

**RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO POLICY AND FINANCE
COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 23rd September 2008
title: Empowerment White Paper: “Communities in Control”
submitted by: Chief Executive
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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report is to inform committee of the proposals in the Empowerment White Paper “*Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power*”.

2 RELEVANCE TO THE COUNCIL’S AMBITIONS AND PRIORITIES:

- Council Ambitions:
- Community Objectives:
- Corporate Priorities:
- Other Considerations:

3 THE CASE FOR PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES HAVING MORE POWER

3.1 Passing power to the people

- 3.2 *Communities in control: real people, real power* has a simple aim: to pass power into the hands of local communities so as to generate vibrant local democracy in every part of the country and give real control over local decisions and services to a wider pool of active citizens.

- 3.3 The key themes are power, influence and control: who has power, on whose behalf it is exercised, how it is held to account, and how it can be diffused throughout the communities in which we live. It is about democracy, and how democratic practices and ideals can be applied to our complex, modern society.

3.4 The principles of empowerment

- 3.5 The principles which underpin this White Paper are:

- democratic reforms must be focused on the role of the citizen to influence decisions, hold politicians and officials to account, seek redress or take control of local services (this document is structured around the ways in which citizens may wish to be engaged in society and the political process).
- reforms are designed to shift power, influence and responsibility away from existing centres of power and into the hands of communities and citizens. Reforms are neither about tweaking the system nor about redistributing political power from one group of politicians to another.
- the challenge and debate that arises from this shift of power is a good thing, however uncomfortable this may be for politicians and service providers. The people, as the ultimate holders of power, have the right to ask difficult questions, demand answers and take action themselves to improve their communities. The belief is:
 - that citizens and communities are capable of taking difficult decisions, balancing competing demands and solving complex problems themselves, given the right support and resources
 - not that only an enlightened and altruistic class of political leaders and administrators can deliver what is good for people

- we should trust people to have the common sense and ingenuity to run their own affairs and to be the authors of their own destiny.
- local authorities have a vital role. There are many excellent examples of councils being at the heart of local democracy and this should be the case everywhere. Representative democracy remains central to local democracy but we believe it can be reinforced, not undermined, by direct participation of citizens – each requires the other
- the role of central government is to provide support, resources, legislation and the framework of national priorities. The state should be a platform under people’s feet, not a weight holding them down
- we particularly value the role of the third sector in social and democratic renewal, by which we mean groups, campaigns, co-operatives, mutuals and social enterprises owned and run by their own members, investing their profits in the local community. These types of organisations are where people learn the skills of democracy and where democracy can flourish
- within the third sector, we recognise and celebrate the role of individual active citizens, social entrepreneurs, campaigners, volunteers and political activists. Our civil society is defined and energised by hundreds of thousands of decent people, performing acts of altruism and selflessness, and these people deserve the support and recognition of government
- the contributions, experiences and perspectives of all citizens, regardless of race, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation and religion should be recognised and valued
- lastly, the assumption running throughout this White Paper is that political activity is valuable and worthwhile, should be recognised and rewarded, and is an essential part of Britain’s national life. We want to challenge the stereotypes of politics and take on the cynicism which corrodes our political system. We aim to show that by engaging in politics people can enact beneficial change, serve their communities, develop their own skills and experience and contribute to a strong society and nation. Our modern definition of democracy is a system of government whereby, political power is exercised by citizens through elected representatives, or directly through petitions, referendums or active participation. This operates within a framework of free elections, checks and balances on power, an independent judiciary and media and guaranteed civil liberties and human rights. Political parties are an essential component of democracy, because they have a vital role in aggregating opinion and giving citizens a platform for their views. They also have a local role in recruiting members, providing political education and organisational experience to individuals and running election campaigns..

4 KEY PROPOSALS

- 4.1 **Petition Power will be strengthened.** There will be a new duty for councils to respond to petitions and any petition signed by 5% of residents will be required to be debated in a full council meeting. Councils are also to act as “community advocates” in responding to petitions that deal with issues outside of our direct control eg: GP surgery opening hours.
- 4.2 **The “duty to promote democracy”.** The paper recognises councils’ positions as the “hub” of local democracy. The duty will draw on the best examples from councils and will encourage a range of actions which could include better information for residents, engaging young people, and giving practical support to councillors.
- 4.3 **Participatory budgeting** is being encouraged and the expectation is that it will be used in every local authority area by 2012. Participatory budgeting involves people in making decisions about how sections of local public budgets are allocated and invested
- 4.4 **Powers of overview and scrutiny are to be updated and made more visible to the public.** Local senior public officers (ie: not just council officers) may be required to face public scrutiny as the result of residents’ petitions – this is to be consulted upon. Chief Executives and Chairs will face a regular public hearing with the intention that such public officers will become more visible locally.

