

Joint Working Together Statement Hart District Council and Rushmoor Borough Council

JUNE 2022

This statement is issued on behalf of Hart District Council (Hart DC) and Rushmoor Borough Council (Rushmoor BC). The statement has been endorsed by each council.

Background

Local Government is in a period of change and reform. Public expectation of services continues to increase whilst resources reduce, creating a constant challenge about how best to deliver high quality services with limited resources.

The Government set out plans recently in the *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*¹ white paper, which includes details of a new devolution framework and a raft of proposals to drive change in local government. Central to these proposals is the need for renewed and strong local leadership, and the opportunity for councils to drive locally led change, to reorganise and work together, where there is broad local support.

It is against this backdrop that Hart DC and Rushmoor BC commenced a dialogue to find ways to work collaboratively, share resources and drive significant and sustained improvements in services for residents in a combined area serving more than 200,000 people.

The Opportunity

The two councils believe that in exploring the opportunity of working together several benefits are achievable:

1. **A reduction in overall costs.** By identifying ways to deliver services and share resources, it will be possible to reduce duplication and overall management costs.
2. **A stronger voice in the County and with Government.** The increased scale and combined resources will bring a stronger voice to represent our communities.
3. **Improved joined-up service delivery.** By working closely together, in an area that shares many similar challenges and history, it will be possible to deliver better organised, coordinated and joined up services for our communities.
4. **Better use of scarce resources.** The combined capability of two organisations working collaboratively together to recruit and jointly manage, will provide an opportunity to attract and retain higher calibre candidates.
5. **Improved resilience.** In potentially sharing services and staff resources, over time each council will improve its resilience to deal with both planned and unplanned events.

The focus of these proposals is on shared services and shared working, not on merging the councils. Both councils will retain their legal and political arrangements as well as their proud individual civic identities.

¹ February 2022

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1052708/Levelling_up_the_UK_white_paper.pdf

What are we intending to do?

Hart DC and Rushmoor BC have committed to working together as equal partners, to consider the opportunity for the appointment of a shared Chief Executive and to build on and grow our shared service delivery. To do this our early steps will be to explore:

- ***A Shared Chief Executive*** - An early step will be to establish a process to appoint a shared Chief Executive responsible for leading the change programme across both councils. This creates an opportunity to reduce management cost, but more importantly ensures that strong leadership is in place, committed to setting the tone and culture for future shared and collaborative working. This will also enable a joint strategic voice working across North Hampshire supporting both Leaders in discussions with external partners and stakeholders such as The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), Hampshire County Council, other district councils and with Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) partnerships.
- ***Further Shared Services*** - The sharing of services is commonplace amongst local authorities. There is evidence that where many councils have undertaken shared activity, they have delivered savings, made improvements to services or improved resilience, for example in better recruitment and retention. Hart and Rushmoor already share some services and both councils are now keen to extend shared services, looking at other areas to deliver improved services at a lower cost.

To reiterate, we are not considering a merger of our Councils, now, or in the future. However, as we align ourselves further opportunities may present themselves, such as the ability to share more knowledge skills and resources within our management teams, leveraging benefit for both Councils and the communities we serve.

Next Steps

We want to ensure that we move quickly to deliver change, but at the same time work together to identify, understand, and agree the right opportunities.

The councils will develop business cases to support any changes, detailing the potential opportunities, and recommending which order any changes are made. Where the business cases prove worthwhile, we will rapidly implement shared working arrangements. We are keen to ensure an open and transparent dialogue with our communities over these changes.

We will be setting up arrangements to consult on the proposals as they emerge in more detail. Further information will be made available on our respective websites in due course. We believe these proposals offer exciting opportunities to improve services and reduce cost for both councils.

Leader of Hart DC

Leader of Rushmoor BC