

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO: CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 1 September 2009
Report of: Borough Solicitor
Subject/Title: Strengthening Local Democracy - Consultation

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 The Department of Communities and Local Government has embarked upon a consultation exercise in England only, which is focussed on promoting local democratic renewal by strengthening the capacity of local government. This particular consultation forms part of a much wider reform package and builds upon themes originally presented in the Building Britain's Future programme which set out the Government's plans to reform democracy, overcome the recession and build the next generation of Public Services.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee forwards comments on the consultation document to the Resources Portfolio Holder in order for him to formally respond on behalf of the Council.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 In order for the Portfolio Holder to consider what response he may wish to make on behalf of the Council.

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 All

5.0 Local Ward Members

- 5.1 Not applicable.

6.0 Policy Implications

- 6.1 Not known at this stage.

7.0 Financial Implications 2009/10 and beyond

7.1 None associated with the consultation response.

8.0 Legal Implications

8.1 None associated with the consultation response.

9.0 Risk Management

9.1 There are no identifiable risks.

10.0 Background and options

10.1 The Government has issued the document attached for consultation. The consultation period is 10.5 weeks. The reason given in the consultation document is that the Government wants to maximise time available for the possibility of taking forward proposals, following the consultation

10.2 The consultation explores whether local government has the powers it needs to meet today's challenges. It sets out a range of proposals to promote democratic renewal and strengthen the power and responsibility of local government by:

- Giving Councils more scope to scrutinise the spending and decisions of local service providers;
- Exploring whether there are barriers to using powers and whether there are other powers which Councils should have;
- Ensuring Councils have the powers and responsibilities they need to tackle climate change;
- Exploring how the powers and responsibilities of sub regional structures should be matched by clear and accountable leadership; and
- Exploring how to articulate, develop and support the relationship between central and local government so that respective functions are clear and transparent to citizens

10.3 Of particular interest to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee are the proposals detailed in paragraph 58 onwards to increase the power and range of scrutiny by Local Authorities by means of:

- **broadening** the number of bodies which can be subject to scrutiny committees: not limited to those responsible for health, crime and disorder or council functions, nor just those responsible for priority

targets set out in the LAA

- **enhancing** the powers which these committees have. Officers and board members could be required to appear in front of the committee
- **enabling** scrutiny committees to make reports and recommendations to a wider range of bodies for their consideration, and these bodies could be required to have regard to the recommendations and formally respond to scrutiny committees

10.4 To assist the Committee in focussing on the key issues in the consultation, the document poses the following consultation questions and it suggested that in addition to any general comments members may wish to make, an attempt should be made at answering each of the questions:

Do you agree that we should extend scrutiny powers in relation to Local Area Agreement (LAA) partners to cover the range of their activities in an area, not just those limited to specific LAA targets?

Do we need to make scrutiny powers more explicit in relation to local councils' role in scrutinising expenditure on delivery of local public services in an area? If so, what is the best way of achieving this?

Do you agree that we should bring all or some of the local public services as set out in this chapter fully under the local authority scrutiny regime? Are there other bodies who would benefit from scrutiny by Local Government?

How far do you agree that we should extend scrutiny powers to enable committees to require attendance by officers or board members of external organisations to give evidence at scrutiny hearings, similar to the powers already in existence for health and police?

What more could be done to ensure that councils adequately resource and support the local government scrutiny function to carry out its role to full effect?

How can council leaders ensure that scrutiny is a core function of how their organisations do business and have a full and proper role in scrutinising the full range of local public services?

What more could be done to better connect and promote the important role of local government scrutiny to local communities, for example, citizens as expert advisers to committees?

11.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

Name: Mark Nedderman
Designation: Senior Scrutiny Officer
Tel No: 01270 529640
Email: mark.nedderman@cheshireeast.gov.uk