

**Response from the meeting of the Cabinet on the
O&S Committee's Comments – 9 December 2021**

Item Number: 4 – Proposal to create a South Warwickshire District Council

Requested by: Chair- O&S and the Green Group

Reasons Considered:

Chair, O&S:

Because of the strategic importance to the District Council and its residents, employees, and business partners.

Green Group:

Call-in questions:

- What's the plan for greater engagement with town/parish councils? How can we be sure that the new SW council will do this?
- Merger could be a logical first step to becoming a unitary council; if this is the case, what are possible steps in the process?
- 3.4.6 (page 9) notes the possibility of a democratic deficit and 4.1 the reduction in councillors may be "from a small handful to closer to 20". Going from 80 to 60 councillors would be a substantial reduction: can there be any guarantee that this won't happen?
- With larger planning authorities, how do they organise planning committee? (e.g. do councillors have to travel further to the meetings, and decide on more remote applications?)
- The business case (appendix 10 page 6) gives local support from a university, hospital trust and a tourism organisation that receives income from the districts. Have important local political organisations such as MPs, WMCA and PCC also been consulted? 3.4.5 of the main report says other councils have not objected but WCC's response is more ambiguous. Can responses from all of these people and organisations be shared with councillors?
- If the merger doesn't work out, how can councillors or residents seek to revert back to the previous district councils?

Scrutiny Comment:

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting discussed the report using the themes that the Scrutiny Chairs had established at the outset of the process. Five main themes were identified:

1. Consultation
2. Services
3. Climate Emergency
4. Democratic Representation
5. Finance & Risk

Overview & Scrutiny would focus on themes (1) to (4). At the meeting each theme was discussed in turn and any comments and recommendations made at the end of discussion of each theme.

Consultation:

The Committee asked that where issues had been raised by residents, there should be a summary of the issues raised and drilled down to provide the split between Councils. It also requested that the way that information was given to residents, should both Councils agree to merge on 13 December, be strengthened so that residents are clear about the aims and objectives of the new Council. There should be an ongoing communications plan. It requested that stakeholder submissions should be circulated to all Councillors ahead of 13 December.

It recommended to Cabinet that a clearer statistical summary of the evidence base should be published providing clarity upfront on the differences between results in respect of the Residents' Telephone Survey and the Open Consultation Questionnaire and how these evidence bases would be used to shape the future strategy.

Services:

The Committee noted the importance of communication with residents and how the council engages with them as Services develop.

The Committee made two recommendations to Cabinet:

1. There should be Councillor engagement when developing the Service Area Plans, this should include involvement in metrics and how measures would be set. (Councillors would not be involved in deciding the mechanism for providing this.)
2. More information should be provided on how to treat the risk logs (the Deloitte Risk Register and the Programme Risk Register devised by officers) and the relationship between the two, after it had been explained that the differences were a result of the timings when the Risk Registers had been prepared, with Deloitte's being at the very start of the process.

Climate Emergency:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee did not make any comments or recommendations in respect of Climate Emergency.

Democratic Representation:

The Committee recommended to Cabinet that:

1. It should be made clear that the Council would work with all parish and town councils in the district, not just those which were members of the Warwickshire Association of Local Councils (WALC).
2. The implications of reference to the "Quality Parish" mark (Item 4/Appendix 10/Page 4 in the agenda papers or page 6 in the actual document) should be reviewed because it was too restrictive. Councillors expressed their scepticism about the advantages being a "Quality Parish" Council might bring.
3. The Shadow Council, should, as one of the first things it focusses on, create a framework for how parish and town councils will be supported and how this Council would engage with them with a view to looking at how powers might be devolved to them in the future where there was interest in so doing.

Cabinet and Council Response:

Cabinet response:

The recommendations in the report were approved and the recommendations to Council were passed to Council for consideration on 13 December 2021.

In respect of the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet decided as follows:

In respect of the surveys, it was agreed that "the residents survey has been designed to give a representative sample that reflects the makeup of people across the two district populations. Achieving a sample size of more than 600 means that statistically speaking we can be 95% confident that it reflects the views of residents as a whole. We have used this to gauge the level of support for the merger. The open consultation was not weighted in the same way meaning that many groups have been under represented and some over represented. Whilst it doesn't provide a statistically sound base it is nevertheless an important source that will help us identify the key concerns that need to be addressed across the programme implementation."

In respect of service risks, both SDC and WDC Councillors will be involved in this work, and the template for the service area plans should be considered by the Transformation PAB with each draft Service Area Plan being considered by its respective PAB; and

In respect of Democratic Representation; the Cabinet were satisfied that the report is clear enough, that all Parish and Town councils will be worked with, not just those who are members of WALC; officers were asked to fully investigate and confirm the merits of being a quality Parish/Town Council and the details of this be circulated ahead of Council on Monday; and in respect of the framework for working with Parish and Town Councils, the Cabinet expected this work to start in the New Year if the Council was minded to merge with SDC.

Council response:

Council resolved that a formal submission be made to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to create a South Warwickshire District Council. It also resolved that a joint member working group be established to review the issues raised in Section 4 of the report and in addition to agree that the working group works with WALC and other key parish and town councils to undertake a community governance and function review for South Warwickshire. A consultation with staff and Trades Unions on options for addressing harmonisation of staff terms and conditions including pay was agreed but if there was failure to agree or if Council did not agree the terms, an emergency Council meeting would be arranged in early January so that a revised strategic approach could be considered prior to the setting of the annual budget for 2022/23 and beyond.

Item Number: 9 – Developing a Digital Strategy for South Warwickshire

Requested by: Chair - O&S

Reasons Considered:

Because of the significant importance to the District and South Warwickshire.

Scrutiny Comment:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted both the report and the importance to consider residents and businesses with the design as it is taken forward.

It recommended to Cabinet that:

- (1) A briefing should be provided to all Councillors because of the wide-ranging impact of the Strategy.
- (2) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee should hold a dedicated session on the Digital Strategy to scrutinise the Strategy in more depth and to look at the finer detail.
- (3) The lessons learned from the Finance System Project and Member involvement in the project should be incorporated into the work to be done for the Digital Strategy.

Cabinet Response:

The recommendations in the report were approved. Cabinet supported and agreed with recommendations (1) and (2) that the Committee had made and approved recommendation (3).

Item Number: 10 – Outdoor Sports Review – Proposed Revised Delivery Models for Council Owned Facilities

Requested by: Green Group

Reasons Considered:

Because this proposes a big change in culture and service delivery across the District

Scrutiny Comment:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is keen for basketball facilities to be provided across the District.

It recommended to Cabinet that as part of the contract, free time provision should be made available at a variety of times during the week and that the provider encourages a wider demographic of people to use the facilities.

Cabinet Response:

The recommendations in the report were approved as well as the recommendation from Overview & Scrutiny Committee.