

TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

SPECIAL EXECUTIVE AND SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING – January 22nd 2007

Report of Strategic Director, Joy Wislade

(This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council, Councillor John Williams)

Response to the White Paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities” on the proposed alternatives for Local Government structure in Somerset

Executive Summary: The White Paper challenges Local Government on its future delivery and how this can best be achieved. Council have already taken the decision (December 12th 2006) that they oppose the unitary bid for the whole of the County being proposed by Somerset County Council. All other Districts are unanimous in their rejection of the single unitary proposal (see Appendix 1). There are now two further propositions to meet the White Paper objectives: a two unitary bid, East and West for Somerset and an Enhanced Partnership approach.

1. Purpose of Report
 - 1.1 To present to Council and to seek their views on options for the future structure of Local Government in Somerset and to consider two approaches: a two unitary bid for Somerset (East and West) and an enhanced partnership approach.
2. Background and Introduction
 - 2.1 Members will be aware that the Government published its long awaited White Paper entitled “Strong and Prosperous Communities” in October 2006 and published the Local Government in Public Involvement Health Bill in December 2006 which includes references to structural and boundary change for two tier Local Government.
 - 2.2 Members will also be aware that since the publication of the White Paper and the subsequent Bill very little time was given for a thorough assessment of all the options, given that the government deadline for submission is 25th January 2007. Therefore each option presented is on “best endeavours” basis and apologies are offered for the lack of detailed information at this stage. However, Members will understand

that this is a fast moving process and all responses are still under consideration and development.

- 2.3 All Somerset authorities will be going to their Councils with the different options prior to January 25th and coming to a view on which ones are their preferred model. Some may choose to support more than one option. Results of meetings that have taken place prior to Taunton Deane Council meeting will be reported verbally.

3. The Options

3.1 Enhanced Partnership Approach

- 3.2 All the Somerset Districts have co-operated on producing a prospectus on how the aims of the White Paper can be achieved by developing a partnership approach which would build on the excellent partnership work we have all been engaged in over the past years. All District Chief Executives and Leaders have been involved in this and have signed up to this as a valid and innovative way forward. It is taking partnership to the next level and whilst builds on what we currently do, it is about a very different approach. We are aware of the business case for savings made through this approach and can commit to meeting a similar level of efficiency gains as those produced by the unitary bid(s). The key advantage is that it can deliver the outcomes required within the White Paper without the disruption of structural change, and the reduction in democratic representation.

The final draft of this prospectus is attached at Appendix 2.

3.3 Two Unitary Councils: East Somerset and West Somerset

South Somerset District Council has been leading the work on an East Somerset Unitary Council. This would cover the area currently covered by themselves and Mendip District Council. Whilst they have to declare in their bid what would happen to the rest of the county, they cannot put in a bid on behalf of another area. We understand that in the East Somerset bid a unitary authority for West Somerset (the areas currently covered by Sedgemoor District Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset District Council) is proposed.

Sedgemoor District Council is leading work on developing a view on what a West Somerset Unitary authority would look like. This work is still emerging. Taunton Deane has been co-operating with this work to ensure there is good representation of the issues within Taunton Deane.

The main advantage of this option is that there is less of a democratic deficit than in a single unitary. However, there would also be some partnership projects that we are currently in line to deliver that would need to be rethought if this approach was taken and we therefore have concern about this option.

The latest draft Executive Summary to this submission is attached at Appendix 3.

4. Recommendation

Members are requested to consider the contents of this report and a verbal update by the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council given at the meeting and to determine the way forward.

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letter to send to all County Councillors

Dear

We, the Leaders of the District Councils in Somerset, have been informed that the Leader of Somerset County Council will be moving a resolution to effectively give the go-ahead for the County Council to submit an application for a single Unitary Authority covering the administrative area of Somerset County Council.

The recently published White Paper offers many ways for us across Somerset to get on with the real job in hand, which is primarily about using our energies to provide quality and cost-effective services, regenerate our neighbourhoods and improve the quality of life for all our residents and visitors. We believe that the application for a single Unitary Authority by Somerset County Council will prove to be totally divisive and a distraction from this vital work.

We know that through partnership working to date and in our own right, each of the Districts and County Council have contributed in their own way to satisfy the above and gain real benefits for our communities.

