

Summary of comments received during staff consultation period

Comments have been received both from individuals and through group meetings, and from both teams. The full comments extend to 25 pages and they have therefore been summarised under the themes set out below. The full comments have been reviewed by the Project Board.

Theme	Summary of points raised by staff and responses to these.
1. The rationale for merging the two teams/comments on the business case.	<p><u>Staff comments:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The required savings could potentially have been made without merging the teams. • Concern that there is a risk that the investment costs will be incurred but that the planned savings may not be achieved. • Savings will be achieved by reducing staff numbers; as a result there is a risk that service standards for residents and customers will fall, and statutory duties may not be deliverable. • Concern that service resilience may be compromised . • Concerns that further savings will be required in two years. • The business case was still being finalised during the consultation period, not allowing staff sufficient time to comment on the final proposals. • The business case assumes increases in efficiency but does not detail what these are or how they will be achieved. • The long period of uncertainty experienced has depressed morale in the Team. • There has been insufficient account taken of staff feedback. • If the merger is agreed Officers would support it and work to try to make it a success but wish their views and the impact on them to be fully considered. <p><u>Response:</u></p> <p>Regarding concerns, in addition to one-to-one meetings held with Officers with roles potentially at risk within the proposed structure, all staff were offered an opportunity to discuss any aspect of the proposals and their individual circumstances and concerns. Various group meetings have also been held with staff, management, HR and the consultant, the result of which has been the need to update and amend the business case in light of points made, further financial considerations etc.</p> <p>Environmental Health staff have also been provided with the details of staff and managers within the Revenues & Benefits Services who have volunteered to share their experiences of the proposed shared working experience from the outset, as well as offer advice, help and knowledge on a personal level and their view of the shared working environment and working practices currently in operation.</p> <p>The rationale for the shared working (increased resilience, reduced costs) have been shared with staff, together with the opportunities for generating further savings in future years (growing the service with other Councils, changing processes to</p>

	<p>generate savings). Clear performance targets have been put in place based on planned resources and workload volumetrics. The business plan was only finalised after the receipt of all the consultation comments, to allow for any adjustments arising from the feedback received.</p>
<p>2. The proposed service location (main base at Dartford with a satellite office at Sevenoaks).</p>	<p><u>Staff comments:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers calling at SDC's reception may not be able to see an EH Officer due to the lower number of staff based there in the future. • Travel time to sites will increase, and hence mileage costs. • Concerns over travelling in and out of Dartford due to M25 congestion. • Home to work travel time will increase and may impact on childcare and other commitments. • Having staff across two sites will make staff management more difficult. • Increasing the time Officers are out on site may require a mobile working solution/increased admin support. • The staffing reductions may lead to a reduction in onsite work. • Will officer authorisations be extended to cover both areas and all work? <p><u>Response:</u></p> <p>The proposal is that the main base will be at Dartford with a satellite office at Sevenoaks, offering drop in hot desk facilities. It is intended that there will be a management presence at Sevenoaks on at least two days each week to ensure the facility is used and managed appropriately as well as to support Officers where applicable. Although nobody will be based at the satellite office on a fixed basis, having the two bases will reduce travel time for officers visiting premises and customers and offer an on-site presence for walk-in customers and liaison with other departments e.g. planning and licensing. There are many Local Authorities that have a larger geographical area than the combined area of Dartford and Sevenoaks. The main base and satellite office model has therefore been developed to mitigate wasted travel time.</p> <p>Regarding the decision to locate the Environmental Health Service at Dartford rather than Sevenoaks there are dense clusters of commercial premises in the Dartford area and to the north of the Sevenoaks area. All other factors being equal, it was this that determined the main location as Dartford.</p> <p>The proposal has been designed to enable remote working, flexible working options (i.e. consideration of condensed hours, flexi-time etc.) and working from home. Individual requests to work more flexibly or to work from home will be considered once the staffing structure is finalised and operational aspects have been fully worked out. However, it will also be important to balance such options with an operational presence on site</p>

