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# Report

**Subject:** : Local Government White Paper – briefing

**Report to** : Cabinet

**Date** : Wednesday 13 December 2006

**Author** : David Crook

**Leader of Cabinet** : Cllr Richard Britton

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### 1. Purpose of Report:

To brief Cabinet on:

- 1.1. the main features of the White Paper “Strong & Prosperous Communities”;
- 1.2. the issues that may particularly affect Salisbury District Council.

### 2. Background:

- 2.1. The White Paper, which was published on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2006, takes forward themes set out in the interim report by the Lyons Inquiry in Spring 2006. The final report of the Lyons Inquiry will be published within the next few months.
- 2.2. This report provides a summary of the White Paper. Links to the full White Paper are published on the council’s website <http://www.salisbury.gov.uk/white-paper>. A copy of the full White Paper is also provided for reference in the Members Room.
- 2.3. Paragraph 12 below highlights key points for consideration by Salisbury District Council.
- 2.4. Cabinet met to discuss the invitation to councils (which deal specifically with bids to become a unitary authority/Pathfinder) on Wednesday 15 November 2006. The recommendation set out below will be considered by the Council at a Special meeting on 18 December 2006.
  1. that the Cabinet considers the Officers to be correct in their assessment of the prospects for a South Wiltshire Unitary Authority bid, and therefore recommends to the Council at a special meeting to be held on 18 December 2006, that such a bid should not be pursued
  2. in the light of the strength and success of the Customer First Partnership, in which Officers of this Council are taking leading roles, a bid for Pathfinder status would at this time be inappropriate.



Awarded in:  
Housing Services  
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It was also resolved that the Leader and Officers be authorised to discuss the County Council's approach with its Leader and Chief Executive.

### **3. Strong and prosperous communities (Chapter 1)**

- 3.1 In this chapter the Government states that there must be a new role for local government, involving strong strategic leadership, effective local partnership working on cross-cutting issues, more information to local people to better meet their needs, with greater community consultation and involvement.

### **4. Responsive services and empowered communities (Chapter 2)**

- 4.1 In this chapter, there are proposals to increase choice in public services & devolve power to community level which cover the following:
- 4.1.1. a "community call for action" enabling citizens to seek action through councillors on persistent or serious problems with local services;
  - 4.1.2. publication of local standards and measuring of performance;
  - 4.1.3. dedicated small budgets for councillors for local issues;
  - 4.1.4. systematic approach to petitions;
  - 4.1.5. devolved power to create Parish Councils;
  - 4.1.6. power of well being to Quality Parishes;
  - 4.1.7. empowerment of local people to manage their neighbourhoods and to own and manage community facilities and assets.

### **5. Effective, accountable and responsive local government (Chapter 3)**

- 5.1. This chapter covers the following key proposals:
- 5.1.1 bids invited from councils for unitary status and for pathfinders on 2-tier working arrangements;
  - 5.1.2 councils required to adopt 1 of 3 political management arrangements (directly elected mayor, directly-elected executive or indirectly elected leader for 4-yr. term);
  - 5.1.3 localised code of conduct for councillors with revised standards board role;
  - 5.1.4 greater freedom for councillors to speak out and vote on planning and licensing issues;
  - 5.1.5 independent review of incentives & barriers to serving as councillors and measures to promote more diverse & representative councillors;
  - 5.1.6 widening and strengthening council overview & scrutiny powers;
  - 5.1.7 devolution to councils of bye-laws, fixed penalty notice powers;
  - 5.1.8 council able to request single-member wards.

### **6. Strong cities, strategic regions (Chapter 4)**

- 6.1. This chapter sets out proposals to further national and regional economic growth in large cities and regions, through improving the quality of governance and leadership.

### **7. Local government as strategic leader and place-shaper (Chapter 5)**

- 7.1. This chapter sets out proposals to strengthen the strategic leadership role of councils as co-ordinators of all local agencies and groups involved in shaping the community through their work in different sectors. This includes:
- 7.1.1. a new duty for upper-tier councils to prepare Local Area Agreements (LAAs) in consultation with partners, and a duty for partners to co-operate & have regard to LAA targets;
  - 7.1.2. council plans should have regard to County-wide community strategy and regional plans;

- 7.1.3. strengthened Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) with council leader and portfolio holders expected to play a lead role.

## **8. A new performance framework (Chapter 6)**

- 8.1. This chapter sets out proposals to improve local public services by reforming the current system of targets and inspection. Key proposals are:
  - 8.1.1. progress on delivering national outcomes measured against core set of 200 national performance indicators;
  - 8.1.2. Comprehensive Area Assessment from 2009 based upon annual risk assessment, scored Use of Resources, and scored Direction of Travel;
  - 8.1.3. remove requirements for councils to prepare Annual BVP plans and conduct reviews;
  - 8.1.4. secure participation and engagement of local citizens and strengthen approach to competition.

## **9. Efficiency – transforming local services (Chapter 7)**

- 9.1. Key proposals include:
  - 9.1.1. ambitious efficiency gains expected over next few years (same as expected from new Unitaries and Pathfinders);
  - 9.1.2. achieved through collaboration across the public sector & greater competition in local government service markets;
  - 9.1.3. encouraging use of business process improvement techniques;
  - 9.1.4. 3 year budgets for councils will mean 3 year council tax projections and 3 year agreements with voluntary & community sector.

## **10. Community cohesion (Chapter 8)**

- 10.1. Key proposals include:
  - 10.1.1. community cohesion should be embedded in new performance framework, LSPs and the priorities of LAAs, with tackling extremism becoming “core business”;
  - 10.1.2. commission on Integration and Cohesion to produce more detailed plans next year.

## **11. What happens next?**

- 11.1. The timetable for bids to become a unitary/Pathfinder is very tight; bids need to be made by 25 January 2007. The council’s approach to this matter will be determined at the Special Council meeting on 18 December 2006.
- 11.2. The remainder of the paper is dependent on a mix of new legislation and further, more detailed, consultation. A series of papers is likely to be needed as the detail becomes clearer.
- 11.3. The council is well placed to react to many of the proposals; its democratic structures including liaison with parishes, the South Wiltshire Strategic Alliance, Area Committees and WiSBX, put it in a strong position to make progress on devolution and community participation.
- 11.4. In respect of one aspect of the White Paper, shared services, it is suggested that urgent work be undertaken. The Wiltshire Improvement Partnership has made good progress in this area through its commitment to and funding for Community First. The Paper (and GOSW) lay heavy emphasis on this area and it is suggested that we should seek an urgent review of the shared service agenda by the partnership, with a report back in the New Year.

## 12. Key issues for Salisbury District Council

- 12.1. Councillor roles and responsibilities (Cabinet/LSP/O&S/ward)
- 12.2. Political Management Structures and election issues (Salisbury City Parish and single member wards)
- 12.3. Service standards and community engagement
- 12.4. Performance framework approach
- 12.5. Partnership working
- 12.6. Efficiency agenda
- 12.7. Unitary debate

## 13. Recommendations:

Council is asked to:

- i) note the contents of the report;
- ii) authorise an approach to Customer First to request an urgent review of the scope and timetable for shared services.

## 14. Implications:

- **Financial** : The Comprehensive Spending Review is likely to assume significant savings arising from shared services. This may well be reflected in the future level of central government grant.
- **Legal** : No.
- **Personnel** : The emphasis on efficiency savings from shared services is likely to require different ways of working and implies a smaller workforce. Careful planning and staff consultation will be needed.
- **ICT** : No
- **Community Safety**: No
- **Environmental** : No