We can, and will, further improve the partnership working arrangements to bring about even more efficient and effective working practices. We collectively implore you not to vote "to submit an application to become a single Unitary Authority". This is our collective position, not because we fear a loss of control or even that changes to the governance arrangements do not have some merit, but simply because of:

1. the option of a single Unitary Authority in Somerset was rejected in the last consideration of this matter in the mid 1990's
2. the significant disruption which will inevitably follow a minority backed option;
3. the deterioration in partnership working between District and County;

4. the negation of our all the significant achievements to date in empowering and involving the whole spectrum of diverse groups, organisations and communities throughout Somerset.

Cont.....

The District Councils are in total opposition to the resolution being put forward to become a single Unitary Authority and call for all County Councillors to recognise the disharmony this will cause and the lost opportunity in achieving a solution which commands a significant degree of consensus across the whole community of Somerset.

Yours sincerely

Signed:

**Councillor Ken Maddocks
Leader of Council
Mendip District Council**



Signed:

**Councillor Duncan M^cGinty
Leader of Council
Sedgemoor District Council**



Signed:

**Councillor Tim Carroll
Leader of Council
South Somerset District Council**



Signed:

**Councillor John Williams
Leader of Council
Taunton Deane Borough Council**



Signed:

**Councillor Mrs Christine Lawrence
Leader of Council
West Somerset District Council**



Hallmarks of great service to the people of Somerset – a new Team Somerset approach

Introduction

A new approach to public service is being taken in Somerset – a team approach. We believe it is the way of the future and the way that we, within the local government community, must work if we are going to meet the rising expectations of our local population for improved services, better customer access and financially efficient services. Additionally, if we are to effectively represent our communities and get the best for them, within the region and at a national level, we need to speak with one voice.

Our aspirations are already evident and we have not been standing still in Somerset. We want to deliver better and more available services to our communities and we want to make a real impact on the quality of life enjoyed here for our current citizens but even more importantly for the citizens of tomorrow. We are ready to build on what we have done in the last few years, and with our team approach become leaders in the delivery of quality public services. We have the experience and we have the passion.

It has become increasingly obvious over the last years that to meet the rising expectations of both central government and those of our local population, the way we do things has had to change. We have grasped the opportunities and here in Somerset we have risen to the challenge by developing new and innovative ways of working which has resulted in some very exciting projects. Working with partners from within the local government community, from other public sector agencies, business and the voluntary sector has become commonplace. There has been some hard learning from these early projects which has set us in a good place for going forward and all authorities have seen the gain in this type of working and are now ready to take partnership to the next level and become a team.

There have been several Government policy papers in recent times that raise issues that will require a team approach if we are to find effective solutions. These include the Leitch report on skills, the Eddington report on transport and the Barker report on planning. The recent Local Government White Paper also corroborates our approach and sets out the outcomes that we must achieve:

- Enhanced strategic leadership
- Neighbourhood empowerment
- Value for money
- Equity

We believe we can achieve these with our team approach. Our evidence shows that our communities feel connected to and represented by the area governance structures in which they live – it adds to their “sense of place”. In the short timescale available we have endeavoured to work with all our partners and commit to significant further collaboration and consultation over the coming months.

We have a track record to build on

We have an excellent track record of collaborative working in Somerset. Our current partnerships include those which just share information, those that work together to achieve a goal in a more strategic, joined up and cost effective way and those that directly result in improved services. Some achieve all of these. Dependent on their purpose these partnerships cut across tiers of local government, including regional agencies, go between the same levels of local government and include local community partnerships. Somerset has not been afraid to embrace this style of working and to let go of its own interest in favour of the greater good. We want to enhance this collaborative style, learn from others and improve the efficiency and focus of our working together. We can evidence examples of projects that have delivered key outcomes:

Enhanced strategic leadership:

- We have responded together in a planned and robust way to the compiling of evidence to inform and influence the long term vision of the region through the Regional Spatial Strategy, which provides the strategic context for Somerset. Thus we have had an agreed approach to this document which fundamentally shapes the scale and location of future employment and housing growth in Somerset.
- We have developed a partnership approach with joint governance arrangements for regeneration projects such as Project Taunton - a partnership that is enabling the regeneration of Somerset’s county town made up of the County and Borough Councils, the Regional Development Agency, the Environment Agency and a variety of other local organisations. This team through its joint governance arrangements has successfully provided strategic leadership for the project and has enabled this regeneration programme to get off the ground quickly by together finding the solution to providing the necessary infrastructure. This approach is now also being used to deliver the Yeovil Vision and the Bridgwater Challenge regeneration projects.
- We have developed a partnership approach to the delivery of waste services. The Somerset Waste Partnership– a partnership of both all waste collection authorities and the waste disposal authority – is delivering value for money for the community by seeking tenders for a county wide waste collection contract, strategic leadership in safeguarding the

