

**Meeting of the Cabinet - 12<sup>th</sup> February 2007**

**Report of the Chief Executive**

**Review of Local Government White Paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities”**

**Purpose of Report**

1. This report highlights the key aspects of the Local Government White Paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities”, which proposed a number of significant changes in the organisation of local authorities, and the relationship with Government, partners and local communities.

**Background**

2. The White Paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities” was published in October 2006, with the expressed aim “to give local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives”. The full details of the White Paper and implementation can be accessed through the Communities and Local Government website – [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk). In summary, key sections of the paper include:-

**Responsive service and empowered communities**

Government aim is to extend public choice over services they received, influence those who provide them and higher service standards. There is a call for local authorities to involve and consult service users more fully and provide better information about standards in their local area. There is also a proposal for local councillors to submit questions through a new Community Call for Action to seek scrutiny of an issue of local concern. There will be encouragement to develop neighbourhood charters setting out local standards and priorities, with opportunities to manage services at neighbourhood levels. There will be a stronger legal framework to require local authorities to secure participation of local citizens and communities.

**Effective, accountable and responsive Local Government**

The White Paper states that Councillors should be champions for their local community “to speak out on all issues affecting their local area”. There are proposals to strengthen overview and scrutiny committees will be strengthened to allow them to call on local public service providers for evidence and demand a response to reports from the Council.

The Paper proposes that there will be three leadership choices for Councils to choose from: a directly elected mayor, a directly elected executive of councillors; or a leader elected by councillors with a four year mandate. All executive powers of

the Council will be vested in the leader of the Council, with a role for the Council to scrutinise the leaders actions and approve the budget and major plans. Where they want to Councils can also move to whole council elections and single member wards.

### **Strong Cities, Strategic Regions**

The Government will continue to work closely with areas interested in developing Multi-Area Agreements, including city region proposals that cross local authority boundaries, to explore devolution of greater power and resources to be devolved to regional and local levels. There will be reforms for Passenger Transport Authorities and Executives to strengthen leadership, it will also devolve powers to local authorities regarding local bus services.

### **Local Government as strategic leader and place shaper.**

There will be a new framework developed for the local strategic partnership to bring together local partners, with a enhancement of the local Area Agreements to set a single set of targets for improvement. There will be a duty for local authorities and local partners to work together to agree the priorities in the LAA, and once agreed with Government, local partners will be required to have regard to these targets as priorities for improvement.

### **A new performance framework**

The White Paper promises a simplification of the performance framework for local authorities, with a reduction to around 35 priorities for each area set through the LAA, with a single set of about 200 outcome based indicators replacing the current range of central government indicators. In addition, there will be a new regime for dealing with monitoring, support, assessment and intervention, with a shift from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment, to a Comprehensive Area Assessment.

### **Efficiency – transforming local services**

The Paper highlights the prospect of additional efficiency gains being specified as part of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review, and is encouraging greater service collaboration between councils and across all public bodies, supporting the use of business process improvement techniques.

### **Community Cohesion**

The White Paper highlights the need for stronger local leadership, greater resident participation and community groups can all help local areas promote community cohesion. The Government intends to work with local authorities to address community cohesion challenges, and highlights the positive work already taking place within Dudley Borough in this respect.

3. Following the publication of the White Paper, the detailed implications of these commitments will be awaited, although clearly the Council is already taking steps towards many of the objectives outlined above, for example:-

- Accessible customer focused services – e.g. the development of Dudley Council Plus.

- Local Community Engagement – e.g. the development of Area Committees and Neighbourhood consultation groups.
  - Strong local priorities –e.g. the development of the Dudley Local Area Agreement in conjunction with local partner agencies and community representatives.
  - Multi-agency working – e.g. the leading role Dudley Council has played in the development of the Black Country Consortium, as well as recent involvement in the Birmingham, Coventry and Black Country City Region initiative.
  - Improving efficiency – e.g. the introduction of business process reviews as part of the implementation of Dudley Council Plus.
  - Community Cohesion – e.g. as highlighted above, the White Paper has featured the steps Dudley has already taken to bringing local communities together
4. As the detailed information on the implementation of the White Paper is generated a further report will be brought to the Cabinet on the implications and options for the Council.

### **Finance**

5. There are no specific financial implications arising from this report, however the implementation of the proposals contained in the White Paper will need to be costed when full details are known.

### **Law**

6. The White Paper will require an Act of Parliament to achieve full implementation of all proposals, with royal assent expected in the autumn.

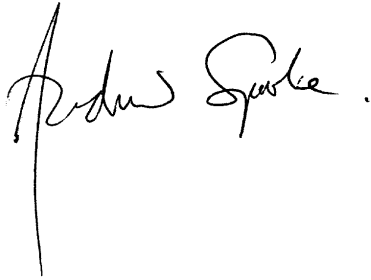
### **Equality Impact**

7. As the full details surrounding the implementation of the White Paper are established the equality impact assessment can be determined.

### **Recommendation**

8. It is recommended that:-

- The Cabinet consider the implications of the proposed changes of the White Paper "Strong and prosperous communities" for the future structure and operation of the Council.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam Spark'.

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Chief Executive

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### **List of Background Papers**

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