

SERVICES IN A UNITARY STRUCTURE

CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Introduction

1. Consideration of a possible unitary structure for Leicestershire presents an opportunity to consider whether to redesign how services are delivered by local government, and if so what form the redesigned structure should take. The focus is on how better outcomes can be delivered for residents, local business and partner organisations, and how local government can best work with those organisations recognising the challenging times ahead as a result of public sector finance restraints. This appendix, and other appendices prepared in part to facilitate discussion at scrutiny bodies, set out the opportunities that a unitary structure could afford to each service, as well as some examples of best practice from the county unitary councils established in 2009.
2. This appendix should be read alongside the appraisal of options in the Cabinet report. In the 'Opportunities' section and case studies which follow, some of the changes highlighted offer the greatest benefits in a single unitary structure.

Background

3. The two tiers of local government in Leicestershire have different responsibilities; the County Council is responsible for the delivery of Children's Services and in particular this is underpinned by statutory guidance that sets out the responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services. This guidance covers the legislative basis for the two appointments, roles and responsibilities of the post holders, and how this relates to Government expectations about local authorities' role in education and children and young people's services.
4. The County Council is responsible for delivering services to looked after children, children in need of protection and in need of support, early help services, education quality and sufficiency, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and safeguarding children. The department also leads on safer communities across the County.
5. District Councils are responsible for housing services and in some districts they choose to deliver non-statutory services directly to children and their families. The districts are responsible for community safety in their locality, including the servicing of the Community Safety Partnerships. Some district councils also work closely with schools in their locality offering a range of support on issues such as community safety and anti-social behaviour.

Opportunities for the Service presented by a Unitary Structure

Education

6. Leicestershire County Council Children and Families Department has a number of statutory responsibilities relating to education, primarily around

maintained schools. The Department is responsible for ensuring sufficient school places are available for children across Leicestershire and for promoting high standards in education.

7. Whilst a unitary council could lead to minimal change in the delivery of functions that are currently managed centrally (admissions, education improvement, education sufficiency) it could provide opportunities for the better alignment of planning matters relating to school capital. The Department currently deals with 7 different planning authorities to secure Section 106 funding for new school builds. A unitary council could reduce this to a single planning authority and allow a cross Leicestershire approach to school planning. A unitary authority could also streamline and simplify support provided to schools (over and above curriculum support) currently offered through District Councils around crime, anti-social behaviour, economic and skills development.

Early Help and Social Care

8. Leicestershire County Council provides children social care and early help services through a centrally managed locality delivered model. Whilst some District Councils provide children's early help services, there is no statutory requirement to do so.
9. Children and Family Services Team are based in localities in order to work closely with partners and communities; however practices and protocols are managed centrally in order to ensure consistency of delivery and quality of practice. This centralised leadership is vital in ensuring thresholds are consistent and that children's cases are managed in line with statutory requirements.
10. The Department operates a single front door for all early help and social care referrals the benefit of which is a single point of contact for agencies as well as consistent application of thresholds and assessment.
11. A single unitary authority could provide opportunities for alignment of children's services delivered by Districts, including reduction of duplication and single referral routes. Such opportunities lend themselves to financial efficiencies through reduced management costs.
12. One of the key areas of work with District Councils is around housing. Currently staff in the department are negotiating with seven different housing authorities for vulnerable families, children with special educational needs and disabilities and care leavers. For some of our vulnerable families or care leavers social workers are sometimes negotiating with two housing authorities for a single case in order to secure a move or to meet the child and family's needs.
13. A unitary council for Leicestershire could create a single local plan that could allow far greater flexibility and range of housing to meet the needs of care leavers, children and their families with a special educational need or disability and other vulnerable families. It could also present opportunity for a consistent

offer to meet needs across the County and flexibility to allow strategies to be put in place to support vulnerable families and children. Services to vulnerable children and families could be better delivered by unifying the services provided by seven different housing and benefits authorities.

Community Safety

14. Community Safety functions are primarily delivered through the District Councils under the governance of 6 separate community safety partnerships (CSPs), Blaby and Hinckley and Bosworth have merged. The CSPs are responsible for the development and delivery of its Community Safety Strategy, across Leicestershire there are currently six separate Community Safety Strategies. The CSPs require attendance from a number of key county-wide partner agencies, including the Police, Fire and Rescue and Probation Services. As a two tier authority there is a statutory requirement to have a strategic safer communities strategy board at a county wide level to bring together the 6 CSP chairs. The CSPs also hold responsibility for carrying out Domestic Homicide Reviews in its area. A complex set of partnership and commissioning arrangements are in place to provide a countywide response to this.
15. Supporting the work of the CSPs are seven District Community Safety Teams who hold a variety of responsibilities relating to community safety, including anti-social behaviour, hate incidents, CCTV and crime prevention.
16. A unitary council could present significant opportunities for efficiencies in community safety through the pooling of community safety funding, reduction of duplication in roles and realignment of governance. A unitary council presents an opportunity for a unified community safety service and commissioning arrangements with streamlined community safety partnership governance across localities to ensure local needs continued to be identified and supported. This could also present a positive impact for partners who are currently required to service all Community Safety Partnerships but who operate at a Leicestershire wide level.
17. A unitary council could also create efficiencies in the development of protocols and procedures to deal with community safety issues consistently across the County. In developing a single anti-social behaviour protocol and implementing the new ASB legislation a complex and time-consuming set of negotiations had to take place between the County Council, seven Districts and the Police, which could have been avoided in a unitary structure.
18. A unified Community Safety Partnership could provide the capability to simplify and strengthen the inter-relationship with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Having a greatly simplified structure could be more conducive to promoting enhanced partnership working on cross-cutting issues such as child sexual exploitation.

