

SERVICES IN A UNITARY STRUCTURE

ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT

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 analysis of options in the Cabinet report. In the 'Opportunities' section and case studies which follow, it is logical, however, to presume that some changes offer the greatest benefits in a single unitary structure.

Background

3. The Environment and Transport Department undertakes a wide range of services including: highway maintenance, waste disposal, bidding for capital funding and delivering major transport schemes, providing school and other specialist transport, providing a network of recycling and household waste sites, maintaining the authority's vehicle fleet, blue badges, parking permits, concessionary travel passes and a range of environmental services.
4. Many of our services are universal (for example looking after the roads and disposing of household waste) and impact on the lives of all of Leicestershire's residents.
5. Under the current two tier system of local government a number of these functions sit entirely with the County Council however in some cases different elements of the same service are delivered by both tiers. For example, district councils collect waste, while the County Council disposes of it. District councils pick up litter and clean streets, while the County Council maintains the roads. In some cases, such as grass cutting, both the County Council and the district councils cut the grass that falls within their responsibility e.g. highway grass by the county and parks by districts.

Opportunities for the Service presented by a Unitary Structure

6. Services can be better delivered by unifying the services now provided by eight councils. Some of the main opportunities and advantages of this would be:

- Simplifying environment and transport services for residents, dealing with a unitary council, providing a single point of contact and easier access to local authority services
 - Consistency of environment and transport services, one policy, one set of service standards, clear expectations
 - Reducing administrative and back office costs, without impacting on front line services, enabling more efficient delivery of outcomes for residents
 - Reducing running costs, for example all eight authorities currently own, lease and maintain a fleet of vehicles and operate depots – this can be done much more efficiently under a unitary council with rationalisation of property assets, whilst also creating opportunities for maximising the operational efficiency of plant, vehicles and depots
 - Economies of scale – a unitary council would be in a much stronger buying position and better placed to negotiate contracts to achieve best value for Leicestershire residents
 - Better for business – organisations doing business in Leicestershire would deal with a unitary authority, helping to make Leicestershire more attractive for investment
 - Opportunities to explore the combination of services currently delivered by several councils; for example street scene services currently provided by the districts such as fly tipping, street sweeping and dog fouling could be combined with other environmental services currently provided by the County Council, such as grass cutting, forestry and gully emptying; leading to more streamlined, efficient and cost effective service delivery
 - Administering taxi licensing (currently a district council function) in a unitary authority would allow a consistent approach to licensing and closer integration with the management of school and social care transport with third party providers. It would also facilitate targeted enforcement ensuring consistent standards for vehicles and drivers.
7. From a strategic perspective, the Highways and Transport branch focuses a large part of its work on ‘enabling’ delivery of wider outcomes such as economic growth or regeneration and unlocking housing growth. A unitary authority would facilitate the following strategic opportunities:
- Coherent, universal place making strategies incorporating many elements currently delivered across several councils for both maintaining and improving existing key locations such as employment, retail and community centres (including the highway and transport connections) as well as designing new growth areas with opportunities for development to promote green and health initiatives, support aging and growing population challenges. Currently the Department has a partial role to play in all of these objectives. A unitary authority would maximise the benefits of any infrastructure or improvement schemes by considering a wider set of outcomes at the design stage.
 - A single voice to promote priorities for public funding to major funding bodies such as Department for Transport, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government with equal resource and experience available across the area.

- Clear accountability for highways and transport issues which is currently split across authorities. For instance, the County Council is the highway authority and responsibilities include producing the local transport plan, acting as statutory consultee to the planning process, maintaining the function and operation of the highway; district councils are responsible for street cleansing and litter collection, grounds maintenance, regeneration schemes (also undertaken by the County Council), street trading and various licensing issues. A unitary authority would ensure the public had clear visibility of roles and responsibilities as well as providing opportunities around utilisation of equipment, skills and resource.
- Efficient approval and delivery processes – often highway schemes and proposals are linked to wider objectives and may be delivered by the highway authority on behalf of the district. This often requires two sets of approval processes or complex and time consuming legal agreements. A unitary authority would remove the need for this saving time and money that could be used to deliver a larger programme.

Existing Unitary Council Best Practice

8. Durham Council: Significant benefits came from structural changes such as bringing together all the 'place shaping' functions into one unitary authority. Transport, economic development, planning and housing working together on regeneration plans, for example, has proved to be extremely successful, whether implementing the authority's own schemes or as a 'one shop stop' for potential developers. The introduction of a unitary council in Durham has resulted in a strong single focus on delivering economic benefits for the county.
9. Wiltshire Council: As part of the move to a unitary structure, rationalised its estate from 95 buildings to 3 main office hubs and contributed to a 15% reduction in CO₂ emissions from local authority buildings. The harmonisation of waste services supported a significant reduction in waste going to landfill. Wiltshire's vision for empowering local communities led to the formation of Area Boards which oversee grants that lever in £6 for every £1 spent, agree improvement works for highways and prioritise street scene works. In the first two years as a unitary council, Wiltshire Council increased customer satisfaction by 18%.
10. Wiltshire Council also harmonised waste collection and disposal to improve household recycling performance and reduce waste to landfill from 56% to 37% (a reduction of 19%).