5 CHAPTER BY CHAPTER SUMMARY

- 5.1 In addition to the summary below the CLG Summary of the White Paper and the LGA On the day Briefing can be found on the Council’s Intranet site.
- 5.2 **Chapter 1: Empowerment and the Duty to Promote Democracy**
- 5.3 As a first step to recognising the principle that political activity is valuable, the Government will place a ‘**duty**

to promote democracy' on local authorities. This complements the 'duty to involve' that was introduced in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The new 'duty to promote democracy' will involve encouraging possible methods of promotion drawn from council best practice including:

- better information: council publications and websites should provide clear information about political control, council meetings, councillors' surgeries and how to contact both councillors and local political parties
- a two-way process: using local radio, blogs, podcasts and interactive websites to improve dialogue between councillors and local people
- empowering young people with a more positive experience of voting through young mayors, the UK Youth Parliament, mock elections and school councils
- getting people involved: explaining to all communities how to be a councillor or take up other civic roles – including school governorships or health board membership – through websites and newsletters
- practical support for councillors, including allowing councillors to hold surgeries on council premises, and allowing all political parties to hire council premises for meetings and events
- training front-line staff so that they can answer simple questions from the public about the local democratic system. People like call centre staff, council tax, housing and planning officers should know which political party controls the council, the date of the next elections, how to register and where to vote
- promoting democracy: councils could involve staff or former councillors in promoting local democracy through programmes such as 'Civic Champions' or 'Democracy Advocates'. This could include: – ex-councillors becoming mentors for serving councillors – councillors working with local schools, including initiating visits to explain their role and to support active citizenship education – making a positive presentation to local volunteer groups or boards about governance roles and how to apply – promoting the role of the council and councillor to community and voluntary groups – developing links with town and parish councils and supporting democracy activities
- targeting: co-ordinated targeting of groups not well represented among councillors (women, young people, people of working age, people from black and minority ethnic communities) to explain the role, time commitment and support available to help them take up civic roles
- third sector: working with third sector organisations to ensure that active citizens in community and voluntary groups know about the opportunities to take up civic roles
- liaising with local employers to encourage support for staff members who have taken on a civic governance role

5.4 Local authorities will also be encouraged to do more to encourage voting through:

- positive campaigns to encourage voter registration and voting, especially with young people
- schemes which recognise people who have turned out on polling day, for example every voter getting an 'I've Voted' sticker at the ballot box.

5.5 The '**duty to involve**' local people in key decisions, which comes into effect in April 2009, will also be extended to cover police authorities and key arts, sporting, cultural and environmental organisations. The 'duty to involve' currently applies mainly to local authorities. It requires appropriate steps to involve people in decisions, policies and services that may affect them or be of interest to them.

5.6 The paper also wants to make sure that people are not bombarded with a range of consultation requests. It states that public bodies should, where appropriate, join up with other organisations to engage people. Work will be done with local bodies under the 'duty to involve' to identify ways to streamline consultation and engagement. Both EleP and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSPs) have an important role here.

5.7 An "Empowering the Frontline Taskforce" will run until 2010 and will work on ensuring that frontline council staff are able to respond to a more empowered public. More details will be announced this autumn.

5.8 **Chapter 2: Volunteering**

5.9 A Community-builders fund (previously Community Anchors) of £70million will be created. The Government will be looking for a national partner to distribute these funds.

5.10 A match-funded Grassroots Grant announced for volunteering projects which have volunteer time as their

main resource. These will be funded from a £80 million allocation from 2008-2011.

