

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO COUNCIL

10 DECEMBER 2014

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

WELSH GOVERNMENT'S WHITE PAPER REFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT – EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR MERGER WITH THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Council with the Expression of Interest for merger with the Vale of Glamorgan Council which was submitted to Welsh Government on 28th November 2014.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan/Other Corporate Priority

- 2.1 The Corporate Plan takes a five year (medium term view) of the Council's Priorities. Changes to public services in Wales are likely to influence the Council's ability to deliver its immediate priorities. However changes to public services will have a more profound influence on the role and impact of public services beyond the life of the current Authority and the Corporate Plan.

3. Background

- 3.1 Cabinet and Council have received reports advising that in April 2013 the Welsh Government established The Commission on Public Services Governance and Delivery known as the "Williams Commission". In January 2014 the Commission published its report and 62 recommendations.
- 3.2 The report included a recommendation to reduce the number of local authorities in Wales and gave some options and variations. This included a recommendation to merge Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) with Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (NPT) and a variation on this that would see these two councils also combined with Swansea City Council.
- 3.3 The Welsh Government White Paper "Reforming Local Government", published in July 2014 broadly endorsed the Williams report with a preferred option that included bringing BCBC and NPT together as a single authority. On 18 September 2014 Welsh Government published a document entitled "Invitation to Principal Local Authorities in Wales to submit proposals for voluntary merger". The prospectus enabled Councils to submit bids for voluntary mergers which would allow them to merge sooner than Welsh Government's legislative timetable otherwise provides for. Initial Expressions of Interest for voluntary mergers were required by the end of 28th November 2014.

3.4 On 18th November 2014, Cabinet approved and recommended to Council for approval that BCBC and the Vale of Glamorgan proceed to develop a joint expression of interest to merge voluntarily and to submit this Expression of Interest to Welsh Government by 28th November 2014. Council subsequently approved this decision on 24th November 2014.

4. Current Situation/Proposal

4.1 Officers of Bridgend and the Vale Councils prepared a draft submission on merger attached as **Appendix 1**. This document is not intended to be the full business case but is to enable Welsh Government to take a preliminary view on the proposal that will, if approved, lead to the full business case being developed.

4.2 On 28th November 2014 Cabinet approved the Expression of Interest (Appendix 1) for submission to Welsh Government. As the Expression of Interest was due to be lodged with Welsh Government by the end of 28th November 2014, the call-in procedure set out in Part 4 of the Rules of Procedure within the Council's Constitution did not apply. The Chairperson of the Community Safety and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that the decision proposed was reasonable in all the circumstances to it being treated as a matter of urgency.

4.3 Welsh Government currently proposes to respond by 5th January 2015 to any Expressions of Interest received by 28th November 2014.

5. Effect on Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

5.1 There is no effect upon the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 There are no equality implications at the present time. A full Equality Impact Assessment will be required should the merger proposal continue to the business plan stage.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 There are no financial implications at this stage. Both Cabinet and Council have considered the wider financial implications of proposed early merger in previous reports.

8. Recommendations

8.1 It is recommended that Council note the Expression of Interest in merger with the Vale of Glamorgan Council which has been submitted to Welsh Government.

Darren Mephram
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
November 2014

Background documents

None other than listed in the report.