

CenSus Joint Committee

17th March 2016



Agenda Item

Report by the Director of Corporate Resources, Horsham District Council

Wards Affected – All

Key Decision - No

Exempt Appendix 2 further to paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 – It is considered that in all the circumstances of the case the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

DISSOLUTION OF THE REVENUES AND BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP

Purpose of Report

This report sets out the implications of Horsham District Council's decision to withdraw from the Census Revenues and Benefits Partnership ("the Partnership"), and the consequential dissolution of the Partnership.

Recommendations

The Joint Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the decision of Horsham District Council's Cabinet to issue Notice to withdraw from the Partnership;**
 - b) Endorse the key principles for the dissolution of the Partnership;**
 - c) Agree the work streams outlined within the report to facilitate the dissolution of the Partnership.**
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1 Background

- 1.1 At its meeting of 26 January 2017 Horsham District Council's Cabinet agreed to issue notice to withdraw from the CenSus Revenues and Benefits Partnership leading to the Partnership's dissolution.
- 1.2 Notice has now been served on Mid Sussex District Council ("MSDC") and Adur District Council as per the Partnership Agreement. (A copy of the notice is attached at Appendix 1). The earliest that a severance can take place is 1st April 2018. This would be disruptive to the annual billing run of council tax and non-domestic rate as well as creating problems for the production of annual Housing Benefit letters.

- 1.3 It is therefore suggested that the dissolution date for the current partnership agreement should be 1st October 2018 with a long lead-in to enable the various issues and associated actions to be agreed. If it proves possible to accelerate the process Horsham District Council (“HDC”) will work with MSDC to enable an earlier dissolution.
- 1.4 This Meeting of the Joint Committee is asked to consider the implications of the dissolution and agree the work streams set out below.

2 **Guiding Principles**

The Chief Executives of Horsham and Mid Sussex District Councils have prepared the following principles for the work:

- Strive to minimise the cost of dissolution to both parties and to avoid any adverse impact on service users.
- Share the costs of the dissolution in accordance with the terms of the partnership agreement.
- Endeavour to improve critical aspects of the service (e.g. Local Authority error rate on housing benefits claims and non-domestic rate in year collection rate) during the dissolution/transition period.
- Agree a timely and realistic programme to complete the process and work constructively to achieve the agreed timetable.
- Take reasonable steps to ensure that the databases and other relevant aspects of the service are rendered fit for purpose at the point of dissolution to minimise future problems with Housing Benefit Subsidy audits.

3 **Implications of the dissolution**

- 3.1 Officers have been assessing the situation and feel that the project can be divided into two work streams, managing the interim period and managing the dissolution.

3.2 Work streams for the interim period

CenSus management will focus on the following themes in the year:

- 3.2.1 Continue to focus on data cleansing of housing benefit claims from working age working people.
- 3.2.2 Continue to focus on maintaining revenues collection rates and housing benefits and council tax support processing times for new claims and change of circumstances.

- 3.2.3 Continue the roll out of the online services to reduce expensive customer contacts.
- 3.2.4 MSDC's human resources team will look into methods to retain staff to the end of the partnership without growing the numbers of permanent staff or the potential redundancy costs.

3.3 Work streams for dissolution

HDC and MSDC's support services teams will work on the following themes to ensure a successful dissolution:

- 3.3.1 The CenSus ICT project board will lead on how to divide the data, especially from the "Information@Work" system where issues have been identified during Adur's withdrawal from the partnership.
- 3.3.2 Horsham's Director of Corporate Resources will sponsor a project to resupply Horsham's service.
- 3.3.3 Mid Sussex's technology management service will look into the licenses needed for Mid Sussex to continue operating.
- 3.3.4 Mid Sussex's legal service will obtain an opinion on the potential legal requirement to follow a TUPE-like transfer.
- 3.3.5 Mid Sussex's human resources team will lead negotiations with the Union(s).
- 3.3.6 Mid Sussex's legal service will renegotiate their contracts for scanning and PrintPro to ensure Mid Sussex retains an on-going service.
- 3.3.7 Horsham's Director of Corporate Resources will prepare a paper for the CenSus Joint Committee at its last meeting before the dissolution making recommendations for the future governance of the residual CenSus ICT functions.

4 **Policy Context**

- 4.1 Partnership working is firmly within the remit of the Joint Committee and is subject to scrutiny within the constituent Councils.

5 **Other Options Considered**

- 5.1 HDC's Cabinet decided on 26 January 2016 to leave the partnership. This decision will lead to the dissolution of the Revenues and Benefits Partnership.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 As the project progresses the costs of dissolution for both Councils will need to be in accordance with the provisions of the partnership agreement.

7 Risk Management Implications

Each Council will complete their own risk assessment of future arrangements.

The key risks in the remaining period of the CenSus Revenues and Benefits Partnership relate to staffing and costs matters. These risks are set out in more detail in the exempt appendix 2.

8 Other Implications

- 8.1 There are no sustainability or equality implications of this report. HDC will complete an equalities impact assessment of its final decision on resupply.

9 Other Material Implications

- 9.1 None.

10 Background Papers

- 10.1 None

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