Case Studies

11. The Environment and Transport Department has identified two services where different elements are currently delivered by the County Council and the district councils, waste management and parking.
12. It should be stressed that these case studies are designed to represent a brief overview of what a unitary service could look like, and that further, more

detailed work would be required to arrive at a fully evidenced, preferred model.

Waste Management Services

Current

13. In Leicestershire, the seven districts, as Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs), are responsible for providing kerbside collections of waste and recyclables. The County Council, as the Waste Disposal Authority (WDA), is responsible for the disposal and treatment of the waste collected by the districts. The County Council also provides the network of recycling and household waste sites and waste transfer stations.
14. In reality this means seven different kerbside waste and recycling collection systems operating across Leicestershire. There is variety in collection frequencies (weekly or fortnightly), sizes and types of containers (bins, boxes and bags) and charges (for green, trade and bulky waste collections).
15. The differing service across the county also extends to materials collected for recycling. With the exception of glass and metal, there are significant differences in materials collected which in confusion for residents. For example, for paper at present some district councils collect all types of wrapping paper while others only collect non-metallic wrapping paper and for shredded paper some districts require this to be wrapped separately, while others do not.. A number of districts collect tetra paks while others do not and again for plastic film, some accept plastic film while others do not. These differences cause confusion if residents move between districts or have family and friends in different districts operating different systems. Ultimately however, confusion is likely to lead to higher contamination of recyclable materials which will lead to higher disposal costs. The above provides an illustration of the differences and complexity of waste collection. Table 1 illustrates the broad cross-section of waste systems currently operating in Leicestershire.
16. Each different collection system is also supported by different policies and processes, for example in relation to missed bins, side waste, assisted collections or charges for replacement bins.
17. This can be confusing to the public and makes the provision of clear, consistent communication messages on a county wide basis much more difficult. At present, there is no single point for residents to access information on waste services: the County Council, the seven districts and the Leicestershire Waste Partnership all provide information on waste services on their websites and each authority has a different telephone customer service line.
18. The variation in collection services also means there are a significant number of waste contracts with different end dates and contractual terms. This situation is inefficient in terms of value for money (particularly in relation to the

costs of procurement and on-going contract management), does not allow for strategic planning and optimisation of waste collection rounds across the county and does not make best use of the network of waste depots and other infrastructure.

19. There is also a significant officer resource required to manage interactions between the County Council and the district councils at both a strategic and operational level.

What could waste services look like in a unitary authority?

20. A unitary council would deliver consistent kerbside collection services for residents (e.g. collection frequencies, containers and charges), as well as trade waste services for businesses. It would allow clear, simple communications and access to initiatives which support waste ambitions, maximising participation through ease of use and branding, simplifying waste services for Leicestershire residents.
21. An example of a waste service offered by a unitary council (Durham County Council) is shown in table 2. In contrast to the confusing variety of services as shown in Table 1, the unitary authority offers a streamlined service across the County area.

