

WORKING TOGETHER – COLCHESTER BOROUGH COUNCIL

Agenda Item 5 (c)

Contact Details:-

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Background Papers:- None

Financial Implications:- £50,000 – this can be met from within current budgetary provision

Equalities Implications:- None

Legal Implications:- None currently – appropriate legal inputs will be sought as we progress any potential sharing appointments

Options: There is an option to do nothing, which will not give value to the residents of the District. Other options and opportunities will be explored.

Risks: Risk is limited prior to any decision to share and delivery services in a different way. A full risk evaluation will be undertaken with each different service delivery proposal.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet's support to pursue the development of a partnership with Colchester BC to jointly identify and explore more efficient and effective ways of delivering services.

DECISION

(i) That the joint understanding commitment outlined in this report is endorsed.

(ii) That a Joint Programme Board be established consisting of

- Council Leaders
- One additional Portfolio holder
- Chief Executives
- One additional Senior Manager

(iii) A project manager be appointed supported by a joint project team of relevant officers of each Council.

(iv) A joint project fund of £100,000 (£50,000 from each Council) is established to be used for specialist support if appropriate.

(v) A single brand for the project and its communication to all individuals and stakeholders.

(vi) That the Terms of Reference of the Programme Board be endorsed.

WORKING TOGETHER

Introduction

As Cabinet is aware, this Council signed a working together protocol with Essex County Council to improve two-tier working, service to the customer and delivering greater efficiency. The work with Essex County Council has been successful to date through the following work streams.

- Joint Office Accommodation proposals
- Notley Country Park and Discovery Centre
- Witham Library Office project
- Development of locality management

and a variety of other smaller issues/projects that have improved the service to the residents of the Braintree District. Whilst the majority of the above issues are about improving services to our customers, it is anticipated that the joint office project should also deliver some revenue savings.

The attached proposal to create a strategic partnership with Colchester Borough Council is focused towards greater efficiency in the delivery of common District Council services and opportunities arising from economies of scale. This approach is not new, since local government, in its quest throughout the country for greater efficiency and to deliver greater value to the taxpayer, has been developing shared services, new delivery models and working together

There are many pressures on local government, which equally apply to our Council:

- Gershon savings – 3% year on year
- Financial settlement
- New demands
- Increased customer expectations
- Limitations on council tax increases

These pressures have been confronting us for some years and we have been able to address the challenges on a year on year basis. However, there comes a time when a more radical approach is required. Whilst we have an excellent track record on partnership working, this has been, in the main, around crosscutting collaborative working. What is now being proposed is taking this style of working to the next stage for service delivery and support services, which may assist this Council in addressing some of the challenges set out above.

Why Colchester Borough Council?

The obvious answer is that they are local authority neighbours and the closeness of locality can assist when working together. We have had good working relationships with Colchester Borough Council on many different issues, the approach to issues is similar to this Council as 'can do' and I believe each Council has a mutual respect for each other.

Both Councils also have the same I.T. partners and use some common systems which assist.

Working with other Councils/sectors

This proposal with Colchester Borough Council is not mutually exclusive. We already work closely with the County Council, which is right on some issues, and could well work with others, if the opportunity is right for this Council.

It is also anticipated that on some issues we will work together on a tri-partite basis to ensure easy access to services by our customers and the effective use of resources in our Districts and part of Essex.

September 2007

Braintree District Council and Colchester Borough Council **Working together for all residents' benefit**

Working Together – what does this mean?

Braintree District Council and Colchester Borough Council each have their own identity and face different challenges. However, we also face very similar challenges which the two Councils can work together on. Attracting quality staff, facing year on year budget reductions, providing improved services and greater value to the tax payer, making best use of our purchasing power, exerting influence on national and regional decision makers and resource allocaters to name but a few.

Therefore Braintree and Colchester Councils are committing to a joint understanding to explore better ways of delivering services in partnership and to make best use of resources on behalf of both Councils. We will be looking together at all of the options for greater efficiency from sharing service infrastructure (e.g. depots, vehicles, ICT systems) to combining services for economy of scale purposes (e.g. reduction in management costs, more effective service provision around administrative borders), through to potentially combining services that could deliver for both Councils

Vision For The Future – what does this look like?

