

Subject:
Strong and Prosperous Communities:
Invitations to Councils in England

Status: For Publication

Report to: Council

Date: 30 November 2006

Report of: Chief Executive

Portfolio

Holder: Leader of Council

Key Decision: YES

Forward Plan General Exception Special Urgency

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report outlines the key points in the document published alongside the White Paper: Strong and Prosperous Communities on 26 October 2006, inviting councils to:

- Make proposals for unitary structures
- Pioneers, as path finders, new two-tier models.

In addition it contains options for Rossendale Borough Council in considering how it wishes to respond to this invitation.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

2.1 Strategic Objectives - the White Paper supports the achievement of all eight of the Council's objectives and contains themes relevant to all of the Council's current corporate priorities.

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

3.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

3.2 The 'Invitation to councils in England' states that local government in two-tier areas faces additional challenges that can make it harder to achieve that strong leadership and clear accountability which communities need. There are risks of confusion, duplication and inefficiency between tiers, and particular challenges

of capacity for small districts. The document goes on to state that the Government believes that the status quo is not an option in two-tier areas if councils are to achieve the outcomes for place shaping and service delivery that communities expect, and deliver substantial efficiency improvements.

Therefore there are risks in not engaging in this debate in terms of being able to Deliver on the agenda contained in the White Paper.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

4.1 Alongside the White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' published on 26 October 2006, the Government issued an 'Invitation to councils in England

- To make proposals for unitary structures
- To pioneer, as pathfinders, new two-tier models.

4.2 Proposals for governance change, whether involving new two-tier models or moving to unitary structures, should:

i) enhance strategic leadership, neighbourhood empowerment, accountability, value for money and equity;

ii) command a broad section of support; and

iii) be affordable, representing value for money and meeting any costs of change from councils' existing resources.

4.3 The invitation states that the Government expects all councils in continuing two-tier areas, even if they are not pathfinders, to pursue new arrangements to achieve the same level of improvement and efficiency gains as new unitaries and pathfinders will be achieving. Councils can respond to the invitation to propose a unitary structure and, as a member of a partnership, to the invitation to be a pathfinder. In such cases councils are expected to await the response to the unitary proposal before taking forward any pathfinder proposal.

4.4 Any proposal for unitary structures must be submitted by a council or a group of two or more councils. The area covered by the proposal may also include adjoining areas which are currently outside that of the submitting council or councils. A proposal must set out the future local government structure for all the areas affected by the change.

4.5 The timescale for the process is:

- proposals submitted on or before 25 January 2007
- announcement of preliminary views as to those proposals that have met the specified criteria (March 2007)
- Stakeholder consultation closes June 2007
- Final announcements July 2007
- Election to new unitaries May 2008
- new unitaries up and running by June 2009

4.6 The invitation for pathfinders for a new two-tier model should aim for:

- Unified service delivery with service users having no need to understand whether the county, district or indeed other service providers is responsible;
- Strong leadership for place-shaping;
- Effective accountability arrangements so that people know who is responsible for what decision and
- Shared back office functions and integrated service delivery mechanisms.

Proposals must be submitted by the partnership of a county council and all the district councils in the county area. The proposal must be submitted on or before 25 January 2007.

4.7 As stated in 4.3 The invitation states that the Government expects all councils in continuing two-tier areas, even if they are not pathfinders, to pursue new arrangements to achieve the same level of improvement and efficiency gains as new unitaries and pathfinders will be achieving.

4.8 Options

Option One: Unitary Structure Proposal

Burnley and Pendle Councils are considering submitting a proposal for a unitary structure. Rossendale Borough Council could consider inclusion in this.

Option Two: Two-Tier Pathfinder

This requires the county and all districts to be included in the proposal.

Option Three: Enhanced Two-Tier

To develop an improved approach to two-tier working across the county.

5. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF FINANCIAL SERVICES

5.1 There are financial implications for all options which would need to be developed as part of any proposal.

6. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

6.1 There are implications for any proposal in terms of democratic arrangements and the Council's constitution.

7. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES

7.1 Any proposals would have implications for the workforce which would need to be detailed in the proposals.

9. RECOMMENDATION(S)

10.1 That the Council identify the preferred option for the future governance arrangements.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

Elected Members Briefing

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Background Papers	
Strong and Prosperous Communities White Paper	