



Report of the Chief Officer, Executive Support

Executive Board

Date: 13 December 2006

Subject: Strong and Prosperous Communities White Paper

Electoral Wards Affected:
ALL

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In
(Details contained in the report)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Department for Communities and Local Government published the Local Government White Paper 'Stronger and prosperous communities' on 26 October 2006. It has major implications for the structure, constitution, Member roles, partnership arrangements, policies and performance management arrangements for all local authorities in England. In the Queen's Speech on 15 November the Government announced a Bill will be introduced in the new Parliamentary session to bring a number of the White Paper's proposals into law.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to summarise the contents of the White Paper and recommend that more detailed reports examining the implications of the White Paper for Leeds are prepared for the Executive Board and other relevant committees.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 The White Paper has 2 volumes, 7 annexes and its 9 chapters outline an enhanced role for councils as strategic leaders and place shapers. It begins to crystallize several policy debates on localism, neighbourhood devolution, and city-regions and is intended to create the foundations of a new relationship between central and local government on the one hand and local government and citizens on the other hand. Alongside the review of local government funding due to be published in December this could be a significant period of reform for local authorities in England.

3.0 Main Issues

- 3.1 Key proposals in the local government white paper include:

- **role for councils as strategic leaders and place-shapers** through stronger Local Strategic Partnerships and next-generation Local Area Agreements (LAAs) with wider scope and importance, and a duty to cooperate between councils and local partners.
- **Stronger cities, strategic regions**, reforming Passenger Transport Authorities and the development of Multi-Area Agreements, with greater powers over skills and spatial planning for authorities who want this.
- **Stronger political leadership** requiring all councils to opt for a directly-elected mayor, directly-elected executive or indirectly-elected leader for a four-year term.
- **A strengthened role for front-line councillors** including powers to respond to community calls for action on local issues, small budgets to deal with very local issues and greater freedom to speak up on planning and licensing issues affecting their wards.
- **A wider and stronger role for scrutiny** including the power to require evidence from all local service providers and a duty on them to have regard to scrutiny recommendations.
- **Devolution of powers**, including removing the requirement for Secretary of State's consent to bye-laws and the creation of parish councils.
- **Community cohesion** – encouraging Councils to put integration and cohesion at the heart of community strategies and LAAs.

- 3.2 In the Queen's Speech on 15 November the Government announced there will be a Local Government Bill to legislate for the measures proposed in the White Paper including:

- Empowering frontline councillors and strengthening political leadership with:
 - a 'community call for action' to resolve issues of local concern;
 - devolved powers for councils to create new parishes;
 - an end to the Secretary of State's role in confirming byelaws and making it possible for councils to enforce them through fixed penalty notices;
 - Councils choosing one of three executive leadership models; and
 - strengthened overview and scrutiny committees;
- Revising the Council code of conduct, including:
 - establishing a more locally based conduct regime for councillors, with a streamlined Standards Board;
 - revising the code of conduct to allow councillors to speak out on licensing and planning issues in their ward.
- Strengthening local partnership working, including:
 - placing a duty on upper tier councils to prepare LAAs in consultation with named partners;
 - requiring the lead councils and named partners to cooperate in agreeing and meeting targets; and
 - placing more area-based funding in the LAA pot.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

4.1 The White Paper has extensive implications for the organisation, powers, partnerships, policies and performance management of the Council.

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

5.1 The White Paper will require all local authorities to revise their executive arrangements and make other amendments to their constitutions. The White Paper will have implications for pooled funding through the Local Area Agreement and points to the need to realize greater efficiency savings by local authorities.

6.0 Conclusions

6.1 The White Paper promises a significant change in the policy environment for local authorities at a neighbourhood, local and city regional level

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 It is recommended that a series of more substantive papers is prepared for Executive Board and other relevant committees identifying the implications for Leeds City in the key areas outlined in the White Paper.