	including attendance at meetings and the continued communication and exchange of knowledge, case updates ideas and support between Officers.
3. The proposed structure and allocation of staff to posts within the structure.	<p><u>Staff comments:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reduction in staff numbers could lead to reductions in service standards. • Both Councils currently use contractors and these have not been included in the proposed staff structure. • Consideration should be given to dropping non-statutory work and using risk-based interventions rather than visits in order to match workload and available staffing. • Existing staff resources work with a waiting list; reducing resources could increase waiting times. • Concentrating technical tasks with one post (Scientific Officer) reduces resilience. • The original expectation was that management posts would be the main reductions but some frontline staff posts are also being reduced. • If mainly DBC or SDC staff are unsuccessful in applying for the posts in competition, valuable local knowledge may be lost. • Further clarification is required around the responsibilities of some posts, including how they relate to the duties of posts in the existing structures. • Training needs need to be considered and provided for (time and money). <p><u>Response:</u></p> <p>There is no national bench mark for the ratio of officers to premises/service requests; some Local Authorities operate with a greater staff to workload ratio, and some with a lower ratio. The structure has been designed by those currently running the service and fully aware of service volumes. Service levels have been proposed to take account of the reduced resources as well as each Council's aspiration to provide good, cost-effective services to residents and businesses, and it is anticipated that the joint service will generate efficiencies. The proposal is a reduction in management and other posts to match the workloads and new ways of working being developed.</p> <p>In a small team one person may carry out a variety of activities, but in the new larger structure activities are allocated to specific posts. Detailed workload assessments and volumetrics have been carried out for some posts and some changes are now proposed in the allocation of work, albeit within the staffing numbers originally proposed.</p> <p>The Scientific Officer will lead and manage some specialist areas with the opportunity and requirement for other Officers within the team to provide cover, which is a resilient option. Challenges to the proposal to assimilate the post holder into this post are being addressed by line management and HR..</p>

4. Staff pay and conditions.	<p><u>Staff comments:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is understood that staff will stay on existing terms and conditions for two years but it is unclear what will happen after that date – this creates further uncertainty for staff. • There are a number of differences between terms and conditions for DBC and SDC staff – how and when these will be resolved, this needs further clarification. • Clarification is required over pay protection arrangements, when staff not placed in the structure would be made redundant (if not successfully redeployed) and when new job descriptions will come into force. <p><u>Response:</u></p> <p>Staff were issued with a copy of the Stability Policy (SDC) and Redeployment and Redundancy Policy and Procedure (DBC), together with a list of Frequently Asked Questions at the start of the consultation process which addresses these issues. Staff have been informed that any plan to harmonise terms and conditions, will be done in full consultation with all staff and communications to staff will be ongoing.</p>
5. Out of hours arrangements.	<p><u>Staff comments:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarification is required over how the out of hours arrangements work under the new structure – are all staff expected to participate and will existing payment arrangement continue. • Further information is required about why the out of hours arrangements are being reviewed as a separate exercise. <p><u>Response:</u></p> <p>These arrangements are still under discussion as both Councils wish to continue to provide a service and staff will receive an additional payment for this. Current indications are that there will be sufficient Officers volunteering to undertake these duties but it is important that the service has contingency arrangements in place if those Officers should be unavailable. Personal circumstances will of course be borne in mind.</p>
6. Mileage payments and travel time (also covered under 'location' above).	<p><u>Staff comments:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further information is required about how mileage payments will be calculated, particularly if an officer makes a site visit first rather than going to the office first, this also affects how working hours would be recorded. • Concern that miles travelled may increase rather than reduce as a result of the joint service. <p><u>Response:</u></p> <p>Both Councils have policies that cover calculation of business mileage and define working time. These will continue to be</p>

	<p>applicable and will be reviewed for consistency, fairness and practicality as has been the case for Revenue and Benefits staff who have been in the same situation of changing their work location. These discussions, including site visits, together with flexible working options can only be agreed when the staffing structure is finalised and operational aspects such as having sufficient resource on each day have been considered.</p>
7. Redeployment opportunities.	<p><u>Staff comments:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern that for professional Officers the number of possible redeployment opportunities at a suitable grade are likely to be very limited. • Officers are being asked to express a view on potential redeployment opportunities now rather than at the end of the selection process. <p><u>Response:</u></p> <p>When new or vacant posts occur, where they are suitable for redeployment, they are being kept open for Environmental Health staff. Also, staff are not expected to formally express their interest until they have been unsuccessful in securing a post in the new structure. Staff are being asked to express their view informally at an early stage, so that posts are not kept open unnecessarily. Where a post is available for redeployment, training will be available to the staff involved.</p> <p>Furthermore, individual discussions have been offered to staff, some of whom have met with the Manager of the department in which a role is available, to discuss the required qualifications, knowledge, expertise and training that would be required for the role.</p>
8. Management Structure/ Arrangements	<p><u>Staff comments:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is disappointing to lose the input of the Head of Environmental and Operational Services to the service's development and future success. • The job description for the Environmental Health Manager has not been published. <p><u>Response:</u></p> <p>The Environmental Health Manager post will still be line to the Head of Environmental and Operational Services (SDC) and the Strategic Director (DBC). Given the proposed new joint structure further consideration of the requirements of the Environmental Health Manager role was required in conjunction with the Assistant and Principal role responsibilities, hence this job description was subsequently made available during the consultation process.</p>