- environment by driving up recycling and diminishing the threat of the impact of potential fines under LATS (Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme). We are currently setting up a Joint Committee to operate all waste services in Somerset (October 2007) and our plans are to set up a Joint Waste Board for Somerset once the legislation has been established.
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership: in the east of the county we have amalgamated the CDRP to align with the police BCU (Basic Command Unit) to give more strategic focus.
 - Transformational change is being delivered through ISiS (Improving Services in Somerset) and through the current business support contract in Mendip.
 - Joint Civil Contingency planning across all authorities to ensure joined up approach to major incidents.

Value for money:

- The Somerset Waste Partnership approach for the delivery of waste services (see above)
- We have established a South West Audit Partnership which brings together audit staff from four of the district authorities providing not only value for money but also added value in service delivery via the retention of staff and the opportunity to employ a wider range of specialists.
- We have a track record of procuring services through public and private sector partnerships, for example the established business support contract in Mendip. We are currently in the process of establishing the ISIS joint venture (Improving Services in Somerset) which is a partnership between Somerset County Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council, Avon and Somerset Constabulary and a private sector partner (currently being procured). ISIS is committed to joining up and bringing efficiencies to the support and transactional services and also bringing investment in new technologies and transformational ways of working to all areas of business. ISIS is due to be launched for the two founder partners (Somerset County Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council) in summer 2007. Avon and Somerset Constabulary are also in the process of joining as a founder partner. All Somerset authorities have expressed interest in joining once it has been established.
- We have established joint Development Control Services between Sedgemoor and West Somerset Districts providing value for money and additional capacity.

Neighbourhood empowerment: All Somerset District authorities have led innovative community engagement strategies

- South Somerset has established a model that has attracted national interest and Taunton Deane is developing community planning models in six areas.

- A Gypsy and Travellers Housing assessment was jointly commissioned by all authorities to ensure an equitable approach for our Gypsy and Traveller community, value for money, strategic leadership and a regional focus.
- In Somerset we are excellent at working with our third tier of local government, parish councils. These are the representatives of our communities at the most local level and we have a good track record of consulting with them, empowering them to act within their communities and working in partnership with them.
- We have close ties with the voluntary and community sector. We are all committed to making a difference where it counts. We work with VCS to achieve its goals and especially to enable gaps in service provision to be effectively filled. This good practice is something we would like to build on.

How does Team Somerset see the future?

We believe that although we have started down the right road, there is more, much more to do. We believe that as we work together and form our plans and strategies that Team Somerset will become the key influencer of public service delivery for the county. Therefore, to continue to deliver effective strategic and local government in the future we will require:

- Strong leadership at a strategic planning level entailing efficiency and closer alignment of strategy through joined up strategic planning thereby gaining influence with other public agencies.
- Joined up local political engagement and interaction and strategic decision making
- Efficiencies through shared services – also addressing the issue of improved professionalisms, retention etc. We will also need to play to our strengths and share specific experience across the county by allowing those with recognised expertise to lead on relevant issues.
- Improved satisfaction and joined up customer access– access not just between local government layers but with other public sector agencies and overall satisfaction levels rising as we transform our services to focus on the customer’s needs.
- Equity of service for the citizens of Somerset – that is being clear that although we require consistent standards of service throughout the county we also need to ensure mechanisms are in place to deal with the pockets of deprivation that exist and the very dispersed nature of our population.

How could a Team approach address the key issues in Somerset?

We believe that by working together we can tackle our problems in a fresh way and bring some new approaches to solving some of the key issues that our communities are concerned about. Our thoughts need further work but already we can see the added value of a team approach so that together we have more influence and that together we are brave enough to be more innovative.

