

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT – NEW POLITICAL STRUCTURES

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 Following the detailed guidance now received from Central Government on 'New Political Arrangements' for Local Authorities, this report seeks Members' views on the way forward.
- 1.2 Under the Local Government Act 2000, it is a statutory requirement that Local Authorities change the way they operate. No change is not an option.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Following deliberation by this Sub Committee, last July full Council considered which of the 3 executive options then contained within the draft legislation it should adopt as its preferred option for consultation purposes. At that meeting, Members were advised of a late amendment to the Bill, through the introduction of a fourth option, which has now been included in the final Act. Given that information, full Council therefore decided on the night to defer making any decision and await further details. That information has now been published by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, in the form of detailed guidance entitled 'New Council Constitutions'.

3 DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 A briefing note outlining the main aspects of the detailed guidance has been circulated to all Members and is attached as Appendix 1. It concentrates on the fourth option, given that details on this are available for the first time, and also highlights the requirements now set out in terms of consultation. The Chief Executive will run through the key points at the Sub Committee meeting.
- 3.2 Members need to decide whether a working up of the fourth option, and possible alternatives under this option, is the approach they would prefer, given the limitations placed upon the number and size of Committees that would be allowed and also, the emphasis placed upon any new arrangements in terms of improving efficiency, transparency and accountability.

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- 3.3 Whichever option is chosen, Members need to be aware that there will be a need for Overview and Scrutiny Committees and also a Standards Committee.
- 3.4 The information contained in the guidance, in terms of the consultation process, similarly needs to be considered, in terms of the content and type of consultation required, its timeframe, and its resource implications. Clearly, it is important for the Authority to ensure that Central Government's requirements concerning this are met; otherwise there is a danger in the process being deemed to be procedurally flawed.
- 3.5 A further meeting of this Sub Committee is scheduled for 5th December, 2000. To take this matter forward, it is therefore suggested that further reports be prepared and presented to that meeting, outlining in more detail possible structural arrangements available to the Authority under a preferred option and also the consultation proposed, including its resource implications. However, such reports need to be framed in the context of the comments, preferences and guidance given by this Sub Committee meeting. The meeting needs to consider which option Members prefer and also provide feedback as to how Members envisage the change to new arrangements being progressed, in the light of the guidance outlined.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The move towards new political arrangements will clearly have resource implications, in terms of Member and senior officer time, and also in terms of the consultation process required. Officers will attempt to outline these as the change process progresses and various actions are detailed up.

5 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

Any new political structure will have implications in terms of the District Council's working relationship with Parish and Town Councils.

6 RECOMMENDATION

That in the light of the information now provided, Members consider the preferred choice for the Council, in terms of the new political arrangements, and also the implications for the Authority in terms of taking the matter forward.

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Chief Executive

Background Papers:

Local Government Act 2000

New Council Constitutions – Guidance Pack Vols. 1 & 2 DETR October 2000

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