
BEACON COUNCIL SCHEME – ROUND 5

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report details the latest round of the Beacon Council initiative outlining the themes eligible for bid submission. It suggests that given the themes promoted, the Council might like to consider making a bid application around either Benefits Administration or Crime and Disorder partnerships or both. In the context of the Crime and Disorder partnerships, it may also be worthwhile looking to other Districts and the County Council in Essex to see whether a County-wide bid can be made.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Beacon Council scheme has now been operating for some four years. It was launched in an attempt to raise standards in local Government by identifying and recognising innovative and excellent practices in Authorities and helping them to share best practice with their peers. In the past, Members have considered that the themes outlined made it relatively difficult for the Authority to make a worthwhile bid. Often the themes detailed were more relevant to a County Council, a Metropolitan area or a larger district.
- 2.2 The Government have now launched Round 5 and the themes outlined this year are as follows:
- Benefits Administration
 - Better Local Public Transport
 - Crime and Disorder Partnerships
 - Early Years and Childcare: the Sure Start Agenda
 - Housing Renewal
 - Promoting Sustainable Tourism
 - Services for Older People
 - Supporting People
 - Supporting Social Care Workers
 - Transforming the School Workforce
- 2.3 Expressions of interest have to be made by Thursday 14 August with bids submitted by 10 of September 2003. Successful applicants will be announced in April 2004 and the hold Beacon status until the end of June 2005. The aim is to ensure that the winning Councils reflect a good geographical spread, are representative of the diversity of local government and highlight the different services and cross-cutting areas

chosen for Beacon themes this year. Joint bids are welcome with Authorities able to apply for up to three themes.

3 DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 Given the themes now outlined, Members might like to consider making bids in the areas of Benefit Administration and Crime and Disorder Partnerships, with the latter particularly suitable for perhaps a County-wide bid, given that the Best Value Review in this area was undertaken on a County-wide basis.
- 3.2 Certainly over the past few years we have invested considerable resources, reorganised and reviewed our practices and procedures in Benefits Administration.
- 3.3 Beacons in Benefits Administration will have recognised the importance of their service to benefits customers and how it can support the wider aims of the Authority. This will be reflected in their service vision and strategy that support the processes and mechanisms that ensure delivery. Beacons will be delivering an efficient and effective service that has a customer focus and amongst other things achieves a high score against key performance indicators. The service will have a high profile in the Council, contribute to the Council's overall strategies and benefit from the active interest and support of Members, Beacons will demonstrate an effective liaison working with partnership and an ability to be responsive to the needs of different users. There will be high levels of customer satisfaction.
- 3.4 Over the past 12 months, Members have received a number of reports in connection with the Council Tax and Benefits service and have also responded to the resource issues which have arisen. Whilst there have recently been changes in the National Performance Framework criteria which are still being assessed, it is felt that at the very least, we should register an expression of interest in this area. Over the next few weeks we will finalise our assessment against the revised performance assessment framework and in the light of that, determine whether to proceed with a full bid.
- 3.5 With regards to the Crime and Disorder Partnership, a Beacon in this area should be able to demonstrate that it has played a key role in the delivery of crime and disorder reduction and tackling the misuse of drugs. It also needs to demonstrate that tackling crime is prioritised to areas of greatest need and of concern to the public. A Beacon also needs to demonstrate that Community safety is mainstreamed into the provision of all its services and that it actively engages and contributes effectively to the work of the Crime and Disorder Reduction/Drug Action Team Partnerships. A Beacon needs to promote effective

partnership working, it needs to promote the evaluation of activities and disseminate good practice, helping contribute to community cohesion.

- 3.6 With the County-wide Best Value into Community Safety receiving a two-star promising prospects for improvement assessment and the Districts own partnership continuing to work well. It would appear that there are justifiable grounds to submit a bid in this area, particularly if it was with other Essex Districts and the County Council as a County-wide bid.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The key issues in terms of resources, would be around the officer time spent in preparing the bid submissions. However, much of the work will be required in connection with the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of the Authority and thus duplication should be minimal. If we were to be successful in one or more of these bid submissions, there would be both Member and officer time spent in the promotion of the sharing of good practice. In becoming a Beacon the Authority would have to enter into an agreement with the Secretary of State to share good practice, service innovation and the lessons they have learnt with a wider local government community and theme partners. This would be achieved through a national programme of activities, coordinated and supported by the Improvement and Development Agency.
- 4.2 The Government advises it has now set aside a total of £3m to reward successful Beacons for their achievement. The Government anticipates that this would be shared equally among the successful applicants. This money can be spent on covering the cost of the work involved in disseminating best practice, or anything else that they may wish.

5 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 It is proposed that the Council **RESOLVES**:
- (1) To submit expressions of interest in connection with Benefits Administration and Crime and Disorder Partnerships under the Beacon Council Scheme Initiative.
 - (2) That, in connection with Benefits Administration, officers complete the assessment work against the revised performance framework criteria before determining whether a bid should then be made.

- (3) That, in connection with the Crime and Disorder Partnership, the support of other Essex Districts and the County Council be sought in making a joint bid submission.

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Background Papers

The Beacon Council Scheme – How to Apply: Applications Brochure 2003 –
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

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