- 5.11 Support for programmes developing leadership skills for local community leaders including through a new Empowerment Fund (of at least £7.5million) (subject to separate consultation).
- 5.12 **Chapter 3: Access to Information**
- 5.13 One of the main reasons people can feel powerless is a lack of information, in formats and places which are readily accessible and easily understood.
- 5.14 We are often guilty of using jargon, acronyms and technical language which alienate, confuse and frustrate citizens in their pursuit of simple answers or basic information. Technical language can become a means of excluding the ordinary citizen. Most local authorities have sought to remedy this, through initiatives such as plain English campaigns.
- 5.15 Through the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Government ensured that citizens in England and Wales have a general right, with limited exemptions, to the information held by public authorities, including local councils. This recognises that unless a citizen has full access to the information he or she needs, then full citizenship cannot be achieved.
- 5.16 People want access to relevant information about the services and facilities which they use regularly – information which is understandable at the level of their neighbourhood or local area. They also want to use information to get involved in local decisions. When they can get such information, they often feel better about the quality of services. Yet in 2006–07, barely half of local authority residents felt that their council kept them very or fairly well informed about the services and benefits it provided (53% in Ribble Valley – which is top quartile). For vulnerable people the role of accessible support and advice in making choices related to services they need is crucial.
- 5.17 People want information so that they can understand:
- what services and facilities are available in their local area
 - how they can get more involved in their local area
 - how their local services compare with those in other areas
 - how a complaint they have made is being addressed
- 5.18 The paper states that **having information online is not enough**. There is a strong correlation between those who are socially excluded and those who are digitally excluded. For example, it is estimated that 15 per cent of the adult population (more than six million people) suffer social exclusion and are also unable to use the Internet.
- 5.19 A range of methods will therefore be necessary, using the media that different people prefer, and delivered where they can easily access it, including through libraries. Many local authorities are already providing information in innovative ways including key facts cards and fridge magnets.
- 5.20 The government wants **information on services to be truly local** – available at local neighbourhood level – so people can see what is happening in their own area. For example council-wide crime statistics can hide marked differences in particular areas; for the information to be useful to a community group it needs to be as local as possible.
- 5.21 The **Local Area Agreement (LAA)** offers an opportunity for local authorities and their partners to present clearly to local citizens how they are going to tackle the major priorities for their area, and their contribution to national issues which affect everyone, such as climate change.
- 5.22 Communities and Local Government has recently launched the cross-government **Data Interchange Hub** which gives local authorities access to the most up-to-date information on National Indicators and through that, the chance to compare local performance against LAA targets. This will allow local authorities to benchmark their performance against similar authorities elsewhere in the country.
- 5.23 Reporting of the Comprehensive Area Assessment – the main indication of local performance – will enable citizens to compare the performance of all areas against all the National Indicators. CLG will be working with the LGA to identify best practice in information dissemination - a new paper was published this week entitled '**Reporting Performance Information to Citizens**'.

5.24 **Chapter 4: Having an Influence**

- 5.25 This chapter explains how the government will give people new rights to petition for action from their representatives and public officials and how they will encourage higher turnouts in elections, including through voting incentives.
- 5.26 The paper makes it clear that they are not proposing government by petitions, nor are they suggesting that the role of elected representatives in taking difficult decisions should be undermined. But, they do believe that stronger petition powers will enable more people to have their voice heard and help elected representatives do their jobs better.
- 5.27 **A new duty on local councils to respond to all petitions, including electronic petitions, relating to local authority functions or other public services where the council shares delivery responsibilities** will be introduced. Petitions could call for action – to deal with empty properties, to transfer the ownership of a building to the community, to calm traffic in an accident blackspot, or to request refuse collection on a certain day, gates at the end of the passages behind houses, a new school crossing, or new street lights in a dark corner of an estate. They could also call for participatory budgeting or a local referendum thus giving the initiative to the citizen.
- 5.28 If the Council's overview and scrutiny committee decides the response is not adequate or substantive, petitioners will be able to secure a debate of the full council. In any event, if five per cent of the local population sign a petition, there will have to be a full council debate. A few issues, for example planning, will need to be dealt with differently to reflect existing robust statutory processes for public participation and consultation.
- 5.29 **Councils will also act as community advocates.** Councils will be required to respond to petitions on subjects outside of their direct sphere of influence eg: GP surgery opening hours.
- 5.30 CLG will work with key inspectorates to encourage them to consider petitions as important pieces of evidence to determine when inspections must take place, for example if an old people's care home is not up to an acceptable standard or a workplace is felt to be unsafe.
- 5.31 A new power for councillors was introduced in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 called the **Councillor Call for Action**. This empowers councillors to require overview and scrutiny committees to consider issues of local concern. Guidance will be issued later this year to support councillors in exercising these powers.
- 5.32 **Participatory budgeting** involves people in making decisions about how sections of local public budgets are allocated and invested. The Government currently supports the Participatory Budgeting Unit to encourage the spread of participatory budgeting in England.
- 5.33 The paper states that participatory budgeting helps to develop the skills, experience and confidence of those involved and it helps to bring people together across divides of race, age, class and background to build a stronger community and engenders greater understanding of the complexities of local councils' decision-making, including compromises and trade-offs. The decisions taken can be better tailored to local needs because local community views are built into the process from the start, and the process enables local councillors to adopt a position of strong community leadership.
- 5.34 There are 22 local authority participatory budgeting pilots currently operating in England, with more planned by the end of the year. The government wants to encourage all local authorities to follow the example of pioneering local authorities such as Sunderland and Bradford so that participatory budgeting is used in every local authority area by 2012. A **National Strategy on participatory budgeting**, which will set out how this aspiration will be achieved, will be published shortly.
- 5.35 Many people view voting in elections as one of the duties of citizenship, and carry out their responsibilities every polling day. Increasingly, though, voting is seen as an arcane and alien process, which deters many people from taking part. This is especially true of young people, who are turning their backs on voting in elections in record numbers.
- 5.36 As part of the new duty to promote democracy that will be placed on local authorities, LA's should run information campaigns to explain the processes and implications of voting, especially to young people. This might involve local councils forging partnerships with schools to use citizenship education to advocate voting.

