

Leading and Listening

Introduction

1. This is the third in a series of documents that aim to progress the proposal for a collaborative approach to local government re-design
 - 1.1.1. The first is ***Collaboration in Somerset: The Case for Change*** which seeks to explore the particular context of Somerset and to describe why collaborative working at all levels and across the whole system of provision holds the key to sustainable progress.
 - 1.1.2. The Second document ***Somerset: A Plan for Collaboration*** sets out a proposed approach to a programme of work, resourcing and governance, that would deliver the change by the most efficient and effective route possible.
 - 1.1.3. The third document ***Leading and listening*** sets out a programme of activity to secure a democratic mandate for the proposed course of action and how to get meaningful buy in from staff, partners and the public.
2. In structural versions of Local Government re-organisation reform there is a well-trodden path of creating Unitary Councils with a number of standard steps. Those steps are subject to reflection in this document and questions asked about whether the process engages stakeholders fully, and whether the outcomes produce a good enough platform for future actions.
3. This document, in making the case for a for a collaborative, non-structural solution proposes a different approach, one that would enable leaders to take decisions in stages, and one that would involve residents and staff more meaningfully than in previous exercises.

Communications and engagement in Local Government Reorganisation

4. The most recent example of an approach to engagement and communications was in the County of Dorset where the previous configuration of two Unitary councils (Bournemouth Borough and Poole Council) the County (Dorset) and the district councils (Christchurch, North Dorset, West Dorset, East Dorset. Purbeck and Weymouth and Portland Councils), was reorganised into two Unitary councils (Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch became BCP Council) and the remaining Districts and the County formed a new organisation (Dorset Council). The new arrangements went live on the 1st April 2019 the culmination of work that had been ongoing for over 4 years.
5. The process used is as follows
 - 5.1. A number of reports were commissioned by the Councils which explored and evaluated the potential savings and improvements that could be made, and the advantages and disadvantages of different configurations of Unitary government.

These recommended configurations were based on financial, spatial and demographic analyses.

- 5.2. The individual councils set out to consult the public on the basis of four options (no change and a number of different unitary options), one having been rejected in advance (a single unitary for the whole County).
- 5.3. Another firm, specialising in engagement activity, produced an information pack containing the reports of external consultants in full and abridged form was developed and distributed through a specially designed website which enabled people to engage with the material.
- 5.4. A programme of Residents surveys, roadshows and programme of meetings were organised and information about the options.
- 5.5. Of the total number of households that could have responded (750,000 residents) a stratified random sample of 20,000 household were selected. They were sent paper based questionnaires and 4,258 responses were received.
- 5.6. On the 'frequently asked questions' section of the website people questioned the total number of respondents but were reassured that these results were "statistically significant". Indeed under this method the views of **384** household would have been seen to be 'accurate' to within $\pm 5\%$.
- 5.7. On the basis of the outcome of the consultation. The Secretary of State signalled that he was "minded to approve" the proposal in November 2017.
6. This approach is not special to Dorset, many Councils have used the same process. It is familiar in the local government world and recent developments in Northamptonshire, (albeit following intervention by the Secretary of State on the basis of a Best Value inspection), had followed the same path.
7. The process has been successful in securing a democratic mandate for the proposed course of action, in the face of some opposition from some of the Districts, and the new Councils are now in place with many of the savings challenges scheduled to be met as a result of the changes.
8. Reflecting on the process however the Team were mindful of a number of potential challenges to this standard process
 - 8.1. How robust are the predicted savings? Many of the reports base their predictions on algorithms or 'typical' scenarios of what has been achieved elsewhere and have not.
 - 8.2. How engaged are the staff? There is considerable evidence from research and the academic world that points to the fact that the level of 'buy in' from staff is critical in the quantum of savings and improvements that can be realised and the time taken to achieve them.
 - 8.3. Are the public really engaged? The information presented coupled with the questions asked can incline some to believe that they are being steered toward particular solutions and that the choice has already been made. The engagement is generally at a 'macro' level with defined choices.

Communications and Engagement for Collaboration

9. Reflecting on the points in 9 above, the Team were interested in whether those elements of the engagement and communication process could be improved and whether that activity, in relation to a more collaborative proposition, would be different to one which is about structure.