Affordable Housing: We have a number of ideas that we want to explore and by doing this together we will not only have greater access to resources but we will also have greater influence with both public and private sector partners:

- The opportunity for using land not only in our ownership but also in wider public sector ownership to bring forward schemes on exception sites and using our joint power of influence to this end.
- To look at assets that are held in public ownership for longer term growth and explore bringing them into use for the shorter term (10 – 15 years) for accommodation to meet the needs of some of our specific professional group requirements.
- The use of Community Land Trusts to deliver more affordable units

Economic Prosperity: We all aspire to delivering sustainable growth, better pay and quality employment for our citizens today but also and importantly to ensure we retain our young professionals. We already have consensus about this and an established economic partnership is being developed into an inward investment bureau. However, we believe there are other ways we need to explore if we are to address this issue:

- To increase access to higher education locally we would like to explore and facilitate the opportunity for universities to partner with Somerset institutions so that a wider range of degrees are available within the county. Thus building on the good work already carried on by colleges across Somerset.
- The Leitch report (November 2006) makes it clear that workforce training is of paramount importance. We believe that Team Somerset can work with the Learning and Skills Council and the business community as a pilot area to facilitate this in innovative ways that truly will make a difference.
- We want to increase the opportunity for start up businesses, particularly by young people, by the provision of a network of support facilities (units, advice, training and mentor support). Working together we want to explore setting up hubs and spokes of these “start up villages” throughout the county.
- SMEs (Small and Medium Size Enterprises) are the majority of our business community. We want to explore targeting particular industries that naturally fit with the profile of Somerset county – for example environmental technologies – and open negotiations with universities to support these emerging innovative enterprises.

Transport: we want to halt the rise of congestion in Somerset and address the issue of provision of an improved public transport system. We have ideas that we believe should be explored together:

- We have already learned that by working together we increase the chances of Somerset securing capital investment in infrastructure and are delighted that the County Council's Local Transport Plan has resulted in two major schemes for Somerset. We believe that a team approach will enable us to lift the profile of transport in Somerset with government even more effectively.
- Application to the Transport Innovation Fund for piloting ways that we can work together to reduce congestion solutions in market towns rather than the current emphasis on cities.
- To bring together other players in the public sector to explore how we can join up provision of transport by for example sharing provision with the Health sector.
- We have two major routes that run through the heart of Somerset, the M5 and the A303/A30. We would want to together make a case to Government to ensure that once the road tolling they are planning to introduce is implemented, that Somerset gets a proportion of the element raised on the stretches of these roads within the county to reinvest in alternative transport solutions for Somerset.

Environment: we want to ensure we act now to protect the environment that our current communities enjoy and to safeguard it for the communities of tomorrow.

- We will develop a sustainability and climate change strategy that will set targets to substantially reduce Somerset's carbon footprint including plans for the use of renewable energy in the major new housing growth areas.
- We will join with the Environment Agency to agree a county wide approach to flood alleviation, coastal management and general water management.

What does this future start to look like for Somerset?

Improved Leadership

Team Somerset will be the hub that co-ordinates a strategic focus for the county. We believe we will need to make changes to our governance arrangements if we are going to achieve this approach – an example of what this *could* look like is attached at Appendix 1 – though we recognise we need to do further work on this before coming up with a final model. We can do this without our communities losing the current level of representation and feeling of connectivity they currently enjoy. Whilst we do not have all the answers at the moment about how this would look whatever model is chosen will need to manage the complexity of

representation and work for Somerset. We do know it will require joint Executive or Leaders' decisions at a strategic level and a joint management team approach between authorities. The Somerset Strategic Partnership will have an input into the strategic level and the Local Strategic Partnerships will input at district and community level. The outcome that the structural arrangement must deliver is clear leadership and strategic planning for the county and derived from this, greater influence with other public sector agencies to ensure that the plans for Somerset are delivered effectively by all.

At a managerial level it entails a team approach that is quite different to what we see today. It means a shared vision and a clear indication within an individual organisation's plans of how that shared vision is being delivered. It means joint management teams at both senior and middle management levels. We need to build this new team and its vision together through joint team building events and envisioning exercises and then cascade the message throughout our own organisations as well as sharing it with the wider public sector. We will hold an annual Team Somerset conference that engages all those who deliver services to our communities.

One of our roles will be to champion careers within the public sector. Thus our organisations will develop joint career paths, secondment opportunities and joint training events.

We believe that this approach will enable Somerset to start punching above its weight.

Better Integration

We believe there is much more to do in delivering sensible joined up services – joining up the dots. Somerset has taken this approach seriously in many of its partnerships illustrated by the Somerset Waste Board project and in the South West Audit Partnership. We believe there are other services that would benefit from the same approach.

