

Title: Update on Joint Work of WDC and SDC
Lead Officer: Chris Elliott/David Buckland
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Hales/Councillor Cargill
Wards of the District directly affected: All wards

Summary

It was agreed at a previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and of the Finance and Audit Committee that a report would be brought to each meeting to set out the progress of the work being done to enable effective Scrutiny of the proposals.

To support this approach, this report is to introduce a Programme Highlight report template which sets out to systematically report progress of the South Warwickshire Together Programme at monthly intervals.

Recommendation

That the contents of the report and appendices are noted and any comments arising are presented to the Cabinets of both Councils and the Joint Advisory Steering Group (JASG).

1 Background/Information

1.1 This report reiterates the vision agreed by both Councils and the reasons for undertaking this approach; sets out work done to date; the next steps; the key benefits; and the key milestones and intended overall outcome. The changes from the last report are set out in italics.

1.2 Vision – both SDC and WDC at their respective Full Councils agreed the following vision:

To create a single statutory South Warwickshire District Council covering all of the activities currently carried out by Stratford-on-Avon District Council and Warwick District Council by 1 April 2024.

1.3 Reasons for undertaking this approach:

- Both Councils have significant financial pressures
- Both Councils wish to continue to provide valued services to residents/businesses/local communities
- The two Councils have a good track record of partnership
- There is a shared economic geography between the two Councils
- There is a shared sense of community between the two Councils' areas
- There is a very strong political relationship in place
- The two Councils are within the same County Council area.

1.4 Work done to date (including ongoing work) includes:

- Deloitte Report commissioned and agreed by both setting out the high-level business case for the creation of a single South Warwickshire District Council
- Vision stated above (paragraph 1.2) agreed by both Councils
- The Cabinet portfolios for both Councils are fully aligned
- Joint contract awarded for the Refuse and Recycling Service
- Agreed to develop jointly a South Warwickshire Local Plan
- Published the first stage of that Plan and issued a call for sites
- Agreed a joint Regulatory Services Enforcement Policy
- Agreed to develop a South Warwickshire Economic Strategy
- Agreed a shared set of ambitions regarding the Climate Emergency
- Joint Staff/HR policies agreed
- Agreed and have appointed a Transformation Programme Manager and Programme Support Officer
- Established a governance regime via the creation of an officer Programme Board (which meets weekly) and the Councillor led Joint Arrangements Steering Group (Reports and Notes of meeting available on the South Warwickshire Together Hub)
- Work on due diligence financially undertaken by LGA consultant and reported to JASG
- Regular meetings with Unison (both branches) on a fortnightly basis
- Communication Hub for all Staff and Councillors of both Councils established – South Warwickshire Together Hub
- Leaders and CEOs meet fortnightly
- Joint Management Team meets fortnightly (two vacancies immediately saved)
- Discussions have started with the Government regarding the creation of a single South Warwickshire District Council
- Agreed paper for public consultation proposals
- Sharing experience and likewise gaining experience from joint work of other Councils including those who have merged and those who are also considering the same step
- Update presentations given to Councillors, members of staff and Service Managers
- Scrutiny Chairs of SDC/WDC have met
- Start of public consultation on proposal from 6 September to 24 October – 600 representatives of the community directly surveyed; open form available for all to make their comments; stakeholders notified and asked for comments; focus groups for residents; parish/town council; community/voluntary; business
- Consultation on proposal has taken place.
- CEOs have held a consultation session with over 50 Parish/Town Councils; and with business representatives of the Chamber of Commerce; almost 600 staff have attended CEO briefing sessions. All three MPs have been briefed.
- Programme of Service Integration and principle of sharing an HQ was subject to a separate report that has been agreed by both Cabinets.
- Business Case for Joint Legal Service integration was agreed by both Cabinets
- Report to Employment Committee re use of Section 113 Agreements for the Service Integration process

- Both Councils considered and agreed to make a formal application to merge the two organisations to create a single South Warwickshire Council – on Monday 13 December 2021
- The application has been acknowledged by a Minister who will lead the work on the assessment.
- Officers have contacted the civil servants to seek follow up meetings and to ensure requests for information are responded to quickly
- Have brought together both Council's Homelessness/Housing Advice teams under the same line manager along with the Community Teams from both Councils. This post will also provide support for the health and well-being work at South Warwickshire Place Partnership Board
- Signed the Joint Waste contract which will start on 1 August
- Published the call for sites in response to the proposed new South Warwickshire Local Plan.