10. Whereas the Unitary journey is a predominantly technical and structural one, collaboration at this level is in essence an example of how to achieve 'adaptive change'. The difference is illustrated in the following quotation:

*"While technical problems may be very complex and critically important they have known solutions that can be implemented by current know-how. They can be resolved through the application of authoritative expertise and through structures, procedures, and ways of doing things. **Adaptive challenges can only be addressed through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties** (Heifetz 1994)*

The 'steps' in adaptive change are defined as follows

- I. **Share the problem** - rather than try and sell a solution (or a choice between solutions)
 - II. **Ripen the issue** - by creating alternative scenarios of the future
 - III. **Make positive choices easy** - by making data available and committing to unblock previous problems
 - IV. **Shift responsibility to the primary stakeholders** - by engaging the people who will do the work and bringing them together
11. Taking all these points into consideration the Team configured a different approach to communications and engagement that would have the following design principles
- 11.1. Members should be able to make decisions in stages on the basis of robust information about savings levels and the way that change would be achieved
 - 11.2. Staff and partners should be engaged at an early stage in order to more accurately identify the scale of the opportunities and how they might best be realised.
 - 11.3. Residents could contribute to these discussions in specific areas where they could feed in to an outline re-design process, as well as having more accurate predicted savings figures

Our objectives

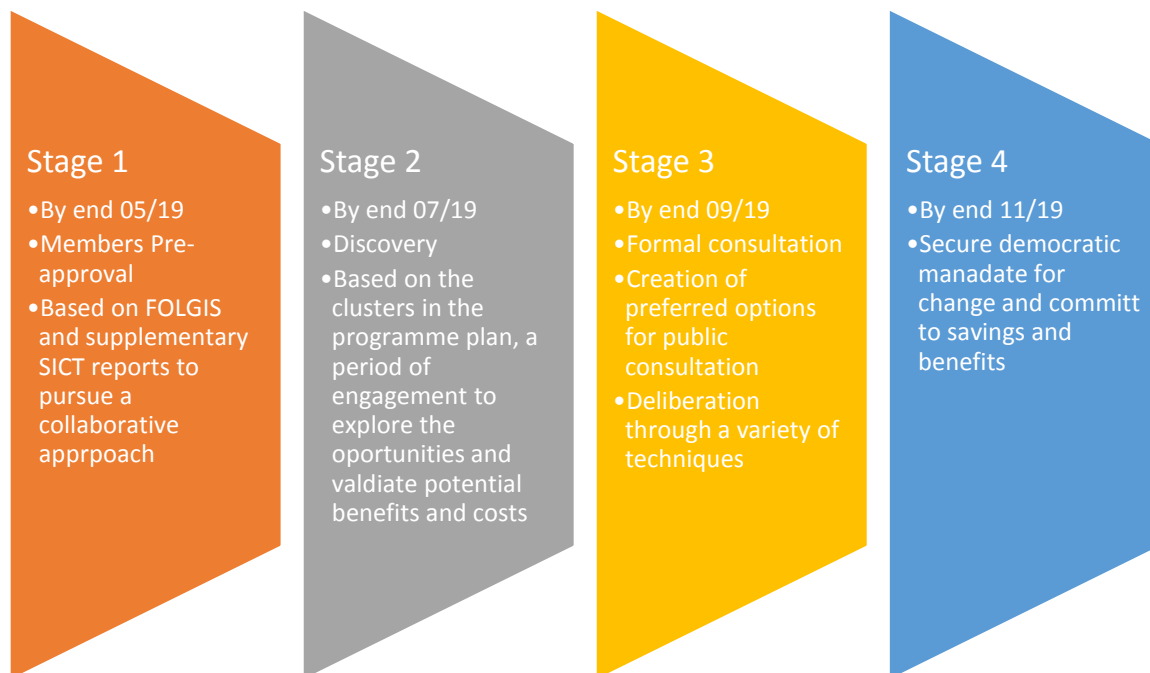
12. Our approach should have the following objectives

- 12.1. To explain the concept behind the Somerset Local Government Conversation, with the prime objective of keeping costs low for residents of Somerset while delivering good outcomes for people.
- 12.2. To support the business case and engagement process for preferred options
- 12.3. To be open and transparent with members, staff and unions.