The vision for the future is two continuing and separate Councils each with their own democratic process, strategic direction, resource base, and priorities. A delivery and strategic structure which responds to the needs of both Councils requirements but takes advantage of economies of scale; integrated management; areas of excellence; joined up thinking on cross border issues; retains ambition and influence and provides even better value for money for tax payers.

There should be a period of time for looking at the opportunities a joint understanding for partnership working offers both Councils. It then allows for a period of integration where opportunities present themselves which could include setting up new joint management arrangements or service sharing. At a point in the future a decision will need to be made about the success or otherwise of the joint working and whether the two Councils want to move towards a more integrated organisation that delivers services across the two Councils or continue with other joint partnership working arrangements.

What this is not?

The agreement to explore joint working is all about a more efficient and effective way of doing things for the benefit of all our residents and tax payers.

It is not a bid for one Council or the other to become a unitary Council. Therefore, Braintree District Council will continue in being as will Colchester Borough Council. Both will retain their separate democratic process, separately elected Councillors to represent wards in their own District Council (60 Councillors in Braintree and 60 Councillors in Colchester), each will have revenue raising powers, separate decision making and scrutiny powers, be a legal entity in their own right and retain their own constitution to govern their way of working.

Both Councils will not work in partnership to the exclusion of all others and will seek other partnership opportunities where they are in the best interest of residents, council tax payers and the Councils themselves. Both Councils are already working in partnership with Essex County Council on customer service and renaissance issues in Colchester and accommodation issues in Braintree. This type of partnership working will continue. Any such new partnership proposals will be shared by each Council to ensure that the maximum opportunities are achieved.

Benefits – What do we get from this?

Partnership working, seeking economies of scale and joined up thinking should bring about a range of benefits. These will be explored under the joint understanding agreement but one can list a number as follows:

- Financial savings
- Efficiency gains
- Effective working
- Creating capacity
- Shared areas of excellence
- Enhanced ambitions
- Critical mass for specialist functions
- Attracting and retaining staff
- Building reputation and profile
- Improved service delivery
- Providing better value

This list is not exhaustive but gives a range of benefits which should be expected in a venture of this type.

Potential Risks – Where can this all go wrong?

There are risks to anything we do and in considering partnership working described in this paper there are potential risks which we must be aware of and then manage. By doing so we mitigate those risks and stop people asking “Where did this all go wrong?” This is different to deciding the costs or drawbacks greatly outweigh the benefits and the project should not continue. Potential risks will emerge as consideration is given to the options for joint working but those identified now include:

- Organisational uncertainty
- Confusion over aims, policies and processes
- Loss of good staff
- Councillor disengagement
- Identity crisis

For each individual project undertaken through the partnership, a full business case will be required, with the appropriate risk and benefit analysis.

These potential and emergent risks need to be mitigated and managed. This will require leadership from the top level and excellent communication and consultation with members, officers and stakeholders.

Key Factors for Success – How do we know this is right?

Any initiative of this type will require in place key milestones to ensure we measure success. Success will be measured by the benefits achieved for our customers and communities through exploring all options for joint working which will lead to a decision of whether to merge some services or create a new organisation that can deliver the differing needs of both the Councils.

Some factors which will assist us in moving towards successful goals are:

- Excellent communication to a range of people and organisations
- Involvement of members and managers in successful joint working arrangements
- Alignment of organisational culture and ways of working
- Spirit of trust and challenge between leading members and managers
- Properly constituted and resourced project management approach
- Real willingness to make a positive difference for the people of Braintree and Colchester
- Leadership to make things happen, and to take decisions on what happens next

Staffing – How will it affect jobs?

It is the intention that any impact upon jobs would initially be achieved through voluntary processes or natural wastage. Both Councils value the individual contributions made by all staff.

Where staff are affected through achieving greater efficiency by the two Councils working together, it is the intention that the Councils' secure continued employment whether this is directly or indirectly. However, this will mean being flexible in the roles they could perform. Although enforced redundancy can never be ruled out, it will only be used where unavoidable. Normal consultation arrangements would be undertaken with the recognised Trade Unions in each Council as specific proposals are worked up.

Planned Programme of Working Together

Working together to improve efficiency, give better value and service to the taxpayers of both the Councils is not a short-term fix; it will take time and drive to make real improvements happen. At this point in time, we anticipate a programme of work that could take us to approximately March 2010 to ensure that we build upon strong foundations, which lead to a successful transition on how both Councils deliver services and conduct business.

