

15 FEBRUARY 2021

## JOINT EXECUTIVE ADVISORY BOARD

15 February 2021

- |                                |                              |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| * Councillor Paul Abbey        | * Councillor Ann McShee      |
| * Councillor Jon Askew         | * Councillor Bob McShee      |
| Councillor Christopher Barrass | Councillor Masuk Miah        |
| Councillor Dennis Booth        | * Councillor Ramsey Nagaty   |
| * Councillor Ruth Brothwell    | * Councillor George Potter   |
| * Councillor Graham Eyre       | * Councillor Jo Randall      |
| * Councillor Andrew Gomm       | * Councillor Maddy Redpath   |
| * Councillor Angela Goodwin    | * Councillor Will Salmon     |
| Councillor Angela Gunning      | * Councillor Pauline Searle  |
| * Councillor Gordon Jackson    | * Councillor Fiona White     |
| * Councillor Diana Jones       | * Councillor Catherine Young |
| Councillor Steven Lee          |                              |

\* Present

Councillors Joss Bigmore, Chris Blow, Julia McShane, John Redpath, Caroline Reeves, John Rigg, Tony Rooth and Paul Spooner were also in attendance.

### **19 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE MEETING**

In the absence of Councillor Angela Gunning, Councillor Angela Goodwin assumed the role of Chairman for the meeting without the need for election and Councillor Gordon Jackson acted as Vice-Chairman.

### **20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Angela Gunning and Steven Lee. There were no substitutions.

### **21 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND NOTIFICATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary or non-pecuniary interests.

### **22 COLLABORATION BY COUNCILS IN SURREY**

The Joint Executive Advisory Board (JEAB) was invited to consider a report which informed councillors of discussions being held with other Surrey councils in respect of possible future local government structures in the County and opportunities for closer partnership working. To inform these discussions, KPMG had been commissioned collectively by the Surrey districts and boroughs to explore models for local government structures and prospects for greater collaboration between those councils, and its analysis of options and opportunities was appended to the report. Views were sought from councillors in this regard to assist with shaping the future direction of this work having, at this stage, a particular focus on closer partnership working with Waverley Borough Council (Waverley).

In terms of submitting related recommendations to the Executive, councillors were invited to express views and comments concerning preferred council structures in Surrey in the light of any future local government reorganisation, including the three unitary council model set out the KPMG report; priority areas for closer collaboration; the range of options for discussion

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with Waverley on greater partnership working; and the proposed engagement of the Local Government Association (LGA) to explore the potential savings for the various options for collaboration with Waverley.

The Board received an introduction and overview from the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council which outlined the background to the current position, the preferred future three unitary council option and closer partnership working with Waverley. This was followed by a presentation given by the Managing Director and the Strategy and Communications Manager. The presentation outlined the background, unitary council options, collaboration opportunities, working with Waverley, Guildford - Waverley options, service by service option, single officer team option, and specific matters for the Board to consider.

The following points and views arose from ensuing questions, comments and discussion:

- a) Whilst the restructuring of Surrey from a two tier to a unitary system of local government was welcomed, it was felt that a structure of three unitary authorities for the County was the best model as a single or two unitary authorities would be too large in scale resulting in democratic deficit and loss of local decision-making. Although none of the various unitary options should be discarded at present, 3c was the preferred proposal whilst 3g was recognised as having some merit.
- b) A councillor was of the view that a group of local authorities was able to submit a restructuring proposal to the Government and therefore a unanimous decision across Surrey would not be required to support a unitary bid from borough / district councils.
- c) The financial status of neighbouring authorities in Surrey should be taken into account as part of any unitary authority proposal.
- d) Although public consultation would form a valuable part of unitary authority proposals and options, it was suggested that councillors should also play their role as elected community representatives in this regard and that public engagement should feature clear explanatory material.
- e) Collaboration with Waverley was welcomed as a means to deliver savings through economies of scale and reduced duplication and to support the future case for a multi-unitary option. Although there were similarities between this Council and Waverley, there would be risks associated with merging two local authorities, such as a divergence of priorities, aims and manifestos, which would require careful negotiation including contract clauses and dispute resolution. Whilst Option A, service by service business cases, offered a gradual approach to merging to minimise further disruption following the implementation of the Future Guildford transformation programme, it would be time consuming to progress and achieve savings. Although Option B, single officer team, would realise greater savings, it would require careful management to achieve an equal balance between the two authorities. The engagement of the Local Government Association (LGA) to support the work with Waverley and develop an options appraisal for further consideration by both councils was supported.
- f) Although past discussions with Waverley in respect of collaboration had not come to fruition, it was felt that there were currently strong financial and governance drivers to pursue such an initiative and indications that Waverley was committed to do so.
- g) A collaboration with Waverley would seek to ensure adherence to shared values that sought to deliver excellent services designed to meet residents' needs.
- h) Collaboration discussions with Woking Borough Council had not progressed as that authority was currently experiencing changes in both political and officer leadership resulting in perceived uncertainties regarding its future direction.
- i) Other councils which had collaborated could be approached to ascertain the success and financial savings achieved as a result.
- j) In the event of collaboration with another borough(s), it was suggested that consideration should be given to establishing a regional planning regime in respect of

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Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to provide a holistic approach. This could involve merging Local Plans.

- k) As some areas of collaboration would be more straightforward to achieve than others, the support of the LGA to assist with addressing the more complex aspects was welcomed. Cross collaboration in areas such as procurement and economic development would be beneficial whilst tackling climate change should remain as a county wide initiative. Compatibility of ICT systems utilised by collaborating councils was an important factor and an associated audit was being undertaken to inform this.

The Chairman summarised the discussion and identified the following recommendations of the Board for submission to the Executive:

- In the event of a local government reorganisation in Surrey, a model of three unitary authorities for the County be pursued.
- Collaboration with Waverley is welcomed and the assistance of the LGA be sought to explore the details, concerns and potential financial savings.
- The option of including Woking Borough Council in a collaborative partnership in the future be retained.