- 5.37 The Quality Parish Scheme requires parish councils to promote local democracy as one of the criteria for achieving Quality status.
- 5.38 Local authorities will be **given the power to provide incentives for voting in local government elections**, for example by entering voters into a prize draw. Voting incentives should not be construed as 'paying for votes' or create a major new financial burden on councils. Instead, they should be viewed as an eye-catching method to increase awareness and engagement, especially with young people who have never voted and who might view the process with suspicion.
- 5.39 **Stronger community governance** - Formal democratic decision-making is to be conducted as locally as possible, so that citizens can feel that their local government is part of the fabric of community life and that their views can be heard and acted upon by local councillors.
- 5.40 To this end, **the Government wants to encourage the creation of councils at the most local level where these are wanted and needed by local people**, so that councils do not just exist at district, county or borough level. In big cities, people tend to identify with the part of the city they live in. In conurbations, people identify with their suburb, estate or neighbourhood. In rural areas, people identify most strongly with their village or nearest town.
- 5.41 Residents in every part of England can now seek to establish a form of local council. People can now also choose to call their local council a neighbourhood, community or village council instead of a parish or town council if they wish. This will help to avoid confusing civil parish councils, which are local councils, with ecclesiastical parish councils which are linked to a church. We want to encourage The creation of more local councils especially in major cities, where there is local demand for them, will be encouraged. The Government intend to introduce a right of appeal to the Secretary of State where a community's proposal for a local council is denied by the local authority. They will also work with the National Association of Local Councils to encourage more parish and town councils to become Quality councils under the revised scheme.
- 5.42 **Empowering people in the planning system** - A wide range of planning reforms is taking place alongside this White Paper. For example, at local level it has been made easier for people to get involved with plan preparation by streamlining the process.
- 5.43 The Government are also moving to a system where developers make contributions to infrastructure on a much fairer basis. This new regime will be called the **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)**. The local authority's proposals for how much developers should be charged will be consulted on. This will provide more opportunities than are currently available for local communities to get involved in decisions on where to spend money.
- 5.44 The current planning obligations system ('section 106') will continue alongside CIL. They are exploring how they can give local communities more information about what contributions have been made, more opportunity to shape how the contributions are used and whether the local planning authority has spent them on the facilities that were originally agreed.
- 5.45 There are many different techniques available which help engage the public and other stakeholders in generating ideas and making decisions on issues which affect their lives. One popular method is **Planning for Real**.
- 5.46 The Government will be allocating up to £4m over three years to local planning authorities in England to **promote community participation in planning**, whether at individual or group level.
- 5.47 To develop skills in community engagement, they will work with the Royal Town Planning Institute on the community planning content of their education and lifelong-learning programmes. They will also work with the Planning Advisory Service to ensure professionals have access to appropriate good practice and information. It is important for planners to develop stronger skills in communicating the purpose behind local and regional plans, and how and when communities can influence them.
- 5.48 They will also extend the planning bursary scheme by £1m between 2009 and 2011; this will bring another 45 planners a year into the system and help ease staffing pressures so that more time can be spent working more directly and proactively with communities.
- 5.49 Chapter 5: Challenge**
- 5.50 We want to **raise the visibility of the scrutiny function** to ensure that people are aware of this powerful tool at their disposal.