- 12.4. Ensure that key stakeholders are can participate in any significant decisions/developments in a timely and coordinated way.
- 12.5. To demonstrate that local government can find innovative and effective solutions to delivering public services with reduced budgets.
- 12.6. To ensure a unified message is provided at all times

The Plan

13. The communication and engagement plan would follow the Programme Plan outlined in Somerset: A plan for Collaboration.



- 14. In the first instance the new leaders of the Councils will, having regard to the information that has been presented in the FOLGIS report and the supplementary reports from the SICT, make a decision in principle to explore and validate the assumptions and figures outlined in the reports.
- 15. This would lead to a period of focussed engagement, based on the programme plan of the following
 - 15.1. Within the clusters, whole system and participative engagement of multi-agency professionals and service users in the relevant areas. This engagement would include the use of technique to gather hard and soft data to inform the use of an event such as a search conference to create a vision for the future in the relevant areas of activity. Work would also be carried out to understand the impact of current systems, in-place contracts and agreements.
 - 15.2. The appointment of an Engagement lead for the Programme, either an internal or external resource who would:

- Brief and engage managers and staff at both councils to ensure they are equipped with key messages to reassure their teams during this period of uncertainty.
 - Brief and engage politicians at all councils to deliver full cross-party understanding of the business case(s)
 - Manage media coverage effectively to minimise misinformation
 - Work with CEOs to ensure they brief and engage local MPs to ensure they are kept informed of progress.
16. Based on the information from stage 2, a robust set of information could then be used for leaders to take decisions about realistic and costed options to place before the residents of Somerset.
17. A formal consultation period would then ensue, if necessary to secure the backing of MHCLG and/or the relevant Councils to ensure a public commitment to realising the benefits is made and this will create momentum behind the programme to be implements.
18. Communication and engagement will play a role throughout in creating a successful programme of change. We would propose to use the channels of communication that are currently used in the 5 Councils found in Appendix 1.

Somerset Internal Consultancy Team

Appendix 1 Internal Communication channels/tools

19. Mendip District Council

- My Mendip – all MDC staff (weekly newsletter)
- News in Brief (bi-weekly Member's bulletin)
- SharePoint (internal intranet)
- Group Management Group meetings (fortnightly)
- Corporate Management Team meetings (fortnightly)
- Service area team meetings (quarterly)
- Scheduled meeting with Unison - branch (fortnightly)
- Formal reports to Cabinet, Scrutiny if required.

20. Sedgemoor District Council

- Bits and Pieces to all staff (weekly)
- Members bulletin (weekly)
- Internal intranet page (dedicated space)
- CX drop in sessions – (monthly)
- CX colleague update, written (monthly)
- Formal written reports to Full Council
- Formal written reports to Executive
- 6-weekly scheduled meetings with Unions (JCC)

21. Somerset County Council

- Our Somerset E-Newsletter to all staff (weekly)
- Core Brief for strategic managers (Monthly)
- Members Core Brief (monthly)
- Staff intranet pages (can dedicate space)
- Service specific newsletters e.g. Children's Services and Adults Services (approx. monthly)
- Members Information Sheet (ad hoc as required).
- Formal reports to Cabinet, Executive, Scrutiny if required.

22. South Somerset District Council

- Staff Portal (daily bulletins and updates)
- Members Newsletter (monthly)
- Yammer (internal social network)
- Staff awareness session (monthly)

- Members' briefing (monthly)
- LMT and SLT briefings
- Transformation Tuesday (weekly newsletter)
- Formal reports to Cabinet, Executive, Scrutiny if required.

23. South West and Taunton

- Slack - electronic staff/members intranet – discrete groups set up within Slack
- OTIS – One Team Intranet Site
- Transformation newsletter (ad-hoc)
- Weekly Bulletin (staff members and external – TDBC only)
- One Future Managers Network - monthly – verbal updates but presentations can be shared as well
- Members newsletter (every 2 months)