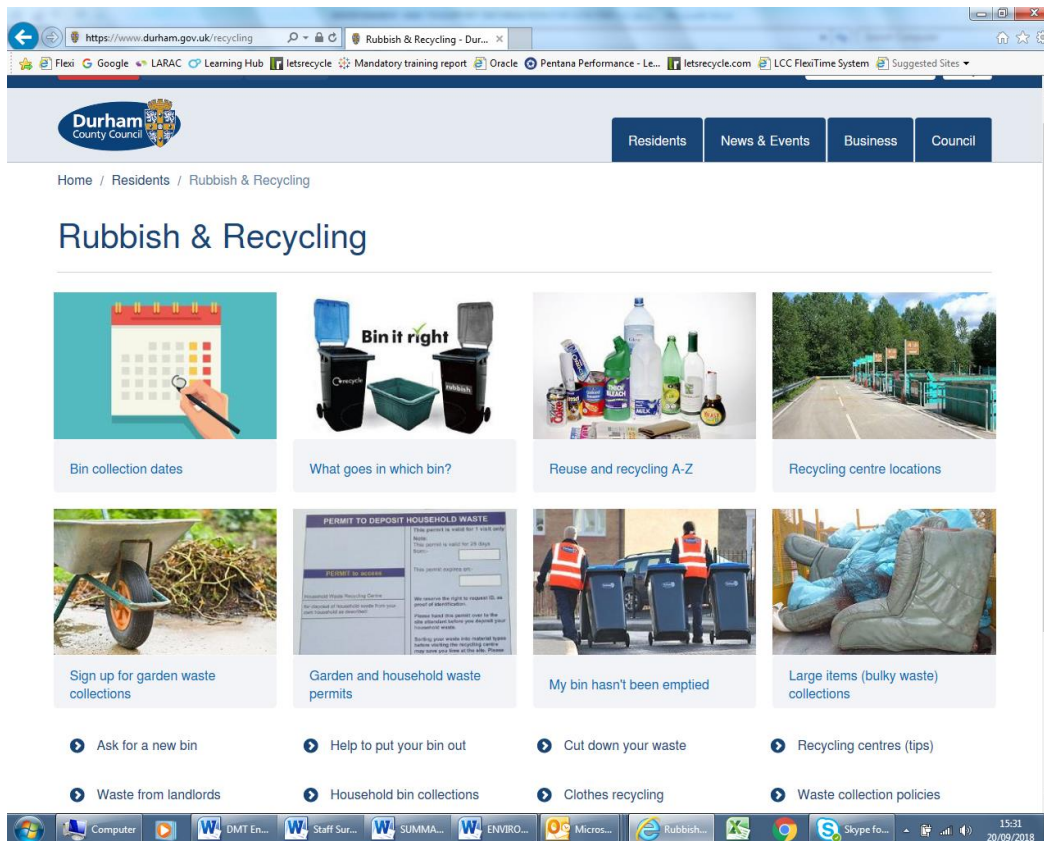
Residual	Recycling	Green Waste	Bulky Waste
Standard Bin Fortnightly	Standard Bin and Box Fortnightly	Standard Bin or Bag Fortnightly £30	6 small items £16. Each additional small item £2.50 3 large/DIY items £16. Each additional large item £5.00 Exception items £32 per item

Table 2 Durham County Council waste collection service.

22. Residents would also benefit from a single point of access for all core waste services which would reduce duplication of effort on their part and be easier to understand.
23. For example, the Durham County council waste 'home' page provides a single point of access for residents for both waste collection and disposal services, including:
- Bin collections
 - Recycling
 - Household waste recycling centres
 - Garden waste collections

- Missed bins
- Bulky waste collections

24. This compares to nine different websites in Leicestershire – the County Council, the seven district councils and the Leicestershire Waste Partnership – which all contain information on waste services.



25. Waste policies (for example in relation to missed bins, assisted collections, side waste etc.) would be the same across the unitary authority area, reducing duplication, simplifying communications and providing consistent services for residents.

26. A unitary council would also give opportunities to deliver a whole system approach to waste services offering value for money through optimising the configuration of waste collection rounds, making efficient use of infrastructure by rationalising waste depots, utilising co-location opportunities and maximising contractual buying power.

27. There would also be opportunities to integrate other tasks such as litter, fly tipping and enforcement into the waste service provided by the unitary council allowing the services to be flexible and responsive to residents' needs.

28. A holistic waste service would enable decisions across the whole spectrum of waste management functions, delivering savings through the streamlining of management, back office systems, procurement, direct service provision and contract management functions, and a better customer service experience.

Parking Services

Current

29. Currently the seven district councils are responsible for off street parking; the County Council is responsible for on street parking and residents' parking schemes. The current Civil Parking Enforcement Partnership activity is coordinated through a Parking Board whose membership is made up of the County Council and seven district councils. Powers to enforce on street parking restrictions are currently delegated by the County Council to the districts with the County Council providing a processing service in respect of all issued penalties across the county.
30. Within the current system six of the seven districts charge for the majority of off street parking. Tariffs vary from district to district and different systems and contracts are in place to administer parking across the county.
31. This can be confusing for the public as they encounter different charges and regulations when parking in different locations within the county.

What could parking services look like in a unitary authority?

32. The County Council, in its role as a Highway Authority, has a statutory duty to ensure the efficient movement of traffic on the roads of Leicestershire. Consideration of on street parking forms a part of this responsibility. A unitary authority with responsibility for on and off street parking would be able to maximise the efficiency and availability of off street parking to support this statutory duty.
33. A unitary authority would enable a single policy covering on and off street parking, applying a consistent and simpler approach for parking, permitting and traffic regulation. Similarly it would also enable a consistent approach to parking charges, civil enforcement and appeals delivering savings across procurement, contract management and back office functions.
34. Civil Enforcement Officer (CEO) resource could be more efficiently deployed with the removal of current district boundaries.
35. In addition, having total control of parking would allow a more considered and universal approach to determine where funds are best invested, for example in highway or car park maintenance, or providing additional parking where this would complement sustainable growth.
36. There would be opportunities for a unitary authority to explore the integration of many other aspects of street activity, for example identifying street lighting, sign, footway or highway defects into a revised Civil Enforcement Officer / inspection role.

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