in place for the Borough Council leadership (Members or officers) to participate, inform or assist the work of Nottinghamshire County Council. However, it is currently anticipated that at a meeting scheduled for 5 November 2018 information will be shared regarding the progress and recommendations to be made to Nottinghamshire County Council’s Policy Committee and Full Council in November and December.
- 1.4. To ensure Rushcliffe Borough Council is able to respond appropriately in accordance with the Council resolution it is recommended that Cabinet supports the formation of a cross party working group charged with the duty to consider, scrutinise and evaluate any recommendations or business case shared by Nottinghamshire County Council or Nottingham City Council. This approach will provide an appropriate forum to make an informed decision about any responses required to protect the residents’ interests.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that:

- a) A Cabinet-led cross-party task and finish working group be formed to consider the potential reorganisation of Local Government in Nottinghamshire in line with the Terms of Reference as set out in Appendix 1.
- b) The the task and finish working group reports its progress and findings back to Cabinet by no later than April 2019.

3. Reasons for recommendation

A cross-party task and finish working group is thought to be the best possible way of bringing together for detailed consideration all of the information required to make an informed contribution to the debate about the potential reorganisation of Local Government in Nottinghamshire.

4. Supporting information

- 4.1. On 12 July 2018, Nottinghamshire County Council voted on a motion, to instruct officers to prepare a formal business case for the creation of a unitary authority for Nottinghamshire. Any business case submitted as a formal bid to government could lead to the abolition of the County Council as well as the seven district councils in Nottinghamshire. Currently it is understood that the County Council's work includes the creation of one unitary authority for the county. Supporters of the proposal believe that unitary status would make things simpler for residents and enable the authority to take a county-wide approach whilst reducing the level of duplication. However, the driving factor is seen by some to be the need to respond the continuing financial deficit being experienced within local government and the continued increasing demand being placed upon key service areas. Objectors to the proposal believe that local government in Nottinghamshire may become too remote and removed from the people it represents.
- 4.2. At this time, these 'reasons' to support or object to the proposals are predominantly unsubstantiated conjecture, which have been reported in the public domain, often within the press. There has not been sufficient time to pull together the information required to view the proposals from multiple perspectives, taking into account real facts, figures and projections to assess the overall impact of the proposal. At the time of writing this report no opportunity has been presented to either officers or Members to fully engage in the process of agreeing the drivers for change, identifying options, undertaking an impact analysis, cost profiling or construction of a business case.
- 4.3. It is reported that the County Council are considering the viability of seven different proposals (or variations on proposals) including a no change option, a unitary covering the whole of Nottinghamshire serving approximately

817,000 residents, and various ways of subdividing the county to create two unitary councils. Nottingham City Council has made it clear (Appendix 2) that it will start to formalise its own plans to extend the city boundaries which could significantly impact upon West Bridgford and the wider Rushcliffe area.

- 4.4. In terms of a timeline, the County Council are currently working on proposals which will be debated at a meeting of the council in December 2018. If the council decides to progress to submitting a formal bid, it is understood that there will be a further period of public consultation in the new year with a finalised proposal being presented to Nottinghamshire County Council in May 2018. This proposal would then be potentially submitted to the Secretary of State for consideration after this date.
- 4.5. It is clear that to be in a position to take an appropriate view it is essential that Rushcliffe is engaged, informed and responsive to any future government dialogue. Therefore it is proposed that a cross party working group is formed as a task and finish working group. The group would be tasked with drawing together the relevant information regarding the impact upon the Borough, residents, the Council's serves and the likely financial impact. The findings and recommendations from the group will be reported to Cabinet prior to any formal consideration by Full Council.

5. Alternative options considered and reasons for rejection

Cabinet can choose to not establish the cross-party task and finish working group and either not prepare information in advance of the publication of the County Council proposal or find an alternative way of drawing that information together, however all these options could result in an uninformed understanding of the proposals being submitted and a lack of clarity regarding the stance of the Council.

6. Risks and uncertainties

There are significant risks to the Council if no action is taken on this issue. Actively engaging in the debate allows the Council be involved in designing the shape of local government for this area in the future to get the best possible deal for the Borough and its residents. Refusing to engage with the debate will result in Rushcliffe being seen as part of the problem not part of the solution.

7. Implications

7.1. Financial implications

At this point in time there are no financial implications with forming a cross-party task and finish working group. Any future financial implications will be reported in accordance with the Council's financial governance arrangements.

7.2. Legal implications

Consideration should be given to appropriate membership of the group given that some borough councillors also serve on the County Council and should therefore be mindful of the conflict of interest this could be seen to involve.

7.3. Equalities implications

There are no equalities implications in setting up a cross-party task and finish working group.

7.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 implications

There are no Section 17 implications in setting up a cross-party task and finish working group.

8. Link to corporate priorities

Participation in a proactive debate about the potential reorganisation of Local Government in Nottinghamshire feeds into all three of the Council's Corporate Priorities.

9. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that

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- b) The the task and finish working group reports its progress and findings back to Cabinet by no later than April 2019.

For more information contact:	Allen Graham Chief Executive Tel: 0115 9148520 agraham@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	None
List of appendices:	Appendix 1: Terms of Reference for a cross-party task and finish working group on the potential reorganisation of Local Government in Nottinghamshire Appendix 2: Letter from CEX of Nottingham City Council to CEX of Nottinghamshire County Council regarding local government reorganisation

Terms of Reference for the Potential Reorganisation of Local Government in Nottinghamshire Working Group

Membership

- Chairman of the Group to be a member of Cabinet
- Group to comprise of nine Councillors
- Membership to be cross-party and representative of the Council

Timescale

- It is anticipated that the Group will commence in November 2018 and report its findings by April 2019.

Terms of Reference

The Group will examine:

- The latest information about the Borough including demographics, Office of National Statistics data, and resident satisfaction survey data.
- Information about the Council's services including the costs of such services, the quality of service provision and use of services by residents as well as plans for future transformation and development.
- Latest financial information and projections for the future.
- Any proposals from other authorities about the future of Local Government in Nottinghamshire.

Support and Resources

- The Group will be supported by the Chief Executive, Executive Manager – Transformation and Operations, and Executive Manager – Finance and Corporate Services