- 5.51 This is to be done by encouraging councils to consider new approaches to scrutiny, including:
- encouraging more creative involvement of the public, for example through holding deliberative events along the lines of 'America Speaks' (large scale citizen engagement forums)
 - moving committee meetings and hearings out of the town hall and into the community, and considering webcasting
 - greater public involvement in suggesting and selecting topics for review
 - making information more readily available and accessible on websites and at council offices
- 5.52 In addition, we will make changes to the scrutiny function by:
- further enhancing the powers of overview and scrutiny committees in local authorities to require information from partners on a broader range of issues
 - if necessary providing councils in areas with district and county councils with a power to combine resources in 'area' scrutiny committees
 - requiring some dedicated scrutiny resource in county and unitary councils
- 5.53 The **visibility of local public officers is to be increased** so that they are all open to public scrutiny and questioning from local communities. A key part of the role of chairs or chief executives of a local public body should be that they face a regular public hearing. It should be expressed in their job objectives and could be introduced as part of strengthened overview and scrutiny procedures. A new right to require by petition that senior officers in local public services should attend a public hearing – this will go to consultation.
- 5.54 We will support strengthening relationships between professionals in local public bodies by encouraging people from across the public sector to run joint **leadership development programmes**. This will include establishing the key leadership competencies around community engagement, cohesion and empowerment.
- 5.55 A consultation will be opened into on-line petitioning for establishing an elected mayor, and also to look at lowering the percentage of residents required to trigger a referendum on having an elected mayor from 5% to 2, 3 or 4%. The amount of time allowed between referenda in the event of an unsuccessful bid for an elected mayor will fall from 10 years to 4 years. Elected mayors will be expected to chair LSPs and be the community crime and policing representative. More details on crime and local accountability are expected in the Policing Green Paper.
- 5.56 Chapter 6: Redress**
- 5.57 The CLG are conducting a concise review on issues of redress which will be published at the beginning of 2009 and will consider if and when financial compensation for residents might be relevant.
- 5.58 There will unfortunately be occasions where services do not meet people's expectations. This chapter looks at how to make sure that expectations are clear, how citizens can seek redress and how redress can be used to improve performance in the future.
- 5.59 People want systems and services that match their busy lifestyles and working patterns. People also expect their complaints to be dealt with promptly and with courtesy when systems fail.
- 5.60 However not everyone will have the knowledge or confidence to make an official complaint or they may not feel their complaint will make a difference. This is especially true when people are unsure who is responsible for a local service.
- 5.61 Many people who do complain feel that their complaints are handled poorly. Only 34 per cent of those who had contacted their council in the last year were satisfied with the way their local authority handled their complaint. A number of factors influence satisfaction. Knowing the name of the person dealing with the complaint (35 per cent), keeping people informed (32 per cent) and the speed of response (32 per cent) are seen as particularly important. Knowing the organisation will treat complaints fairly (32 per cent) is also mentioned by many.
- 5.62 The **principles that underpin complaints procedures should be** that:
- the citizen is the most important person in any transaction, and has a right to decent, agreed standards of service and care

- everyone should have easy access to clear information
- both sides should have a clear understanding of what is expected from each other
- systems of redress and compensation should be clearly explained and understood
- services should learn from the complaints received and make sure that this learning influences delivery next time

5.63 Chapter 7: Standing for Office

- 5.64 The Government has published its response to the Councillors Commission Report which reinforces the central role of councillors in local democracy and importance of encouraging people to stand for office.
- 5.65 Discretionary ward budgeting will be further encouraged.
- 5.66 Councils will be given the power to modernise their business practices to include remote attendance and voting, balanced with measures to preserve accountability and transparency.
- 5.67 According to the 2006 Census of local authority councillors:
- only 29 per cent of councillors are women, despite over half the population being women
 - only four per cent of councillors are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, despite nearly 10 per cent of the population describing themselves as coming from an ethnic background
 - only 0.3 per cent of councillors are aged under 25
- 5.68 These figures are an indication of a serious weakness in our local democracy and the Government is committed to ensuring that **local representatives reflect the local communities they serve**. This will not only lead to a fairer system, with more effective representation but will also encourage people to serve as councilors because they can see role models 'like them'.
- 5.69 The **'Widdicombe rules' will be amended** (section 2 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989) which forbid council workers, above a certain salary band, from being active in party politics, so that only the most senior council officers such as chief executives and chief planning officers continue to be barred from political activity along with other 'politically sensitive' posts.
- 5.70 Restrictions on council employees being councillors in their local authority in which they work will, however, be retained.
- 5.71 Less than one per cent of local councillors are black, asian and minority ethnic women. To be more reflective of society this needs to increase more than five fold to around 1000. At the current rate of increase this could take more than 130 years. Therefore a taskforce has been established by the Government to help more black, asian and minority ethnic women to become councillors, and so make councils more representative of the community.

