

# CARLISLE CITY COUNCIL

Report to:- **Carlisle City Council**

Date of Meeting:- **11 September 2007**

Agenda Item No:-

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**Public**

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Title:- **LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION**

Report of:- **Town Clerk & Chief Executive**

Report reference:- **CE 35/07**

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## **Summary:-**

The Executive considered the report attached at Appendix 1 at its meeting on 28 August 2007 and agreed the recommendations. Members of the Council are therefore invited to consider the recommendations below.

## **Recommendations:-**

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Notes the work that the City Council has undertaken following the Government's announcement on 25 July 2007 that the County Council's bid for a Unitary Cumbria was unsuccessful
2. Agrees the areas of work to be progressed over the next few weeks, co-ordinated by the Member/Officer Group
3. Notes that a further report will be submitted to Full Council on 6<sup>th</sup> November, which will set out work proposed on behalf of the District Councils and the County Council, following their joint work during September and October

**Contact Officer:** Maggie Mooney

**Ext:** 7001

**Note:** in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None



# REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

## PORTFOLIO AREA:

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Date of Meeting: 28th August 2007

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Public

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Key Decision: Yes/No

Recorded in Forward Plan:

Yes

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Inside/Outside Policy Framework

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Title: LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION

Report of: TOWN CLERK & CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Report reference: CE 35/07

### 1. Summary:

The purpose of this report is to apprise members of progress since the meeting of Council meeting of 18 June 2007. At this meeting it was resolved to oppose the County Council's bid for a unitary Cumbria and task the Member/Officer working group with considering how the City Council should respond to the Government's decision.

Since that meeting the Government announced on 25 July 2007 that Cumbria County Council's bid for a single unitary Cumbria was unsuccessful.

### 2. Recommendations:

That the Executive recommends the City Council:

1. Notes the work that the City Council has undertaken following the Government's announcement on 25 July 2007 that the County Council's bid for a Unitary Cumbria was unsuccessful
2. Agrees the areas of work to be progressed over the next few weeks, co-ordinated by the Member/Officer Group

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

3. Notes that a further report will be submitted to Full Council on 6<sup>th</sup> November, which will set out work proposed on behalf of the District Councils and the County Council, following their joint work during September and October

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#### 4. WORK TO DATE

On 25 July, the Local Government Minister John Healey MP announced nine unitary bids that would be progressed as a result of the invitation to councils that was issued with the Local Government White paper. The County Council's bid for a unitary Cumbria was rejected – the reason given was that the Secretary of State “does not consider that a single unitary authority for Cumbria would be capable of providing effective strategic leadership given the particular circumstances of Cumbria. She notes that Cumbria is unique geographically and that East/West communication links are very poor. She recognises the significant differences in history, and economy between the coastal parts of the county (and particularly the ex-Lancashire south-east coastal strip around Morecambe Bay), the rural southern area, and the northern part of the county. On balance, she concluded that there is not a reasonable likelihood of your proposal achieving the outcomes specified by the criterion.”

The Government therefore recognises that Cumbria comprises a number of diverse and distinct communities that cannot be strategically led by a single authority. This was the principal reason for the unitary bid's failure.

The announcement indicated a clear expectation from ministers that there will be much closer working between all tiers of local government in Cumbria and a delivery of efficiencies comparable to those that were claimed would have been delivered by a unitary structure. The Department for Communities and Local Government has said that they are “...looking for much tougher arrangements and much closer working relationships between the County Council and District Councils...” and that they are “...looking for them to produce proposals likely to achieve the same sort of financial efficiencies and effectiveness that a unitary may have achieved...”.

It is still not clear whether or not the County Council accepts the Government's decision or intends to challenge it, but meaningful closer working will not be possible until their position is clarified at the County Council meeting on 12 September 2007.

Meanwhile the City Council has been engaged in the following activities.

- Meetings have been held with staff throughout the process in order to ensure they were kept informed about the unitary bid and its possible impact on the organisation.
- The Member/Officer Group has regularly met to co-ordinate the City Council's activities.

- The Better Government for Cumbria Group continued to meet after the submission of the response to the consultation on unitary structures. This was chiefly to co-ordinate publicity and maintain strong links between the district councils.
- The Cumbrian Local Authorities Strategic Board (CLASB) met on 3 August 2007 to explore ways forward following the Government's decision. It is felt that as the County Council is still to determine a formal response to the decision, genuine progress is difficult across the County and District Councils.
- A summary of the successful pathfinder bids for enhanced two-tier working has been produced for the Member/Officer Working Group. This will provide a range of ideas for discussion and negotiation among the Cumbrian authorities.

## **5. WORK TO PROGRESS**

In the short term a number of activities are planned to establish the City Council's position with regard to future enhanced two-tier working.

- A facilitated workshop with the Member/Officer Working Group to explore and define areas for collaboration for consideration by members.
- A conference for members and officers to further develop thinking around these issues. It is important that the City Council has a clear way forward based on consensus to ensure the City is properly represented at future discussions on two-tier working. The City Council also needs to make progress in shaping the City Region agenda.
- The basis for these events can be the analysis of successful pathfinder bids and the service analysis that formed part of the work of the Better Government for Cumbria Group. Thus possible areas for collaboration, shared services and greater community involvement can be explored.
- It is critical that the outstanding issues with the Local Government White Paper and emerging challenges in the Housing Green Paper, Planning White Paper and Government thinking around sub-national economic development are considered when shaping the strategic direction of the City Council.

## **6. FURTHER WORK**

Until the position of the County Council is clear it will be impossible to undertake any meaningful work on delivering the benefits of enhanced two-tier working in Cumbria.

However the City Council is committed to working with the County Council and the District Councils on delivering enhanced two-tier working where this clearly benefits the communities of Carlisle.

The further report to Full Council on 6 November will expand on how the City Council can best deliver these benefits in the light of the County Council's position.

### **Recommendations:**

That the Executive recommends the City Council:

- 1 Notes the work that the City Council has undertaken following the Government's announcement on 25 July 2007 that the County Council's bid for a Unitary Cumbria was unsuccessful
- 2 Agrees the areas of work to be progressed over the next few weeks, co-ordinated by the Member/Officer Group
- 3 Notes that a further report will be submitted to Full Council on 6<sup>th</sup> November, which will set out work proposed on behalf of the District Councils and the County Council, following their joint work during September and October