

## CABINET - 20 SEPTEMBER 2016

### REPORTS INTO FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN OXFORDSHIRE

#### Report by County Director

#### Introduction

1. On the 25 February 2016, the city and district councils of Oxfordshire launched a proposal to abolish the existing county and district councils and replace them with four unitary councils and a combined authority.
2. In early May Oxfordshire County Council appointed Grant Thornton UK LLP to consider how local government could be reorganised to reduce costs, improve service outcomes, support economic growth, enhance local engagement and empowerment, and provide strong and accountable leadership. The Districts appointed PwC to undertake a similar study.
3. Grant Thornton's brief was to undertake an objective, evidence-led review of all options - 4, 3, 2, or 1 unitary authority, or the status quo. It initially also was to cover a multi-county 4-unitary option proposed by the Districts, however on 19<sup>th</sup> May the Districts announced that this option had been ruled out.
4. The County Council asked Grant Thornton to consider the local government structures that would address the following criteria:
  - **Service Delivery and Outcomes:** reforms should improve local service delivery and outcomes, particularly for the most vulnerable,
  - **Cost Savings and Value For Money:** reforms should deliver significant cost savings and drive value for money and long-term financial sustainability,
  - **Stronger Leadership:** reforms should provide stronger and more accountable strategic and local leadership,
  - **Economic Growth and Infrastructure:** reforms should drive economic growth and meet the infrastructure challenge, and,
  - **Local Engagement and Empowerment:** new structures should engage with communities and empower local areas
5. Grant Thornton undertook this work between May and August, including engagement with a range of key local stakeholders, and a public call for evidence. The terms of reference were agreed by an independent advisory group made up of stakeholders drawn from public, private and voluntary sectors, who advised Grant Thornton on the review. Their final report was published on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> August, as was the district report.

6. There were a number of areas of agreement between the two reports, in particular the finding that a single unitary authority for Oxfordshire would save over £100m net over its first five years, and that key services and strategies including strategic planning, adult social care, housing, transport, infrastructure, and pooling of funding and redistribution to address service demand would need to be delivered on a countywide basis. They also concluded that such an authority as the third largest unitary in England, would require structures to ensure effective local engagement and devolution within the county. Both reports conclude that the status quo is not a viable option.
7. Both reports are appended to this covering report, with Grant Thornton at Appendix 1 and PwC at Appendix 2. It is important to note that a further document described as a summary of the PwC report is in circulation. This was produced by the district councils, not PwC, and is therefore not included with these papers.
8. The reports are being considered by the Council's Performance Scrutiny Committee on 13th September, at a meeting to which all members of Council have been invited. A supplementary report with further recommendations, including feedback from the Performance Scrutiny Committee, will be circulated following the above meeting.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

9. Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to consider the proposals set out in the PwC and GT reports, together with any comments or recommendations following Performance Scrutiny Committee on the 13 Sept, with a view to taking forward the most appropriate proposal for Oxfordshire.

PETER CLARK  
County Director

Annexes:  
Annex 1: Grant Thornton report  
Annex 2: PwC report

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August 2016