- Set up a Joint Strategy Unit to work with the SSP on long range strategy and policy options. Within this unit we would consolidate research data, technical evidence, GIS analysis.
- Create a major planning application response team.
- Investigate creating a county wide regulatory service that includes Environmental Health, Licensing and Trading Standards
- Ensure closer alignment of housing and social care services.

We want to explore all of these and others where we can work in a more resource efficient way in more detail. Decisions will be made based not only on efficiency but also on what improvements would be made to services, what would make them more sustainable and also what brings about added value for the

customer. We will also commit to exceeding the Government's efficiency requirements through this agenda.

We can demonstrate that we have experience of connecting our services – at a district level and at a county level. We have made connections between both these levels of local government that makes sense. We believe we can use that experience with a wide range of other organisations so that we do start to have real joined up public services in Somerset. We intend to work closely with the other key public agencies in the county, in particular the Regional Development Agency, the Learning and Skills Council, the Police and the PCT to achieve this. Two areas that we would want to focus on initially are joined up planning around crime, youth offending and our drug and alcohol services and joint planning by the relevant agencies to ensure that the significant pockets of deprivation in Somerset are addressed.

We are passionate about improving customer service and will be working to provide integrated public access to services with other public agencies.

More Local Empowerment

We will have a more joined up approach to our local area focus. We believe that all three tiers of local government can work effectively together at a local level through new community partnerships. These would ensure our local communities are able to set their own priorities and draw in the required resources. These new local community partnerships would be based where possible on existing local area networks or local community planning areas and would include representation from the parish councils, local community networks etc. It is important that these new local area forums cover areas where there is an existing sense of place that means something to residents and that they have a clear mandate for their existence which must include responsibility for community planning.

We also want to develop our schools as local community hubs with access to a wide range of services and facilities.

Modernised Ways of Working

All authorities are committed to providing back office services in the most efficient way. The main, though not exclusive, vehicle for this will be the ISIS joint venture project (Improving Services in Somerset). It is committed to joining up and bringing efficiencies to the support and transactional services and also bringing investment in new technologies and transformational ways of working to all areas of our business. ISIS is due to be launched for the two founder partners (Somerset County Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council) in summer 2007. Avon and Somerset Constabulary are also in the process of joining as a

founder partner. All Somerset authorities have expressed an interest in ISIS and it is feasible that other authorities could join as early as 2008.

Improved Customer Access

We will bring improvements to our customer access. The plans being formed within the ISIS (Improving Services in Somerset) programme will be applicable to all areas of Somerset. This will include upgrading the telephony and IT infrastructure to give much improved access via these two channels. It will mean the opening of new customer access centres in main towns – but also in other communities using the library network and other community facilities. It will also facilitate the use of much improved mobile communications technology bringing our services to people's homes and businesses. The IT investment being made by the joint venture of ISIS is the building block that underpins this and which ensures it works effectively. Through ISIS we are already working with Avon and Somerset Police and discussing joint public access arrangements. As this approach takes shape we would be inviting others to join so that wherever possible there would be a point of access (or at very least a signposting service) for the main public services.

We are passionate about meeting the needs of all of our communities within Somerset and we believe that the most effective way to meet these needs is via a mix of structures that can be both strategic and locally focussed, that can have greater influence regionally and nationally and yet respond flexibly and quickly to a local requirement. For our rural communities we believe that our new approach to customer access via ISIS will better address the local customer access issues. We also believe that retaining a three tier local government approach means that the needs of these dispersed communities will continue to be championed effectively. Where we have pockets of deprivation within our towns we believe that our more joined up approach across our own organisations and our ability to have greater influence strategically will enable us to engage all the relevant agencies in working together with the community to reduce this deprivation.

Efficiency Savings

We already have the business case for the savings we will make through the partnership approach to Waste Services and the business case savings that will accrue from the ISIS project. Therefore, through this enhanced partnership approach we are confident that there are substantial efficiencies to be made and commit to making similar levels of efficiency gains to those proposed in the Somerset unitary bid(s) – but without the structural change and set up costs that this would incur. The detail of the financial case is still to be finalised and will be done once the business case for the unitary bid(s) is known. This partnership approach has to be for the benefit to the council tax payers of Somerset, not only

from a financial perspective, but also because we can deliver this ambition without any disruption to services.

