

Cabinet backs business case to save tax payers £18m a year

County councillors will vote on whether to submit the business case for a new single council for Buckinghamshire to Government on Thursday 22nd September, after it was backed by Cabinet.

Under the plans, all five county and district authorities would be abolished and replaced by a new Buckinghamshire Council, saving tax payers more than £18m a year.

Cabinet members who unanimously backed the proposals on Monday 19th September said the move would also empower local communities, simplify things for residents and give Bucks one strong voice on regional infrastructure issues.

Leader of the Council, Martin Tett, will now write to the four district councils seeking consensus from them on the conclusions of the draft business case.

The Full Council will be asked to approve the business case and authorise Martin to submit it to the Department for Communities and Local Government for a decision.

See www.futurebucks.co.uk for the latest information on the business case.

Selected quotes from Cabinet Members at Monday's meeting

- Leader of the Council, Martin Tett, who represents the Little Chalfont and Amersham Common division, said:

“This is a proposal to Government to disband all five councils and replace them with one and completely new council. It would cover the geography of the county but would actually be the best of the heritage of all the preceding ones and hopefully bring new innovations as well.

“We can deliver better services and better value for people and that’s not by cutting troops on the frontline. We don’t need 250 councillors for Buckinghamshire – that’s about half the size of the entire House of Commons to run Buckinghamshire. We can do it with less, we can do it with about 98.

“We don’t need chief executives for five councils. We don’t need senior staff or finance departments or HR departments for five councils, we can do it once rather than five times.

“This is a strong proposition and I hope desperately that our colleagues in the districts will work with us to try and find a degree of consensus around this proposal. I will certainly be writing to them straight after this meeting to make that offer to them.”

- Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, Mike Appleyard, who represents The Wooburns, Bourne End and Hedsor, said:

“What is important about some of the numbers in this report is they have all been independently checked and verified.”

He said that while there will clearly be some implementation costs, ‘we start making very significant savings in year three and we are saying that openly so

people can understand we are being transparent'.

“We have put all of our documents into the public domain, we have told people what our assumptions are, we have told people what our brief is.”

- Cabinet Member for Transport, Mark Shaw, who represents Chesham, said:

“If you were to organise local government in this country today would you really be looking at having three different levels of authority? When you talk to people they talk about their issues as what ‘The Council’ is going to do about it. How is ‘The Council’ going to help me? They don’t differentiate; they just want a one-stop shop and one person to go to.

"Someone who will listen to them, not a myriad of different people, different issues, different offices and different telephone numbers to contact.

“It strikes me that the most effective way we can move things forward is by having one new council for Buckinghamshire that caters for the wants and needs of people and helps them with their local issues.

“One of the key things that impressed me about this document is the key element of localism and enhancing these relationships with local people and local services.”

- Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Lin Hazell, who represents Farnham Common and Burnham Beeches, said:

“People come to me about an issue and they don’t know whether it’s a district or a parish or a county issue, but

they just look on you as the local elected leader to resolve it. People don't necessarily understand the difference in the structures and actually I don't think they really care. They just want you to fix it if something goes wrong."

She said people 'want to feel confident they are masters of their own destiny'.

"I see this as the next step in empowering individuals locally and I think this will be a great success."

- Cabinet Member for Planning and the Environment, Warren Whyte, who represents Buckingham East, said:

engagement sessions had been held with town and parish councils earlier in the summer, when concerns over localism and how 'a county-wide unitary would affect local parishes and communities' were raised.

But he added: "I think the proposal in front of us has dealt with that in a very robust way."

He said planning decisions will be made locally and town and parish councils will be empowered if they wish to take up services.

He also highlighted proposals for community hubs: "In my division, Buckingham Library already has the nucleus of that idea and if it can be rolled out they will be a really powerful way of making sure all council services are seen locally.

"Most of our residents don't care which council deals with it, they just want an efficient council to react to their concerns. This can only make it easier to do that. Our residents will get a better bang for their buck."

- Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Zahir Mohammed, who represents Booker, Cressex and Castlefield, said:

“It is very important we are more local and more responsive and try to deliver better services for our residents. In my particular division we have five district councillors and one county councillor and it just makes so much sense if there was just one councillor who was dealing with all the queries our residents have.

“This is not just about financial savings but it works and stacks up non-financially as well. We have a growth agenda coming up, we have a demand for services, particularly around some of our statutory services, for example school place planning, and it requires the council to be a lot more agile in how it delivers services.”

- Cabinet Member for Resources, John Chilver, who represents Winslow, said:

“On the financial side a unitary authority would deliver significant savings. It would reduce bureaucracy and deliver value for money for the tax payer, as well as a reduction in council tax rates for most residents through harmonisation.

"It will be easier for residents to have only one council to deal with. I myself have seen in the reception here people being redirected to the district council offices because their issue was dealt with there.

“Having a district council responsible for housing and a county council responsible for delivery of infrastructure does not lead to joined-up strategic clarity and a single unitary would ensure a more co-ordinated approach.”

