

DISCUSSION PAPER

The effect on the transition to Wiltshire Council of:

- **Early amalgamation of services/functions**
- **Early migration from workstream to new service directorates**

including general governance arrangements and senior management.

Author

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1. Background

- 1.1 JIT has recently received detailed papers on the early amalgamation of services/functions and a more recent discussion paper on migration from workstream to service directorates. Although separate papers they are intrinsically linked and the principles set out in the former are equally applicable to the latter and indeed vice-versa.
- 1.2 It is not my intention in this paper to reiterate the principles, aims and objectives set out in the above reports but it is worthwhile to recall certain key elements:
- Clarity for staff by an early appreciation of structures and where they will fit in those structures.
 - An acceptance that staff morale has suffered during the transition with its inherent uncertainties, with the resultant need for early joining of services and staffing structures. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is a high volume of work that needs to be delivered, by these same people, to maintain service and effect a smooth transition to Wiltshire Council.
 - An acceptance that the transition needs to be at 'final testing' stage by 1st January 2009, i.e. we essentially need to have the governance structure effective and operational by this date.
 - An acceptance that with the new Corporate Leadership Team and service directors in place, they will take over and lead the existing workstreams effectively creating a virtual Unitary governance and senior management

structure in liaison with the Implementation Executive. It is essential that at this stage we do not lose the momentum that has built up in those areas which will directly influence and impact on the reputation of the Council from day one.

- An acceptance that, as the workstreams and the new Corporate Leadership Team develop and move the transition forward, the role of District Chief Executives and their respective senior management teams will inevitably diminish with services and functions effectively becoming quasi 'Unitary' services rather than individual district services with staff effectively seeking direction and guidance from their 'Unitary' managers rather than their existing managers.
- An acceptance that we will continue to lose 'key' staff unless the transition moves forward to clear and certain structures.

1.3 Subject to staffing regulations, the new Unitary Corporate Leadership Team is in place and it is anticipated that service directors will similarly be in place by 1st July 2008. Further, during September/October 2008 one can assume that circa 100 Heads of Service will also have been appointed.

1.4 With paragraphs 1.1 and 1.2 in mind, I have been asked to produce a discussion paper which sets out possible options for the early accountability and responsibility for the new Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) in respect of 'Unitary' services given the potential conflict with the current role of District Chief Executives and their teams.

2. Appraisal and Options Available

2.1 It is my belief that an early transition to management by the Unitary CLT is essential for the reasons set out above. There are, however, potential HR issues and politically there will be different attitudes to the 'concern' that with a diminishing District management function there is in some way a diminishing political function. The latter will not be the case in my opinion, but the former is an inevitability whether we embrace the transitional change or not.

2.2 At District level the position is broadly as follows:-

- Over 50% of staff are, from one perspective or another, actively engaged in the transition to the new Unitary authority and this will increase as we approach 1st April 2009.
- Staff are leaving, the ability to replace effectively being restricted because of the short term life of the District.

- Senior management is much reduced by staff leaving or being used as part of the transition (for example, one of my Deputies until last week's appointment was spending 90% of her time on the Unitary function. My role is to attempt to effectively 'manage' that gap and this will be replicated elsewhere).
- Accordingly my role and, I suspect, that of my peers is essentially 'to keep the show on the road'. This will become increasingly difficult as the handover approaches with more and more staff sitting in newly amalgamated teams (thus reducing not just capacity but also the flexible multi-functioning that a good District requires to operate effectively), others becoming involved in the transition, more staff leaving and further erosion of senior management whether by departure to other authorities or by appointment to key positions in the new Unitary.
- As touched upon in paragraph 2.1, there is a feeling with District members that they are becoming increasingly marginalised and it is essential that communication with them, in order to keep them involved and informed, both continues and is accelerated. The appointment of the new team provides a clear advantage as the focus for this work and emphasises their leadership role across service areas as that role for District Heads of Paid Service gradually diminishes.

2.3 My proposal is that we proactively manage the transition (rather than reactively) by not only joining services and establishing senior management structures but also transferring responsibility for management during transition to the members of the new CLT so that that team can direct and mould the staffing organisation both culturally and operationally, an organisation for which it will be ultimately responsible.

