

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Report No. 5

Date of Meeting	14 th June 2007
Title of Report	Proposals for future unitary structures: stakeholder consultation
Link to Corporate Priorities	Council resolutions relating to the future of Local Government in Wiltshire could impact on all of the Council's corporate priorities
Public Report	YES

Summary of Report

1. In January 2007 the Government received 26 proposals from Councils wishing to move to a single tier of Local Government. Wiltshire County Council was one of these councils and its proposal was supported by North Wiltshire District Council at its meeting on the 17th January 2007.
2. All proposals were assessed by the Government against a number of criteria and on the 27th March 2007 it announced which of these proposals it judged met the criteria and should go forward for consultation. Wiltshire County Council's proposal was one of those successful proposals and this report gives the council its opportunity to respond to the Government's stakeholder consultation document which invites responses by 22nd June 2007.

Officer Recommendations

The Council confirms its previous decision to support the submission by Wiltshire County Council to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for the establishment of one Unitary Council for Wiltshire OR puts forward alternative representations to the DCLG.

Other than those implications agreed with the relevant Officers and referred to below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Community & Environmental Implications	Human Resources Implications	Equality & Diversity Implications
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Following the publication of the Local Government White Paper, “Strong and Prosperous Communities” in October 2006, this Council resolved (on 5 December 2006) to support the case for one Unitary Council for Wiltshire in place of the existing County and District Councils, provided that the business case commissioned by Wiltshire County Council demonstrated that this would be: affordable; provide more resources for services; and strengthen community leadership and links with town and parish councils.
- 1.2 On the 17th January 2007 the Council considered a further detailed report and made the following decision,
“.....that, North Wiltshire District Council formally supports a submission by Wiltshire County Council to the Department for Communities and Local Government for the establishment of one Unitary Council for Wiltshire.....”
- 1.3 The Government is now consulting a wide range of stakeholders, including District Councils, seeking views on the various “unitary” proposals. The deadline for responses is 22nd June 2007.
- 1.4 Since the Council's decision of the 17th January 2007, District Council elections have been held resulting in thirty one new members at North Wiltshire District Council. On the 20th May 2007 Councillor Peter J Doyle submitted a Notice of Motion to Council in accordance with Council procedure rule 15 as follows,
“...following a discussion with constituents during the May 2007 Local Election Campaign North Wiltshire District Council withdraws its previously expressed support for a possible new unitary authority for Wiltshire...”.

2. Options

- 2.1 Option 1: to confirm the Council's previous decision to support the submission by Wiltshire County Council to DCLG for the establishment of one Unitary Council for Wiltshire.
- 2.2 Option 2: that the Council does not support Wiltshire County Council's submission to DCLG for the establishment of one Unitary Council for Wiltshire.

3. Background Information

- 3.1 The Local Government White Paper, “Strong and Prosperous Communities” was published by the Government on 26th October 2006. Appendix 1 to this report sets out a briefing note that summarises the main points within the White Paper.
- 3.2 On 16th January 2007 the Wiltshire County Council considered a detailed report on the White Paper which is attached as Appendix 2. It also considered a preliminary report on potential financial implications for a single Wiltshire Authority which is attached as Appendix 3. Following consideration of these papers the Wiltshire County Council resolved to make a submission to the DCLG for one Unitary Council for Wiltshire in place of the County Council and the four District Councils.

- 3.3** The other three District Councils in Wiltshire are objecting to Wiltshire County Council's submission and members will be aware that there is currently a substantial publicity campaign being undertaken. Appendices 4 and 5 to this report present key elements of the respective Wiltshire County Council and District Council cases, in order that Council is able to have a well balanced debate. Appendix 6 attaches the Officer Report to this council on 17th January 2007 (without the appendices which are contained elsewhere in this report) for completeness and background information.
- 3.4** Appendix 7 is the stakeholder consultation paper circulated by DCLG to all areas where unitary proposals are taking place.
- 3.5** Appendix 8 sets out the notice of motion received from Cllr P Doyle.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1** Transition to and establishment of a new Unitary Council for Wiltshire would have major financial implications for this authority in the transitional period. If the unitary proposal is successful, further detailed reports would be prepared for Council, Executive and Personnel, Licensing and Administration Committee as appropriate.
- 4.2** The possibility of a Unitary Council for Wiltshire being established has been included as a risk item linked to consideration of the level of reserves the Council needs to maintain.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1** The establishment of a new Unitary Council for Wiltshire would have major legal implications for this authority in the transitional period, including work on contracts and property transactions. If the unitary proposal is successful, further detailed reports would be prepared as appropriate.

6 Community & Environmental Implications

- 6.1** The establishment of a new Unitary Council for Wiltshire would have a major impact on the way in which local people and local communities interact with local government. The County Council's submission sets out proposals on how local community leadership could be strengthened by a new Unitary Council. Many of these proposals could be taken forward through the existing two-tier arrangements.

7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 7.1** There will be equalities and diversity implications of any move to a new Unitary Council for Wiltshire. If the unitary proposal is successful, Equality Impact Assessments would be required as part of the transitional work.

8 Human Resources Implications

- 8.1** Transition to a new Unitary Council for Wiltshire would have major human resources implications for this authority and for the County Council. If the unitary proposal is successful, further detailed reports would be prepared.
- 8.2** The preparatory work for transition to a new Unitary Council would require a large amount of staff time (at all levels) to be devoted to transitional arrangements, drawing resource away from other Council priorities.

9 Risk Analysis

- 9.1** There are potential risks attached to both a decision to establish a new Unitary Council for Wiltshire and to a decision not to establish such a Unitary Council, although noting that either scenario would be a Government decision and thus out of this Council's control. These risks include:
- Financial risk – the forecasted savings not being made and/or the transitional costs exceeding estimates. Conversely, budgetary constraints such as the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 will inevitably impact on North Wiltshire District Council's financial flexibility.
 - Service delivery disruption - during the transition to the new authority and in any settling down period once the new unitary authority was up and running. This could include loss of skills and expertise if key staff decided to leave.
 - It is recognised in view of impending budgetary constraints that partnership working (including shared services) will be essential in the near future. The Customer First Partnership is integral to this approach and a potential risk is that, without mandatory requirement, it may not fulfil its intended brief.

Appendices:	Appendix 1: "Strong and Prosperous Communities" Briefing note Appendix 2: Wiltshire County Council report on the White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" Appendix 3: Wiltshire County Council preliminary report on potential financial implications for a single Wiltshire Authority Appendix 4: Frequently Asked Questions from One Council for Wiltshire website Appendix 5: LGR paper "Your Voice, your future" Appendix 6: Report to Council 17th January 2007 Appendix 7: Proposal for future Unitary Structures: Stakeholder Consultation Appendix 8: Notice of Motion from Cllr P Doyle
Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:	Local Government White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities", October 2006

Previous Decisions Connected with this Report

Report	Committee & Date	Minute Reference
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Motion to Council on Local Government White Paper• Local Government White Paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities” – The future of Local Government in Wiltshire	Council, 5 December 2006 Council, 17 January 2007	C72.2 C77