

---

## **LEADER'S STATEMENT**

### **AGENDA ITEM:6**

---

#### **Expression of Interest in Voluntary Merger – Update**

The Cabinet considered matters relating to the Reforming Local Government White Paper and voluntary merger of local authorities on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2014 and approved the submission to the Welsh Government in response to the consultation questions set out in the reforming Local Government White paper. The Cabinet also resolved to delegate authority to the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive to:

- progress discussions about the potential development of an expression of interest in voluntary merger, including with the Vale of Glamorgan Council and other stakeholders;
- discuss with the Welsh Government the potential for the development of an alternative proposal based on exceptional circumstances; and
- seek an assurance from the Welsh Government that Cardiff will not be disadvantaged in terms of any freedoms and flexibilities that may be available to other local authorities.

Subsequently the Chief Executive and I met with the Leader and Managing Director of the Vale of Glamorgan Council on the 28<sup>th</sup> October 2014. Following this discussion it was evident that a voluntary merger option with Cardiff was not supported by the Vale of Glamorgan Council. The Vale has since agreed to develop and submit an Expression of Interest in voluntary merger with Bridgend Council. This is expected to be approved at a special meeting of the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Cabinet, which is being held on the 28<sup>th</sup> November, and then submitted formally to the Welsh Government.

Meetings with the Leaders and Chief Executives of other stakeholders (i.e. other neighbouring local authorities – Newport, Caerphilly & Rhondda Cynon Taf Councils) also took place on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014, but did not result in any agreement to proceed with an Expression of Interest in voluntary merger. These meetings were, nonetheless, very positive and underlined the commitment of neighbouring authorities to working closely with Cardiff to deliver savings and protect services.

As a result of these discussions, the Council is not in a position to submit a joint Expression of Interest in voluntary merger to the Welsh Government by the submission deadline of 28<sup>th</sup> November 2014. Consequently I am not in a position at the present time to bring forward a report to Council that outlines options for an Expression of Interest in a voluntary merger. In the absence of a

willingness on the part of neighbouring authorities to pursue a voluntary merger option involving Cardiff, no alternative proposals have been discussed with Welsh Government.

I have therefore written to the Minister for Public Services to seek assurances from the Welsh Government that Cardiff will not be disadvantaged in terms of any freedoms and flexibilities that may be offered to those local authorities who are able to proceed with voluntary merger. The Welsh Government has confirmed previously that it will support and incentivise those local authorities who wish to begin a voluntary process of merger.

In January, the Welsh Government will introduce a first Bill that will enable preparatory work for a programme of mergers. This will include the powers to enable ministers to require the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales to start work on considering and making recommendations for electoral arrangements for proposed new authorities. Subject to the approval of any Expressions of Interest in voluntary merger by the Welsh Government, more detailed and fully developed voluntary Merger Proposals must be submitted by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015.

The Minister for Public Service delivery has also stated in a recent interview his intention to bring forward a White Paper in January. Should there be any consequential developments, I will update the Council.

### **Armed Forces Update**

In March last year Cardiff signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant to promote good relations between the armed forces and the civilian community. To deliver against our Community Covenant commitment, and to help understand how public service providers can help meet the needs of service leavers, an Armed Forces Forum has been established across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. It is chaired by the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and attended by public service providers and third sector organisations.

As members of the Forum, the city has worked with partner organisations to take forward a number of positive activities to support the Armed Forces community in Cardiff. The forum builds on the successful collaborative approach with other major service providers and ensures that issues are considered across the Cardiff and Vale regional collaborative footprint. Work is also currently being undertaken to develop a concise "Directory of Services" with organisations such as SSAFA (Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association) that can signpost the Armed Forces community to those key services that they are likely to need. This also forms part of the collaborative activity with the Royal British Legion, who have recently opened a welfare outreach centre at 18/19 High Street Cardiff.

Several events have also been hosted to support the Armed Forces Community which the Council has supported. This has included promoting services at the Armed Forces Transition event. With regards to the Community Covenant Grant scheme, Cardiff has supported a number of successful funding applications, with a combined value of over £420,000. Activities funded through the Community Covenant Grant Scheme include an initiative to retrain service leavers as youth workers as well as a project to digitalise the names and

histories of local war memorials to make them available to a new generation through smartphone apps.

**Councillor Phil Bale**

**Leader of the City of Cardiff Council/ Arweinydd Cyngor Dinas Caerdydd**