



Chester-le-Street
District Council

Report to:	Council
Date of Meeting:	24 January 2007
Report from:	Chief Executive
Title of Report:	Pathfinder to Unitary – District response to the Governments White Paper – ‘Strong and Prosperous Communities’
Agenda Item Number:	11

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to bring to Members the draft bid to Central Government that responds to an invitation to submit proposals to improve two-tier working in English Shire Counties. It seeks member approval to support the bid that is made on behalf of the six Districts of Easington, Wear Valley, Sedgfield, Teesdale, Derwentside and Chester-le-Street.
- 1.2 It is recommended that Council approve the attached bid as the basis for our submission to Government by the 25th January 2007.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 A major consultation event with key stakeholders in the County was organised by the above District Councils on the 16th November 2006 at Beamish Hall. The event was attended by over 100 people representing a wide variety of stakeholders including community groups, public service providers, the community and voluntary sector and parish and town councils. A summary of the issues raised is attached to the draft submission.

In addition, a sample telephone survey of 1000 residents has been made across the County to seek their views and a number of key stakeholders who were not able to attend the above event have been contacted to discuss the proposed submission.

3. CORPORATE PLAN AND PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The invitation to address improvements in two-tier working and the potential governance changes in County Durham represents a major opportunity to improve Council and Public Service provision for our Communities. Conversely, if the arrangements are simply an imposition of traditional forms of governance and are not developed with the involvement of our stakeholders and communities, there is real scope for service disruption and a potential missed opportunity to transform services for the better.
- 3.2 The proposed District bid seeks not only to minimise service disruption and ensure delivery of this Districts priorities, it also builds in active engagement of our communities in developing a more radical, transparent and responsive form of governance that is fit for the future.

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial and Value for Money

The implications are covered within the attached bid document and our consultants financial modelling shows significant efficiency gains and our bid proposes a managed approach to transitional costs.

4.2 Legal

The timetable for submissions allows for the Minister to consult on bid submissions between March and July 2007. Any alterations in governance arrangements affecting Council administrative boundaries and responsibilities would need to be considered by Government and applied via statute. The Government have stated their intention to consider the Bill in the Autumn of 2007.

4.3 Human Resources

Human resource implications are considered in part in the Bid document but detailed H.R. implications will need to be developed further. The District Bid proposes a managed approach in transformational change and efficiency savings, with staff and trades unions being consulted fully on the proposals.

4.4 Other Services

The Bid presents proposals for transforming Neighbourhood Services, merging back office functions, responding to a changing strategic agenda across the County and takes into account the emerging City Region and Regional special strategies. This level of transformation will touch all services currently being delivered by the Council and impact positively on improved partnership working. The District Bid approaches this change incrementally through a 'pathfinder' mechanism to effectively manage the changes and improvements to services.

4.5 Diversity

Our Bid proposals recognise the very diverse communities in County Durham and proposes a flexible and targeted response to adapt to differing community needs.

4.6 Risk

The Bid and previous consideration of structural change options have embraced risk management at the heart of our options appraisal and the determination of the final bid. Mitigation measures are proposed to ensure that objectives and outcomes are realised.

5. BACKGROUND

5.1 The Bid document presents the background to bringing forward our submission to Government and the context within which our proposals sit.

The six district Authorities making this bid believe that it presents the best opportunity to deliver improved and efficient services for our communities with the support of stakeholders and partners and within an environment of minimal service disruption. Furthermore it gives the opportunity to design a new form of unitary governance that looks to the future, building strong and devolved neighbourhood services, a slim but effective 'centre' that proactively addresses the Regional and National agendas and creates efficiencies that can be re-directed to front line services.

5.2 Our Bid will be considered in competition with a bid from the County Council that proposes the formation of a single County unitary authority in 2009.

6. RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 It is recommended that Council agrees the attached draft bid document as the basis of our submission to the Government in response to their 'invitation' to improve two-tier working in County Durham.

It is also recommended that minor final drafting amendments to be incorporated in the published document, are delegated to the Chief Executive.

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DESIGNATION: Chief Executive

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