



Report to: Council

Date of Meeting: 26 April 2007

Report from: Roy Templeman, Chief Executive

Title of Report: Consultation regarding County Council's proposal for a Single Unitary Authority

Agenda Item Number:

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 Members will be aware that the Minister for Communities and Local Government is currently consulting on the County Council's proposal for a Single Unitary Authority for Durham County. This report seeks delegated authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council to prepare a draft response having regard to the views of our principle partners, stakeholders and communities.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The Government have included a list of stakeholders to which they wish to formally consult on the County Council's proposals and the District Council are invited to comment as part of that consultation. Members will be aware that there is no specific proposal by the Government to consult the wider communities but rather the Government are expecting the District Council will reflect the views of our communities in producing a response. Over the last few days the Department for Local Communities have confirmed their view regarding the powers and options that are available to a Local Authority in relation to the collection of views of local people and stakeholders in informing such a response.

3. CORPORATE PLAN AND PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The key principle of engaging with our communities and partners in understanding their views regarding the future governance arrangements of new unitary authorities is fundamental to both our Community Strategy and Corporate Plan objectives. Indeed this goes to the very heart of the Government White

Paper in relation to community empowerment, democratic accountability and the need for the District Council to represent and respond to the diverse needs of the communities. It is important therefore that the Council seek to obtain the widest possible views of its communities in responding to this very key decision regarding the future delivery of Local Authority services for our residents in Chester-le-Street.

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial

It is proposed that in order to represent the broadest cross section of views from our communities and stakeholders that the Chief Executive is able to commission work to help to inform the response that is ultimately presented on behalf of the District Council.

Because of the tight timescale in which we are operating to pull together an effective response it is further proposed that a budgetary provision of £30,000 is made to enable the Chief Executive to carry out the necessary functions to obtain our communities views.

This funding can be financed from the Local Authority Business Growth Incentive (LABGI) for 2006/07. Both the commissioning of work and the preparation of a draft response will be conducted in consultation with the Leader of the Council so that a final report recommending response to the Government can be presented to Members before the deadline of 22 June 2007.

4.2 Legal

The District Councils within Co Durham have obtained legal advice regarding the options available to obtain our communities views in order to respond to the County Council's proposals and the recent communication from Government officials has confirmed the powers available to Local Authorities under the Local Government Act 2003 which enables such views to be obtained. Officers and Members are mindful of the publicity code and in particular the application of that code during PURDAH period leading up to the local elections. We will be clearly mindful of the need to adhere to that code in commissioning any work to obtain public views and opinions.

4.3 Personnel

There are no direct Personnel implications.

4.4 Other Services

There are no implications to other services.

4.5 Diversity

It is essential that in order to produce an effective response to the County Council proposals that we have regard to the diverse nature of our communities and the different needs and expectations of the people who are dependant upon effective local government services. It is therefore essential that we consult as widely as possible in order to provide an inclusive response to the Government consultation.

5. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1 For Council to delegate authority to the Chief Executive in conjunction with the Leader to commission work in order to obtain views of communities in producing a draft response to the Government's consultation on the Future of Local Government in Co Durham.
- 5.2 That a budgetary provision of £30,000 is made from the LABGI grant in 2006/07 to enable the commissioning of such work.

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DESIGNATION	Chief Executive
DATE OF REPORT	20 April 2007
VERSION NUMBER	Version 1.0