1.5 Programme Highlight Report

- 1.5.1 The Programme Highlight Report document (attached at Appendix 1) sets out to systematically provide a snapshot update of progress related to the Programme. It is envisaged that this document will subsequently be used to update members, JMT, officers, trade unions and other stakeholders during the journey of change.
- 1.5.2 The highlight report will be assessing how the programme is progressing in relation to the following factors: Overall status, Schedule, Benefits, Risks/Issues, Budget, Resources. Summary notes will be given for each of these factors to outline the latest position including any known actions to address the rating.
- 1.5.3 The highlight report also includes a high-level Programme Schedule to illustrate the outline plan of the entire programme, including known dates key milestones and also of the defined tranches.
- 1.5.4 A Red Amber Green (RAG) rating scheme is being used to objectively indicate a best fit assessment for the factors set out above. A key has been provided in the highlight report but in brief:
- Red rating: Significantly off track and major interventions are needed
 - Amber rating: Moderately off track but within manageable limits of the programme
 - Green rating: On track and or exceeding targets
 - No rating: Unrated as either not yet started or developed enough to rate.
- 1.5.5 The key milestones for the programme are indicated in the report including their estimated and actual dates of achievement.
- 1.5.6 Notable developments and achievements during the reporting period, usually the preceding month, will be captured. Proposed targets for the next reporting period will also be listed, when known.

- 1.5.7 The South Warwickshire Together Programme Board will receive progress updates from all designated workstream leads at least monthly, while the workstream is in flight. This also allows regular opportunity for any emerging risks or issues that cannot be mitigated at workstream level to be escalated to the programme board. Appropriate feedback will be given to workstream leads.
- 1.5.8 Workstream leads are advised that if an issue is critical, escalation should be made at the soonest possible time through the Programme Team.
- 1.5.9 It should be noted that workstreams may contain a combination of projects, change management activities and one-off tasks that require a variety of approaches, timelines, costs, skills and resources to deliver the objectives. Support will be provided by the Programme Team where appropriate and added value is provided.
- 1.5.10 To note, workstreams will only illustrate an overall RAG rating on the programme highlight report in their updates, again as a best fit assessment. This will be reviewed by the Programme Team in due course.
- 1.5.11 Programme Highlight reports will be published on the South Warwickshire Together Hub, accessible by all members and officers for reference.
- 1.5.12 The format of the highlight report will be reviewed by the Programme Board to ensure it is achieving its purpose as the programme develops further.
- 1.6 The expected benefits include:
- Achieving financial stability, addressing annual net savings identified in the Medium-Term Financial Plans (MTFPs) of both Councils.
 - Becoming a more effective Council
 - Having stronger accountability
 - Increased ability to tackle climate change
 - Increased ability to support local economic growth
 - Enhanced partnership working and joined up local government
 - Increased presence, influence and strategic voice nationally and regionally.
 - Having a strategic approach to housing and planning
 - Levelling up – better outcomes for residents and businesses
- 1.7 The key milestones are:
- Agreement to the business case to be submitted to Government on 13 December 2021 – **achieved**
 - Approval granted by the Secretary of State within a year of the submission date
 - Shadow Council in existence from January 2023 (estimated) – elections inc. those of Parish deferred for a year
 - All services merged by March 2024 having started the process in November 2021 – **underway and under review**
 - New Council comes into life on 1 April 2024
 - Elections to new Council in May 2024.

- 1.8 The overall outcome would be that a new South Warwickshire Council which has a sustainable financial foundation and so is able to deliver transformed, and relevant services for the residents, businesses, and communities of the area.

2 Alternative Options available

- 2.1 Strategic options were evaluated as part of the work done for the public consultation and can be seen at the Hub. Both Councils have made the decision to seek a merger and previous decisions have agreed plans for service integration and HQ accommodation.

3 Consultation and Member's comments

- 3.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members of current progress and to enable them to make comments.

4 Implications of the proposal

4.1 Legal/Human Rights Implications

- 4.1.1 As so decided by Members, and if so then by the Government, the proposal will have very significant legal implications in that both SDC and WDC will cease to exist and a new legal identify will come into being.

4.2 Financial

- 4.2.1 This report itself does not impact on the budgetary framework or budget, but the subject matter of the report will have an impact as was documented in the report considered in December and in the budget agreed in February 2022.

4.3 Council Plans

4.3.1 Warwick Council Plan

Fit for the Future (FFF)

The Council's FFF Strategy is designed to deliver the Vision for the District of making it a Great Place to Live, Work and Visit. To that end amongst other things the FFF Strategy contains several Key projects.

The FFF Strategy has three strands, People, Services and Money, and each has an external and internal element to it, the details of which can be found [on the Council's website](#). The table below illustrates the impact of this proposal if any in relation to the Council's FFF Strategy.

FFF Strands

External impacts of proposal(s)

People - Health, Homes, Communities - The report will have no direct impact for the community at this stage, but the overall programme will assist with the ability to continue to provide services.

Services - Green, Clean, Safe – As above.

Money- Infrastructure, Enterprise, Employment – As above.

Internal impacts of the proposal(s)

People - Effective Staff – The joint work will offer better protection to staff than the alternatives and by being part of a larger workforce it will offer more opportunities for training and progress.

Services - Maintain or Improve Services – The joint work is intended to better enable the two Councils to maintain or improve their services.

