

# Item 3

## SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Council Chamber,  
Council Offices,  
Spennymoor

Tuesday,  
23 January 2007

Time: 11.30 a.m.

**Present:** Councillor Mrs. L. Hovvels (Mayor) and

Councillors Mrs. A.M. Armstrong, D.R. Brown, Mrs. B.A. Clare, Mrs. K. Conroy, Mrs. J. Croft, V. Crosby, Mrs. A.M. Fleming, R.S. Fleming, T.F. Forrest, Mrs. B. Graham, A. Gray, G.C. Gray, Mrs. J. Gray, D.M. Hancock, J.E. Higgin, A. Hodgson, G.M.R. Howe, J.G. Huntington, M.T.B. Jones, J.M. Khan, B. Meek, J.P. Moran, G. Morgan, D.A. Newell, K. Noble, B.M. Ord, R.A. Patchett, Mrs. E.M. Paylor, J.K. Piggott, A. Smith, Mrs. I. Jackson Smith, K. Thompson, T. Ward, W. Waters and J. Wayman J.P

**Apologies:** Councillors B.F. Avery J.P, W.M. Blenkinsopp, J. Burton, M.A. Dalton, B. Hall, K. Henderson, M. Iveson, Mrs. C. Potts, Ms. M. Predki, J. Robinson J.P, G.W. Scott, J.M. Smith, Mrs. L. Smith and Mrs. C. Sproat

**C.63/06      DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were received.

**C.64/06      LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW**

It was explained that the meeting had been convened to consider the response of the District Councils within County Durham to the Government White Paper, "Strong and Prosperous Communities".

It was explained that the White Paper was inviting Councils to submit bids for a new structure for Local Government, either by forming unitary authorities or pathfinders to improve existing arrangements.

Durham County Council had submitted a bid on the basis of a Single Unitary Authority for County Durham. However, six Districts, within the County of Durham, had expressed concerns on the unitary bid, in particular the timetable for the creation of the new authority and the costs involved.

Those Districts had sought the advice of consultants, KPMG and Tavistock, and drawn up a bid for a pathfinder route building on shared services and enhancing two-tier working, gradually moving towards some form of unitary authority. An Executive Summary of the document was considered. (For copy see file of Minutes). A copy of the complete document would be available in the Members' Rooms.

Under the County proposals for unitary authority, elections would be held in 2008 with the new unitary authority becoming operational in 2009. The major issues and concerns surrounding the County bid involved the financial costs of transition, the major disruption in service which would inevitably occur, the high turnover of staff which would occur and the

reduction in democratic representation. The feasibility of introducing a unitary Council of such size, in the short space of time, was also an issue.

The six District Councils considered that a more appropriate form of local government in the area would be achieved, through enhanced two-tier working and the pathfinder route. This would allow time for engagement with stakeholders and for transition to be managed through a transformation board and business transformation programme and would also allow more time for an assessment of the best form of unitary authority . Under the bid, elections for new authorities would be held in 2011, becoming fully operational in 2012.

This timetable would also allow for improved arrangements at neighbourhood level with the creation of neighbourhood charters looking at performance delivery and setting environmental standards, the formation of development plans, etc.

There would also be a review of ward boundaries based on natural geographies, providing appropriate democratic representation.

By going down the pathfinder route significant savings and improved services could be achieved.. Stronger emphasis would be placed on community services, there would be a better use of resources, a reduction of costs and would be less disruptive to services.

The timetable for the bids was :- submissions of bids by 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2007, an announcement of the preferred bids at the end of March. There would then be a consultation period between March and July with the final decision being made by the Secretary of State by the end of July.

*RESOLVED : That Sedgefield Borough Council supports the six Districts pathfinder bid leading to eventual unitary local government in County Durham.*

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**ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Liz North 01388 816166 ext 4237 email: enorth@sedgefield.gov.uk