5.72 Chapter 8 – Asset Management

- 5.73 A new Asset Transfers Unit will be set up to disseminate best practice and offer advice on the transfer of assets to community groups and the third sector.
- 5.74 The CLG will be working with the LGA and the Audit Commission to determine how this should be managed and to identify methods of best practice currently operated by councils.
- 5.75 A new Social Enterprise Unit will be set up to deliver CLG objectives in this field.

6 OPPORTUNITIES FOR RIBBLE VALLEY BC

- 6.1 Consider the Duty to Promote Democracy which will involve encouraging possible methods of promotion drawn from council best practice (see paras. 5.3 and 5.4).
- 6.2 Consider how to make information on services truly local ie available at local neighbourhood level – so people can see what is happening in their own area.
- 6.3 Consider the impact that stronger petition powers will have and review the systems that are currently in

place.

- 6.4 Consider what role participatory budgeting can have and how it could potentially be introduced.
- 6.5 Consider what can be done to encourage voter turnout in local elections (see paras. 5.36, 5.38)
- 6.6 Consider the effect of the new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) regime (Planning and Development awaiting further information regarding this).
- 6.7 Raise the visibility of the scrutiny function to ensure that people are aware of this powerful tool at their disposal. This is to be done by encouraging councils to consider new approaches to scrutiny (see para. 5.51 and The *Local Accountability Consultation paper* – see below).
- 6.8 Review the Council's complaints procedure and redress procedures in light of the White Paper and following the CLG's review on issues of redress which will be published at the beginning of 2009.
- 6.9 Consider the Government's response to the Councillors Commission Report, which reinforces the central role of councillors in local democracy and the importance of encouraging people to stand for office.

7 FURTHER INFORMATION

- 7.1 CLG have recently published a consultation paper, which is the first in a series of *Communities in Control* consultation documents following the publication of the White Paper. This first paper covers developing the role of overview and scrutiny, a new power for people to petition to hold local officers to account and facilitating the work of councillors. The *Local Accountability Consultation* can be found on the Council's Intranet. Responses are to be made by 30 October 2008.
- 7.2 Specifically, views are being sought on:
 - 7.2.1 Developing and strengthening overview and scrutiny through:
 - implementing the provisions of the 2007 Act, designed to enhance councils' scrutiny powers in relation to scrutiny of Local Area Agreement partners and their delivery of LAA improvement targets; in particular, the powers to make regulations in respect of:
 - overview and scrutiny committees requiring information from partner authorities
 - the publication of scrutiny reports, recommendations and responses
 - the establishment of joint county and district overview and scrutiny committees
 - enhancing the powers of district overview and scrutiny committees
 - scrutiny in small district councils operating a streamlined committee system.
 - 7.2.2 How best to take forward the commitments and proposals in the *Communities in Control* White Paper to raise the visibility of, and to strengthen, the scrutiny function.
 - 7.2.3 Increasing the visibility and accountability of local public officers so that they are all open to public scrutiny and questioning from local communities through:
 - chairs and chief executives of local public bodies attending regular public hearings
 - a new right for local people to petition to hold officers to account.
 - 7.2.4 Facilitating the work of councillors by modernising the way they do business to enable them to use information and communications technology to participate in meetings and vote remotely.
- 7.3 It is proposed that this consultation paper be discussed at Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 30 September 2008.
- 7.4 Other consultation papers which will be published following the White Paper should be discussed by the relevant committee.

8 RISK ASSESSMENT

- Resources: None

- Technical, Environmental and Legal: None
- Political: None
- Reputation: None.

9 IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 9.1 Agree to the formation of a working group, consisting of 4 Conservatives and 1 Liberal Democrat, to further discuss the White Paper and the opportunities put forward in this report and to report back their findings to this committee.

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For further information please ask for Michelle Haworth, extension 4421