



Agenda Item 6

Finance & Audit and Overview & Scrutiny Committees 6 and 7 July 2021

Title: Approach to the Scrutiny of the proposed Merger of Warwick District Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council

Lead Officer: Chris Elliott chris.elliott@warwickdcgov.uk

Portfolio Holder: Andrew Day

Public report

Wards of the District directly affected: All

Contrary to the policy framework: No

Contrary to the budgetary framework: No

Key Decision: No

Included within the Forward Plan: No

Equality Impact Assessment Undertaken: No

Consultation & Community Engagement: No

Final Decision: Yes

Accessibility checked: Yes

Officer/Councillor Approval

Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	30 June 2021 30 June 2021	Chris Elliott Andrew Jones
CMT		
Section 151 Officer		
Monitoring Officer	30 June 2021	Andrew Jones
Finance		
Portfolio Holder(s)		Andrew Day

1. Summary

- 1.1. The report brings forwards outline proposals for detailed Scrutiny of the proposed merger of Warwick District Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. The Committees confirm their support for the proposed scrutiny of the proposed merger between Warwick District Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council as set out in this report
- 2.2. The Committees consider the proposed consultation plan as set out at Appendix 1 to this report and pass comment on it.
- 2.3. The Committees ask officers to arrange an online scrutiny session on the Programme of Implementation (PI) for Members of the two Committees and delegate authority to Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees to formalise the response to the Leaders & Chief Executives of both authorities.
- 2.4. The Committees note the intention to provide a briefing for all Councillors on the PI for merger on 9 August at 6.00pm, followed by Group meetings.
- 2.5. The Committees note that there will be an update, as part of their work programme, at each of their meetings on progress through the PI with the format to be agreed by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairs of the two Warwick Scrutiny Committees.
- 2.6. The Committee asks the Scrutiny Chairs of Warwick District to meet regularly with the Scrutiny Chair of Stratford-on-Avon District Council to discuss scrutiny of merger and cross cutting themes.

3. Reasons for the Recommendation

- 3.1. At the Council meeting on 24 February 2021 it was agreed that "the Chief Executives of both Councils are authorised to prepare a Programme of Implementation (PI) to deliver the vision agreed at 2.4 above for consideration by Members no later than July 2021.
- 3.2. At their meetings in April, the Scrutiny Committees supported the proposals from the Chairs of the respective Committees as follows:

Five broad themes to guide the scrutiny:

- Impact on services to residents.
- Democratic representation.
- Impact on strategic priorities (e.g. CEAP).
- Finance and Council Tax.
- Communication and consultation.

These themes were supported with some additional focus on specific services (e.g. Neighbourhood Services, Green Spaces) and the importance of understanding the interrelation with Parish & Town Councils.

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- Scrutiny for the merger should continue to be done separately by F&A and O&S but that the Chairs of scrutiny should consult frequently to ensure that there is good synergy between the work of the Committees.
- Scrutiny should be conducted in line with the five themes identified with specific service areas as identified being covered in the 'Impact on Services to Residents' theme, and the impact on Town and Parish Councils should become a cross cutting theme. (ask Committee Services to arrange a briefing session for Members on the differing roles of Town & Parish Councils across the District, what powers they currently hold, what further powers and responsibilities could be delegated or devolved to them within the exiting legal framework if those bodies agreed).
- Committee Services should be asked to prepare a scrutiny plan which outlines a timetable for scrutiny to consider these themes. This timetable needs to give sufficient scope for the Committee to influence the development of policy rather than simply reviewing it.
- The Council should seek additional resource to support the scrutiny of this programme both in terms of Council officer support and expert support from the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny (CfGS) (Formally CfPS).
- In terms of the joint local plan, this will be a joint exercise with Stratford-on-Avon District Council and the Chairs of Scrutiny to meet with relevant officers and agree an approach in the new council year.

3.3. The Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees and Chief Executive met with Ed Hammond of the CfGS. CfGS brought forward an outline proposal for Scrutiny of the proposed merger. Officers and the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees considered the proposal, being mindful of the discussions at the Joint Arrangements Steering Group (which include representatives from both Councils) that had subsequently taken place. From this it was identified there were key steps for scrutiny to be involved in:

- Reviewing the proposed PI.
- Reviewing the process for the proposed consultation.
- Reviewing the proposed submission document at an early stage and just prior to submission.
- Monitoring the delivery of the implementation plan for the merger of the authorities.