He welcomed proposals for community boards and the local planning committees, particularly a separate planning committee for Winslow, Buckingham and the north of Aylesbury Vale.

Business case highlights

More Local

The new Buckinghamshire Council would bring access to local services, accountability and decision-making direct to people's doorsteps.

The business case includes plans for:

Community Boards

Nineteen Community Boards would serve Buckinghamshire's towns and villages, enabling local councillors to take decisions on issues such as funding for community groups and local roads maintenance. They would meet regularly in each area and the public would be encouraged to attend alongside town and parish councils, police, fire, and health organisations.

Community Hubs

Community Hubs in each of the 19 Community Board areas would provide a base for a number of public services, including the new Buckinghamshire Council. It means residents, particularly vulnerable people who might be unable to travel very far, would be able to access a wide range of services from a place that is local to them – all under one roof.

Parish/ Town Delivery Partnership

Parish and Town Councils would have the opportunity to take on more services and community assets if they choose to, from public toilets and parks to support for the

isolated and footpath repairs.

Clearer accountability

The number of councillors sitting on 'principal' authorities in Bucks would reduce from 238 to 98, saving £1.2m and delivering clearer local accountability.

Better Value

One council instead of five would save tax payers £18.2m a year by reducing the duplication which currently exists under such a bureaucratic system and delivering services much more efficiently and effectively.

For example, around £4m would be saved by combining the back-office functions of the five councils, such as HR and finance. £3.6m would be saved by running services more efficiently on a larger scale, with greater economies of scale. £3m would be saved by cutting the numbers of senior managers which previously existed across the five councils.

The money saved equates to more than £84 per household per year.

These savings are based on conservative estimates – in reality it is anticipated that actual savings will be significantly higher.

The new Buckinghamshire Council could also earn £48m from selling off council buildings which are no longer required. This money could be invested in improving infrastructure like roads and schools.

The one-off cost of establishing the new council would be £16.2m. It would take just over two years for the new council to pay for itself (savings would build up to £18.2m

per annum by Year Three, not from day one).

Overall savings (once the cost of change is taken into account) for the first five years of a new council would be £45m.

Council tax

Under one Buckinghamshire Council, council tax would be harmonised, so for example a Band D rate payer in Buckingham will pay the same as a Band D rate payer in Chesham. It would result in a reduction in council tax for the majority of Buckinghamshire's residents. The level has been brought in line with the rate Wycombe District rate payers are expected to pay by 2019, which is the lowest of all the districts in Bucks. The cost of equalising council tax would be £2.2m.

Better quality services

Services which complement one another but are currently divided between the districts and county can also be brought together. This will result in better services for residents.

For example:

- Services which aim to help people at risk of addiction, obesity or ill health (currently County) can be brought together with alcohol licensing, housing, leisure centres and environmental health (currently District).
- The Districts' bin collection and street cleaning roles can be merged with the County's waste disposal services, such as its household waste and recycling centres, landfill sites and energy-from-waste plant, which will enhance recycling rates and efficiencies.
- There would be one council responsible for planning for new homes (District) and infrastructure such as schools, broadband and roads (County), creating a much more

coherent approach to housing growth throughout Buckinghamshire which should result in more sustainable development.

- Trading Standards (County) and Environmental Health (District) can be brought together, creating a one-stop shop for key consumer protection services.
- There would be an improved service for people with disabilities through the joining up of assessments and grants (County) with benefits, housing and planning applications (District).
- If one council had responsibility for both fostering (County) and housing stock (District), there would be the potential to put foster parents in a larger home to enable more placements and prevent young people ending up in care homes or being sent to foster carers outside of Buckinghamshire.

Simpler

There is currently widespread confusion about which council is responsible for which service. For example, nearly eight out of ten residents wrongly believe the County Council is responsible for rubbish collection, when in fact this is a district responsibility.

The new Buckinghamshire Council would be a one-stop shop for residents – one website and one telephone number to access all council services in the county, from benefits and planning applications to roads maintenance and social services

Bucks-wide organisations already in existence

Many other local public services and charities are already set up on a Buckinghamshire-wide scale and would find it simpler and cheaper to work with just one council based on the same geography. These include health organisations such as the federated Buckinghamshire

Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) and Healthwatch Bucks; business and infrastructure groups including Buckinghamshire Business First, Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership and Buckinghamshire Advantage; and voluntary sector bodies such Community Impact Bucks and Heart of Bucks. Meanwhile, Amersham & Wycombe College and Aylesbury College have recently agreed to merge to create a further education college based on Buckinghamshire's geography.

One voice

A single county-wide unitary council would speak with one voice for Buckinghamshire, strengthening our influence on the regional and national stage.

Collateral

- John Chilver [John Chilver](#)
- Lin Hazell [Lin Hazell](#)
- Mark Shaw [Mark Shaw](#)
- Martin Tett [Martin Tett](#)
- Mike Appleyard [Mike Appleyard](#)
- Warren Whyte [Warren Whyte](#)
- Zahir Mohammed [Zahir Mohammed](#)

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