To be quite brutal, it will be that team which will be expected to have delivered an operational authority on 1st April 2009. It will not have the luxury of directing any operational failing to a former staffing regime so it must have the tools and the ability to 'take effective control' well before 1st April 2009. Given previous discussions it is generally accepted that 'effective control' in this context should be by 1st January 2009. In this context 'effective control' also means leadership, management and avoiding service silo areas which the workstreams are attempting to break down by their style and approach with cross cutting and barrier breaking involvement across service areas. There is of course a danger that migration from workstreams to corporate directorates (and CLT) could create a temporary loss of cohesion and lack of activity but by not effecting the migration would potentially leave a gap on 1st April 2009 between the aspirations of CLT and reality. It is also important that all key roles are filled to ensure consistency and accountability – if not filled, who will take responsibility and accountability.

2.4 Another key issue will be that of communication and engagement. Staff need to be comfortable as to who they liaise and work with as far as the transition towards the new Council is concerned, including those elements of their day to day work which will

increasingly impact on the transition. This is where there must be a clear mandate for the CLT to act and operate. For example, to make it more tangible a District Chief Executive would not want to take a lead role (nor would it be appropriate) in an area which will affect a Corporate Director's area on 1st April 2009. (District members also could have a view but it must be, of necessity, tempered by the views of the Implementation Executive and recommendations from the new CLT if the matter affects the new Council.)

- 2.5 The possible options set out below are based on this premise. Each District will have to consider which, if any, is appropriate for them; it is though accepted, in view of Mark's appointment to a Corporate Director position and, thus, a member of the new CLT, that Kennet District Council will not generally have to make a decision in this regard except in relation to the potentially wider pro-active role of fellow CLT members.

Options

- As the role of District Council Chief Executives has diminished (that role in job description terms would for example relate to Corporate plan, District policy formulation and action planning, ensuring that organisational structures are in place to meet the service delivery needs of the authority, etc, etc, all of which are defunct or heavily diminished and diminishing) as described in brief above the holder of that position could legitimately be made redundant prior to 1st April 2009. If this was to occur, one possible way forward would be to appoint Keith as joint Chief Executive of Wiltshire County Council and the respective District(s) who with CLT could manage the said District(s) over the 3 months or less leading to 1st April 2009. Sharing Chief Executives is now increasingly common e.g. Essex County Council and Brentwood District Council share a Chief Executive. Whilst this arrangement would enable CLT to direct, shape and manage the pre 1st April 2009 process and avoid any potential conflict between the needs of the transition and the role of the District Chief Executive, there is no doubt that not all Districts would be supportive and on the face of it Keith could effectively be faced with too wide a span of control. Nevertheless, a solution must be found if CLT is to effect its role as leaders of the new culture and change management process – they must be seen in this role not the existing District senior managers. How then can we ensure a much smoother transition for staff who we need to see themselves as part of the new authority prior to 1st April 2009?
- By the end of June/beginning of July the position of all first and second tier staff will be known as in the majority of cases it will be anticipated that their new roles, if any, in the Unitary Council will have been determined. In addition, by the end of September/October it is similarly anticipated that approximately 100 Heads of Service (3rd tier staff) will have been appointed. Thus the appointment of Corporate Directors, Service Directors and Heads of Service will have left a substantial void at District level with, at three senior levels, those officers gradually removing their tier to their 'existing' employers and wanting to press on

with the transition. There will effectively be little or no senior management capability left at some Districts, therefore, with the ability to concentrate solely on day to day management. With this in mind, perhaps the most appropriate option in terms of effecting a smooth transition under the conditions set out above, would be to effectively reflect the Wiltshire Council structure at Districts at some stage from 1st January 2009. This would resolve the wide span of control for Keith (it would remain as CLT only) and most importantly would provide those Corporate Directors, Service Directors and Heads of Service the invaluable opportunity to effectively 'take charge' and manage those functions which will be under their purview on 1st April 2009. This three month period as well as being an invaluable aid to the understanding of the parameters of their respective view posts is also essential in ensuring readiness for 'Day One'. Inevitably the success of this option will depend on the goodwill of officers, some of whom may have been unsuccessful in a competitive selection process. However, in my opinion, the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. In terms of members, a great advantage will be that even in this short period they will gain a greater understanding of how the Unitary might work in its wider context beyond day to day District concerns.

Similarly there is no reason why operational performance, including responses to Councillor's requests and queries, customer complaints, etc, should be affected as the District infrastructure remains in tact; the only change is the senior management chain which, once clarified at each District, will assume responsibility (see below).