3.4. The Chairs were mindful of the key strategic importance of the proposed merger and wanted to ensure that robust scrutiny, from a Warwick District Council perspective could be undertaken, and also recognised the significant resource requirements this will require to both deliver and scrutinise. There is a need for engagement with Councillors to both update them and enable meaningful feedback at relevant stages of the proposals, therefore they asked officers to provide a way for this to occur without significant resources to deliver it. Based on this, the first steps of this will be the feedback consultation approach, along with the remote scrutiny session and wider briefing for all Councillors on the PI.

3.5. The attached report on the consultation, which is being led by Stratford-on-Avon District Council was considered by the Stratford Overview & Scrutiny

Committee on 30 June 2021. This Committee is also requested to present its views on the consultation plan.

- 3.6. It is important to keep Members informed on the PI ahead of the anticipated discussion on the submission document later in the year. This will form as appendix to the Work Programme each meeting of the Committee.
- 3.7. The Committees have previously committed to scrutiny of the merger at Warwick to be independent of Stratford-on-Avon but there is a need for liaison between the Councils to share experiences and ideas. Therefore, it is considered appropriate for dialogue to be between the three scrutiny Chairs at the two Councils.

4. Policy Framework

4.1. Fit for the Future (FFF)

- 4.1.1. 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.
- 4.1.2. The FFF Strategy has 3 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](#). Section 4.2 below illustrates the impact of this proposal if any in relation to the Council's FFF Strategy.

4.2. FFF Strands

4.2.1 External impacts of proposal(s)

People - Health, Homes, Communities – The proposals within the report have no direct impact on this area, however they are designed to scrutinise the proposal to merge Warwick District Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council to ensure those proposals are sound and robust and are likely to achieve the aims and aspirations as set out within the proposals.

Services - Green, Clean, Safe - The proposals within the report have no direct impact on this area, however they are designed to scrutinise the proposal to merge Warwick District Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council to ensure those proposals are sound and robust and are likely to achieve the aims and aspirations as set out within the proposals.

Money- Infrastructure, Enterprise, Employment - The proposals within the report have no direct impact on this area, however they are designed to scrutinise the proposal to merge Warwick District Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council to ensure those proposals are sound and robust and are likely to achieve the aims and aspirations as set out within the proposals.

4.2.2. Internal impacts of the proposal(s)

People - Effective Staff – This report provides clear direction for officers on the approach the Committee wish to take on scrutiny.

Services - Maintain or Improve Services - This section needs to provide details in respect of the following intended outcomes: Focusing on our customers' needs; Continuously improve our processes and Increase the digital provision of services.

Money - Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term - This section needs to provide details in respect of the following intended outcomes: Better return/use of our assets; Full Cost accounting; Continued cost management; Maximise income earning opportunities and Seek best value for money.

4.3. **Supporting Strategies**

4.3.1. Each strand of the FFF Strategy has several supporting strategies but this report does not directly impact upon them.

4.4. **Changes to Existing Policies**

4.4.1. This report does not bring forward any changes to current policies.

4.5. **Impact Assessments**

4.5.1. The consultation will be led by Stratford-on-Avon District Council however this Council should satisfy itself that the proposed approach does not discriminate against individuals with protected characteristics under the equality act and seek assurance from SDC on this point.

5. **Budgetary Framework**

5.1. There are no planned budgetary implications of the recommendations of this report.

6. **Risks**

6.1. The failure to undertake robust scrutiny of the proposals raises two significant risks for the Council. Firstly, it is essential that each steps of the proposal are scrutinised robustly by Councillors to ensure that it will bring forward the aims of the proposed merger. Secondly the Government will be looking to see engagement with all Councillors with the proposals and scrutiny will form a key part of that engagement process.

7. **Alternative Option(s) considered**

7.1. No alternatives have been considered as the proposals were developed in line with the request of the Scrutiny Committees.