

THE BEACON COUNCIL SCHEME

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 To bring to Members' attention Round Two of the Beacon Council initiative and to seek Members' views as to whether to apply.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Beacon Council Scheme aims to identify centres of excellence in local government from which other Councils can learn. Last year, the first year of its operation, saw 269 applications for beacon status in seven service areas. As a result of the Round One applications, some 42 beacon councils were announced. The Government has decided to build on this initiative and has now produced its application brochure for Round Two, with 11 new themes listed. It is anticipated that approximately 40 – 50 beacon councils will be appointed in this Second Round, with applications invited by 25 July 2000.
- 2.2 Last year the Council decided not to make an application given the themes listed, the criteria that would need to be met, and the resource implications not just in terms of submitting a bid, but of fulfilling the requirements of spreading best practice.

3 Detailed Considerations

- 3.1 The themes selected for beacon status applications this year are as follows:-
- Community safety – reducing and preventing vehicle crime (Tackling Vehicle Crime)
 - Competitiveness and enterprise – better regulation of business to protect consumers and encourage enterprise (Competitiveness & Enterprise)
 - Education – increasing the attainment of underachieving groups (Raising Attainment in Education)

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- Health – effective local strategies to tackle the wider causes of ill health
(Local Health Strategies)
 - Local environmental quality – maintaining a high quality environment
(Maintaining a Quality Environment)
 - Making the most of culture, sport and tourism – stimulating economic and social regeneration through culture, sport and tourism
(Regenerating through Culture, Sport & Tourism)
 - Modern service delivery – good access to council services
(Accessible Services)
 - Older people's issues – support independent living for older people
(Independent Living for Older People)
 - Planning – town centre regeneration
(Town Centre Regeneration)
 - Social Services – improving standards for children in foster care
(Foster Care)
 - Younger people's issues – tackling drug misuse
(Tackling Youth Drug Misuse)

3.2 The themes have been selected to reflect the wide range of responsibilities Councils have and the many ways in which they can improve the quality of life of local people. In this second year of operation, the Advisory Panel and Ministers who oversee the scheme are looking for applicants to demonstrate in particular that they are delivering services which make a real difference to the lives of local people and to their communities. Good applicants will need to focus on outcomes (rather than simply the process for delivering them).

3.3 Applicants for beacon status should aim to provide:

- Evidence of consultation with the public and with stakeholders;
- Clear evidence of public satisfaction;
- Evidence of improvement in quality and efficiency;
- Applicants' views on why they deserve to be a beacon

3.4 Beacon status is normally awarded for only one service area per Council, in order to maintain a representative and geographical spread of Beacon Councils. If, however, a Council demonstrates exceptional best practice in more than one service or crosscutting service area then it may be awarded beacon status in more than one theme.

3.5 Councils can make applications either individually or jointly. Each Council within a joint bid will need to demonstrate good overall individual performance as well as a contribution to the excellence of the

joint bid. All Councils involved in successful joint applications will be awarded beacon status.

- 3.6 Councils can be involved in up to three applications on an individual or joint basis. However, Councils should not submit both joint and individual applications for the same theme.
- 3.7 Beacon Councils must be able to show:
- Excellence in a beacon theme;
 - Good general performance;
 - Plans for effective dissemination.
- 3.8 The timetable for applications is as follows:-
- Applications should be submitted by Tuesday, 25 July 2000.
 - A shortlist of candidates will be announced in September 2000.
 - Visits to shortlisted Councils will take place in October 2000.
 - All shortlisted Councils will also be invited to give presentations on their bids in London in early November.
 - Successful applicants will be announced in January 2001.
 - Successful applicants will hold beacon status until the end of March 2002.
 - Written feedback will be provided to all applicants.
- 3.9 Councils appointed as Beacons may use the Beacon Council logo with a 'strapline' referring to the service or cross-cutting service area for which they are awarded beacon status.
- 3.10 Beacon Councils will need to enter into an agreement with the Secretary of State to spread their best practice through a national programme of dissemination activities co-ordinated by the Improvement and Development Agency (iDeA). Applicant Councils will need to be prepared to take part in roadshows organised by the iDeA to promote Beacon Councils and to host their own programme of events and other dissemination activities. The iDeA will market these events and activities, as well as the roadshows, on behalf of the Beacon Councils.
- 3.11 It is envisaged that Councils should hold at least one open day in addition to participating in roadshows. Councils will be expected to organise other events and activities according to their capacity.
- 3.12 Beacon Councils will be able to claim for expenses incurred in relation to their dissemination activities through the Beacon Councils Special Grant once their dissemination plans are agreed. As in the first year of

the scheme, the Government aims to provide Beacon Councils with up to around £20,000 per theme to support dissemination activity.

4 Officer Comment

- 4.1 Of the themes listed this year, a number relate to County Councils and Unitary Authorities. Of areas that could be considered for submission by a District Council such as Rochford, work around younger people's issues and tackling drug misuse is one initiative which might be worth consideration. Clearly, much will depend upon whether our partner organisations, such as the Police, would be prepared to contribute. If the Council did decide to submit an application, it is clear that there would be resource implications both in respect of completing the application form and, if awarded the status, fulfilling some of the criteria relating to spreading beacon status best practice, although such work is likely to receive some additional grant funding of up to £20,000 grant aid payable at the end of the financial year in recognition of the expenditure incurred and on receipt of a claim. Given the size of the authority and the current programme of work, the resource implications associated with this initiative are clearly a relevant consideration.
- 4.2 In addition, there are general questions/criteria that the Authority would need to fulfil in submitting any application form. At this point in time, it is doubtful whether the Council would meet all the questions/criteria set out, particularly in relation to new political structures, the preparation of a community strategy, nationally accredited awards, and consultation.
- 4.3 In summary, the benefits of applying under the Beacon Council Initiative need to be balanced against the resources available to the Council and its eligibility to meet all of the specified criteria outlined in the application submission. However, it is felt that there may be some practical lessons to be learnt from simply submitting a bid, given that more and more initiatives are becoming bid related and are subject to common criteria. In the circumstances therefore, now might be an opportune time to make an initial bid.

5 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Nothing specific, although topic areas relate to Vehicle Crime and tackling drug misuse.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Nothing specific.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Staffing resources would be needed to prepare any bid and if successful, there would be resource requirements in terms of disseminating best practice information, although this would be eligible for grant aid.

8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Nothing specific at this stage.

9 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Nothing specific.

9 RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Committee determine whether it wishes to pursue any bid submission at this stage.(CE)

Paul Warren

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Background Papers:

For further information please contact Paul Warren on (01702) 546366