Money - Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term – It is intended that the work does provide for a firm financial footing over the longer term.

Supporting Strategies & Changes to Existing Policies – The joint work will impact on the two Council's policies. Part of the Programme of work will be to bring the policies of the two Councils into line over the period to 2024 and in some cases beyond that.

4.3.2 ***Stratford-on-Avon Council Plan***

The overall vision which guides SDC's Council Plan is as follows:

We are ambitious for the future of the District as an excellent place to live, work, learn, visit and invest.

The plan sets out our vision for Stratford-on-Avon District as a place in 2030 and for local government in 2030.

The core of the plan is a set of ambitions and actions for the Council over the next four years under five key objectives:

- Working on regional, national and international stages
- Responding to the climate emergency
- Enhancing the quality of Stratford-on-Avon as a place
- Nurturing a thriving, innovative and inclusive economy
- Putting residents and communities centre stage.

The draft Vision and Plan was the subject of public consultation in summer 2019 and the content was informed by two workshops with the Council's key local partners.

We look forward working with residents, local communities and our partners to deliver our ambitions for 2023 in the context of our longer term vision for the district.

The impact on COVID and the forecast of future reductions of government funding will mean that it will become increasingly difficult for the Council to deliver against these objectives. The possibility of working in partnership however, including leading to a full merger should ensure that more of these objectives can be delivered.

This proposed approach is also in line with the final objective of the Council Plan which states:

- In order to deliver this, we will become a more agile and resilient Council.

4.4 ***Environmental/Climate Change Implications***

- 4.4.1 The Councils have agreed joint ambitions on Climate Change and a shared climate change action programme (CCAP). The CCAP provides the basis for joint working to reduce carbon emissions and to enable our communities, economy, and environment to adapt to climate changes. This approach recognises that responses to climate change should not be constrained by administrative boundaries. Furthermore, a single entity will enable a deeper review of the Councils' building assets to be undertaken with the potential to achieve additional carbon reduction measures. Joint working has the potential to reduce carbon emissions from our buildings by enabling shared use of assets and combined approaches to planning and procuring decarbonisation projects.
- 4.4.2 Work is currently being undertaken to complete a joint carbon baseline exercise to show comparable and joint carbon emissions data for WDC and SDC over the last three years. This data will enable prioritisation to be more effective and will ensure progress on decarbonisation can be reported accurately on a regular basis.

4.5 ***Analysis of the effects on Equality***

- 4.5.1 A high-level impact statement prepared in conjunction with public consultation can be seen on the consultation website and will also be published on the South Warwickshire Together Hub.

4.6 ***Data Protection***

- 4.6.1 Not applicable.

4.7 ***Health and Wellbeing***

- 4.7.1 The development of the South Warwickshire Place Partnership (Health) within the overall new structure for the sub region will greatly assist both Councils ability to help improve health and wellbeing for the area. As organisations the Councils are also seeking to integrate their approaches to health and safety reporting and response for staff. Both currently offer similar support packages to staff, and this will be integrated and standardised over time.

5 Risk Assessment

- 5.1 An updated Programme risk register for the joint work has been developed and is attached as Appendix 2 for consideration and comment.
- 5.2 During review of the risk register, modifications have been made to the format to include a risk rating change indicator with arrows showing if the score has increased, decreased or has remained the same.
- 5.3 Members should be advised that it will be unrealistic to assume that there will be a radical change in risk rating scores, actions and outcomes on a monthly basis. This will be dependent on the nature and scope of the risk and its' related mitigations taking effect enough to reduce, remove or suitably control the impact or frequency. In effect, it should be viewed dynamically and accepted as valid as the time of his last update.

6 Conclusion/Reasons for the Recommendation

- 6.1 This report sets out current position on the work being done jointly between WDC and SDC.

Report Information Sheet

Please complete and submit to Democratic Services with draft report

Committee/Date	Overview and Scrutiny/Finance and Audit Committee 12/13 April 2022	
Title of report	Update on Joint Work of WDC and SDC	
Consultations undertaken		
Consultee *required	Date	Details of consultation /comments received
Ward Member(s)	-	
Portfolio Holder WDC & SDC *	30/03/22	Cllr Hales
Financial Services *	30/03/22	Mike Snow
Legal Services *	30/03/22	Phil Grafton
Other Services		
Chief Executive(s)	28/03/22	Chris Elliott
Head of Service(s)		
Section 151 Officer	30/03/22	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer	30/03/22	Phil Grafton
CMT (WDC)	30/03/22	Chris Elliott, Andy Jones, Dave Barber, Tony Perks
Leadership Co-ordination Group (WDC)		
Other organisations	28/03/22	SDC
Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Ctte/Council?		Recommendation to Overview and Scrutiny Committee/ Finance and Audit Committee
Contrary to Policy/Budget framework		No
Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)?		No
Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)?		No
Accessibility Checked?		File/Info/Inspect Document/Check Accessibility