- Within the above context each District can choose how, for just three months or less, it wishes to deal with the role of Head of Paid Service, i.e. retention of existing despite the rationale provided above; appointment of the most senior officer within the new Unitary structure and based at a particular District as an employee as Acting Head of Paid Service (e.g. a new Corporate Director, Service Director or Head of Service) or appointment of Keith in a joint role as set out above. As an alternative, where appropriate, existing Heads of Paid Service could remain in post and effectively delegate operational matters to the 'new structure' with the senior officers taking effective control of the operational matters. Those officers will be managed by the new CLT. However, although accountability could remain with the existing Heads of Paid Service, the potential for 'tension' and 'confusion' as detailed above would be a district possibility.
- A further advantage of the above approach would be to continue senior level support to the District committee meetings where appropriate (particularly Council, Executive etc). It will also give added opportunities for a wide cross-cutting understanding and involvement for members and officers alike. For example, this could include briefing members, wider portfolio links and a higher profile with both staff and members, e.g. surgeries, briefings, peripatetic management team meetings, etc, etc.

It should also be noted that District Council business will gradually be diminishing. Indeed, for example, I believe that West Wiltshire District Council's Executive now meets every other month rather than monthly in recognition of the diminishing workload. This should also be reflected in the workload of Overview and Scrutiny. Whilst each Overview and Scrutiny committee will have an annual workplan, in the majority of Districts this already relates to work supporting the transitional scrutiny board. Even at North Wiltshire District Council the workplan has been heavily reduced. This diminishing workload for members would give a greater opportunity to help shape issues such as area boards and the culture and values of the new Council. However, it must be accepted that for some members their role will be very different over the final quarter of the life of the respective District.

- At Districts such as Salisbury District Council there are a number of key projects that require effective project management. Any discussion on the above option will, of necessity, include a debate as to how effective project management will be achieved. Theoretically this should not be an issue as the operational structures remain in tact. Indeed there is no logical reason why responsibility for all major projects should not be transferred by 1st January 2009, providing the greater 'continuing authority' resources to assist and help drive those projects forward.
- Whatever the option, in simple terms the new CLT must be given the scope and capacity to effectively carry out its role as it will be expected to on 1st April 2009. Equally members of all constituent Districts must feel that they have access to a team which will ensure that day to day operations continue to run effectively.
- Previous reports have left in abeyance the decision as to when the new Corporate Directors, Strategic Directors and Heads of Service take up their respective positions. For effectively the reasons set out above, in my view, it should be when the majority of Heads of Service are appointed or at the latest by 1st January 2009. Indeed this will dilute any argument for NOT moving forward early as Districts will effectively have no senior staff left, i.e. only those who have been unsuccessful in seeking senior posts or who have chosen not to. All authorities will have to move forward together – there will be no choice. In turn this could lead to early departure of some senior staff by way of redundancy and I believe that we as JIT should be making clear recommendations in this regard leaving aside the obvious rationale above. With regard to senior staff let me suggest another example – we have accepted that we are losing staff; if one takes 'legal services' it is possible that an agreed structure will be 'light' on DAY ONE by up to 10 or 20 staff. We could be managing this situation so that by 1st January 2009 we know the structure, we know who has been appointed up to Head of Service level and we know who is leaving (early if appropriate) – any gaps could be advertised then, so on 1st April 2009 or near enough you have an effective team. This will no doubt be replicated in other services and we should be ensuring that we are equipped to cope now not on 1st April 2009. This may be linked with the DAY ONE agenda.

3. JIT and Other Matters

- 3.1 It is not the purpose of this discussion paper to analyse and pontificate on the workstreams and governance of the transition. This is covered by detailed and thorough reports which have been drafted by Tim Gregory and Ian Cook. However acceptance of this report will precipitate change:-
- In essence JIT should consist of the new CLT (Keith will need to define CLT for this purpose), four District representatives (possibly less where there is also representation through CLT), Statutory Officers and the Programme Manager. This, I believe, is the thrust of Ian and Tim's approach and I agree with the rationale.
 - Similarly workstream responsibility should migrate to the new senior management and again Tim and Ian's rationale appears sound.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The paper on Migration from Workstream to Service Directorates was timely. It also spoke of there being considerable competition for time. However, in my opinion, there is no time left for delay and the constituent elements (services) for which the Unitary will be responsible on 1st April 2009 already exist - to manage them requires a streamlining of structure and purpose which cannot wait until 1st April 2009 and this discussion paper highlights a way to deal with the issues.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 That JIT agrees the principles set out in this discussion paper.
- 5.2 That each Head of Paid Service discusses the impact of the report with their respective Implementation Executive members to assess and agree the way forward.
- 5.3 Subject to 5.2 above that a timetable is drawn up detailing the 'handover' of operational responsibility, the effect on each authority and the impact on senior staff including early departure from the relevant Districts and Wiltshire County Council prior to 1st April 2009.