

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 13TH DECEMBER 2018

**Question to
The Leader of the Council**

By Kyle Robinson

Question

Will the Leader of the Council set out the total cost to date for the 'Options for Reform in Staffordshire' documentation that Grant Thornton LLP have been commissioned to produce? Will he also share the 'Options for Reform in Staffordshire' documentation so that County Councillors can share information with residents about discussions regarding future models for delivery of the public services they fund?

Reply

Council will be aware that in September 2018, Staffordshire County Council was the subject of Corporate Peer Review by the Local Government Association. This examined a range of issues, including the county council's unprecedented financial challenges next year and in the medium term – a matter on which you have been notified during previous meetings of Full Council. Over the past few months both members and officers have worked tirelessly to set a balanced budget for 2019/20, and beyond. It is our responsibility as members of Staffordshire County Council to do so, and it is also incumbent upon us to manage the expected £35 million budget shortfall in the best way possible, whilst considering the longer-term sustainability and role of the authority.

We take this role very seriously and the LGA Peer Review team would expect us a well-managed and well-run council to explore all options; leaving no stone unturned to meet these challenges. As part of this we commissioned Grant Thornton to undertake a desk top analysis of all the possible options for the delivery of local governance in Staffordshire – both in terms of the needs of our growing population and about the potential cost savings that may be achieved if local government reorganisation was to be implemented. As one would expect, this required exploration of the status-quo, of unitarisation, and of the regionalisation of local government services. Grant Thornton carried out this work discretely to ensure that their work remained an exploratory exercise that could be delivered without prejudice and without becoming an unwelcome distraction at a time when there is already much deliberation about devolution and re-organisation nationally.

The final report which will be published in January 2019 will recommend the development of enhanced two-tier governance for Staffordshire and that this remains the most effective form of governance for the county. This is pleasing, and I personally have long been an advocate of this form of local governance. This report reaffirms and endorses this view, and I look forward, and remain

firmly committed, to, the 8 district and borough councils that alongside the county council deliver essential frontline service for the people of Staffordshire.

The overall cost of the work undertaken on behalf of the county council was approximately £48,000. I am sure Mr Robinson will agree that this work has helped reassure the LGA Peer Review team that Staffordshire County Council is financially viable despite the experience of other county councils, and that we are clearly committed to the protection of services for those that need them most.