Existing Unitary Council Best Practice

19. Cornwall Council: Has a single Community Safety Partnership but has recognised the importance of place-based delivery. Crime and anti-social

behaviour is concentrated within Cornwall's larger towns and these are persistent problems, frequently co-existing with other social issues, such as deprivation, homelessness, health inequalities and worklessness.

20. The Community Safety Partnership has co-ordinated effective multi-disciplinary operations in three of the largest towns in Cornwall, responding to specific community problems. These responses have provided a balance of enforcement to address immediate crime and safety concerns, and provided targeted and intensive support to individuals with the aim of achieving longer term, sustainable positive outcomes.
21. Building on this success, Safer Cornwall (the Community Safety Partnership) is re-establishing the Safer Towns programme across ten designated towns. These partnerships are tailored to the needs of each area, with membership drawn from public sector, private and voluntary sector and community groups. They aim to support a co-ordinated, targeted multi-agency approach to complex localised issues utilising consistent tools and interventions, to maximise the benefits to local residents and prevent duplication of effort across all partners.
22. Cornwall Supporting Change in Partnership works with Disabled Children and young people between the ages of 0-18 years and their families and is a preventative approach delivered by trained Parent volunteers. The Cornwall single unitary approach enables the supporting change in partnership team to offer direct practical assistance with benefits and housing.

Case Studies

23. The Children and Family Services Department has identified two service areas where different elements are currently delivered by the County Council and the District Councils, community safety services and anti-social behaviour.

Community Safety Services

Current

24. In Leicestershire, the seven districts are responsible for Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs): local strategic management, the commissioning of the local strategic assessment of crime and disorder, the development of local delivery plans for crime and disorder reduction, tackling substance misuse and reducing re-offending, and the overseeing of performance against crime reduction targets. These arrangements are currently governed through six Community Safety Partnerships and supported by seven community safety teams. Districts are also responsible for providing a response to anti-social behaviour both in terms of perpetrator action and support to victims. Districts each hold responsibility for CCTV in their areas and operate separate CCTV systems and infrastructures.
25. The County Council holds the responsibility for the strategic leadership of Community Safety through the Leicestershire Safer Communities Strategy Board, a statutory requirement due to the current two tier system. The County

Council also provides a co-ordination, policy and commissioning function across domestic abuse, hate crime and anti-social behaviour.

26. There is currently significant officer resource required to manage interactions between the County Council and District Councils at both a strategic and operational level, particularly in relation to developing County wide consistent responses to issues such as anti-social behaviour. There are also a number of different commissioning arrangements in place across the Districts and County Council.

What could Community Safety Services look like in a unitary authority?

27. A unitary council could allow a single strategic community safety partnership across Leicestershire and local identification of need and actions delivered through area committees.
28. A unitary council could have a single community safety team and a single point of contact for residents for issues relating to anti-social behaviour, hate crime and community safety. This compares to the current 8 different websites and telephone access points for Leicestershire residents.
29. In addition to this a single unitary authority could allow single co-ordination of CCTV functions. Currently Police and other authorities requiring access to CCTV need to make requests to the 7 different CCTV operatives. A single unitary authority could allow greater join up of resources as well as better targeted use of CCTV for strategic cross Leicestershire purposes.

Anti-Social Behaviour

Current

30. The County Council has a community safety team whose primary role is around co-ordination, policy and commissioning. As part of this team the County Council has a team of street based youth workers (IMPACT) working in anti-social behaviour hotspots around the County. The teams are locality based and centrally managed. The County team also employs a number of officers who deliver direct work with young people involved in anti-social behaviour.
31. There are seven separate District Council anti-social behaviour teams all responsible for dealing with anti-social behaviour in their locality. In reality this means there are seven different contact points for reporting anti-social behaviour, seven separate websites with information and seven sets of information on anti-social behaviour.
32. Alongside this there is significant officer resource required to manage interactions between the Districts and County, particularly in relation to the development of county-wide protocols for anti-social behaviour.

What could Anti-Social Behaviour Services look like in a unitary authority?

33. A unitary council could deliver a single anti-social behaviour team incorporating the direct delivery services (IMPACT and ASB workers) and the

anti-social behaviour officers, currently in Districts. This could not only rationalise spend, including management overheads, but could also lead to a far better joined up approach to tackling anti-social behaviour. The rationalisation of spend could allow greater investment in front line services tackling anti-social behaviour in communities. This resource could be deployed to meet needs more efficiently with the removal of current District boundaries.

34. In addition to this a unitary council could allow a single point of contact for anti-social behaviour issues, consistent information and simple communications for the public. A single anti-social behaviour policy could be in place to allow simplified engagement by partners.