An outline programme of work could look like:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 2007/08 | Understand the challenges, build relationships, develop protocols and process of joint working. |
| 2008/09 | Review the opportunity of all main service areas working/sharing together. (See appendix 1 of proposed reviews). |

2009/10

Create an integrated management structure if the experience of working together indicates that this is the most effective and practical outcome.

Existing Partnerships – What happens to these?

Each Council has its own partnerships and partner workings. These include Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), Primary Care Trusts; Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs); Haven Gateway Partnership and Regional Cities East to name but a few. Under this arrangement all of these partnerships will continue in their current guise and format. There is no intention to look to combine any of these for Braintree and Colchester collectively.

We will, of course, discuss the options and opportunities for both Councils having a closer relationship and how this could enhance the wider partnership agenda.

What do we need to make this happen?

There will clearly be a need for a project management approach to exploring joint working and, if felt appropriate to implementing different forms of joint working. Therefore it is proposed to create:

- i) A joint Project Board consisting from each Council:
 - Council Leader
 - One additional Portfolio Holder
 - Council Chief Executive
 - One additional senior Manager
 - Project Manager to drive forward this project, supported by a project team.
- ii) A joint project management team led by the senior managers from each Council.
- iii) A fund of £100,000 (£50,000 from each Council) to be used for specialist support if appropriate and sanctioned by the Board.
- iv) A single brand for the project and its communication to all individuals and stakeholders.

Timetable and Decision Making – Who decides what and when?

| Subject | Braintree | | Colchester | |
|--|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Joint understanding | Leadership Team | October '07 | Leadership Team | October '07 |
| Joint understanding | Cabinet | October '07 | Cabinet | 17 October '07 |
| Progress on joint working arrangements | Cabinet | March/April '08 | Cabinet | March/April '08 |
| Organisational Options | Cabinet | April '09 | Cabinet | April '09 |
| | Council | May '09 | Council | May '09 |

Recommendations

Braintree District Council and Colchester Borough Council Cabinets are recommended to:

- i) Endorse the joint understanding commitment outlined in this report between Braintree District Council and Colchester Borough Council.
- ii) Agree to the proposals under the resources heading to take that joint understanding forward.
- iii) Agree the project plan and the services for review.

Adrian Pritchard
Chief Executive
17 September 2007

Appendix 1

PROGRAMME OF REVIEWS

As part of the review process, it is intended that a business case be prepared as part of the project management methodology and presented to the Programme Board for authorisation of moving on to the next stage of the review.

The proposed programme of review is:

- (i) Customer Service Centre Options:**
Attached is the project initiation document for the customer service centre review. This sets out the structure, content and process that will be followed for each review.
- (ii) Central/corporate services to be reviewed as to the potential to establish a single delivery unit for both Councils.**
- (iii) The options for the operational services such as waste, recycling, cleansing, grounds maintenance, etc. to deliver efficiencies through working together.**
- (iv) The options for the process function of revenues, benefits, tax collection to deliver greater efficiency.**
- (v) That where opportunities are identified by managers, say by vacancies or changes to working practices, that these be explored jointly to establish whether efficiencies could be achieved.**

Future Programme

Until the initial results of the programme set out for the first year have been evaluated against success criteria, it is not planned to make any further review commitments. However, should appropriate opportunities arise, which indicate benefits to both Councils, they will be added to the overall programme.

Appendix 2

BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL AND COLCHESTER BOROUGH COUNCIL PROGRAMME BOARD – WORKING TOGETHER

Membership:

Council Leaders
One Portfolio Holder from each Council
Chief Executives
One other Senior Manager from each Council

Frequency:

Commencing with a monthly frequency during the early stages of the project. Then meetings as business demands. Minimum of once a quarter.

Draft Terms of Reference:

1. To monitor and manage the overall programme of work between the Councils.
2. To monitor, review and guide each of the individual projects that make up the overall programme.
3. To agree joint recommendations to each Council on any issues of policy or operations as a result of the reviews.
4. To have overall responsibility for the delivery of the outcomes of each project and any joint processes that may need to be agreed.
5. To make decisions on the effective allocation of resources to ensure delivery of all the projects
6. To ensure that effective communications are maintained both internally and externally regarding the progress and outcomes of the project.
7. To make final recommendations on the overall programme and individual project implementation to the respective Council decision-making bodies.

September 2007