When could we implement this?

A year from now ...

- We will have implemented our new leadership structures
- ISIS will be up and running with the founding partners and new partners will be in the process of joining
- We will have one customer access strategy for Somerset
- We will have investigated the next phase of services which need to be joined up across the county and implemented a Somerset Waste Board.
- Plans will be in place for the community partnerships
- We will have set up the Joint Strategy Unit plus think tank sub-groups to find innovative solutions to Somerset's key issues
- We will have implemented a single Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership in the west of Somerset to align to the police BCU (Basic Command Unit)
- Efficiencies will be delivered above the level required from 2008 onwards.
- We will have continued to deliver our services and operations without interruption.

Five years from now ...

- Somerset will have a significant voice at regional and national level
- Investment in Somerset will be strong and our citizens will be seeing the fruits of regeneration
- Our communities will have their own local area plans
- Our service planning will be fully integrated, between ourselves and also with other public agencies in the area.
- We will have better balance between strategy and local focus
- We will have modernised services, resulting from investment made from efficiencies.
- Citizens will have improved access to services and satisfaction with our services will be in the top quartile nationally

Conclusion

This new Team Somerset approach has the ability to demonstrate the hallmarks of great service to the people of Somerset. It is based on a collective and shared ambition to improve the well being of those who live, work, learn or invest in Somerset. It has not been based on a rigid or mechanical division of responsibilities. We have started down the road of change in Somerset but to see the full benefits of what we have started we now are prepared to act in some radically new ways.

APPENDIX 2

This statement is not based on self-preservation or self-interest, but knowledge of what has been achieved, what is possible to achieve, and the importance of balancing co-ordinated strategy and service with local delivery, accountability and focus.

This is a positive statement of ambition for Somerset.

An Illustrative Example of Enhanced Two Tier Governance in Somerset

We believe that by working together we can tackle our problems in a fresh way and bring some new approaches to solving some of the key issues that our communities are concerned about. This illustrative example of how the governance of enhanced two tier working could operate demonstrates how this could be achieved strengthening a local focus with a sub-regional overview. It is probable that this will not be the final model of Governance that is used in Somerset, its purpose is to demonstrate that our prospectus in one of innovation in improvement to address the complex needs of our sub region.

The illustrative model below addresses the four key goals of the Government's White Paper, Strong and Prosperous Communities in a way that resolves the tensions between what can be seen as the potentially competing objectives of:

- Enhanced Strategic Leadership
- Neighbourhood empowerment
- Value for Money
- Equity

The following paragraphs outline the roles of each element of this enhanced two tier working model.

Strategic Board

The Strategic Board would comprise the Leader from each Council and key representatives from the Somerset Strategic Partnership such as Government Office and business representatives. The Strategic board would be supported by a Project Board comprising the Chief Executives of each Council

The Strategic Board would lead Team Somerset setting the sub-regional strategic direction, overseeing the changes that will be required to deliver the efficiencies that will be required whilst addressing the needs of our communities and citizens. This would include agreeing lead authorities and areas where we will share service delivery so we can share and build upon our strengths. We could also make better use of agency agreements among councils to reduce the need for citizens to have to know who is providing a service and at the same time improve the level of service being provided.

The Strategic Board would not operate as a quasi-council but a group responsible for setting the parameters and objectives for collaborative working in Somerset.

County and District/Borough Councils

The Strategic Board would reduce the inappropriate hierarchical nature of the relationship between County and Districts creating a local focus whilst

addressing the county-wide overview. One of the key aims of all the Councils would be to work collaboratively to achieve the vision agreed by the Strategic Board. There would still be a strategic role for each Council and the purpose of this model is not to reduce local accountability but enhance it. Local people would still be represented by their local council, who would still deal with the day-to-day issues that affect their communities. There would also be a number of collaborative arrangements among the authorities that would create a network of purposeful partnership working. Examples of this are already in place with the Somerset Waste Partnership, the South West Audit Partnership, the ISIS project and the Joint Transformation Group arrangements between Mendip and South Somerset District Councils.

It is proposed to increase the integration of the LSP's on the Somerset Councils by facilitating a joint conference between the District Executives and the LSP's twice a year to ensure an in-depth understanding of the issues facing key stakeholders and the progress that is being made in address our communities needs.

Community Partnerships

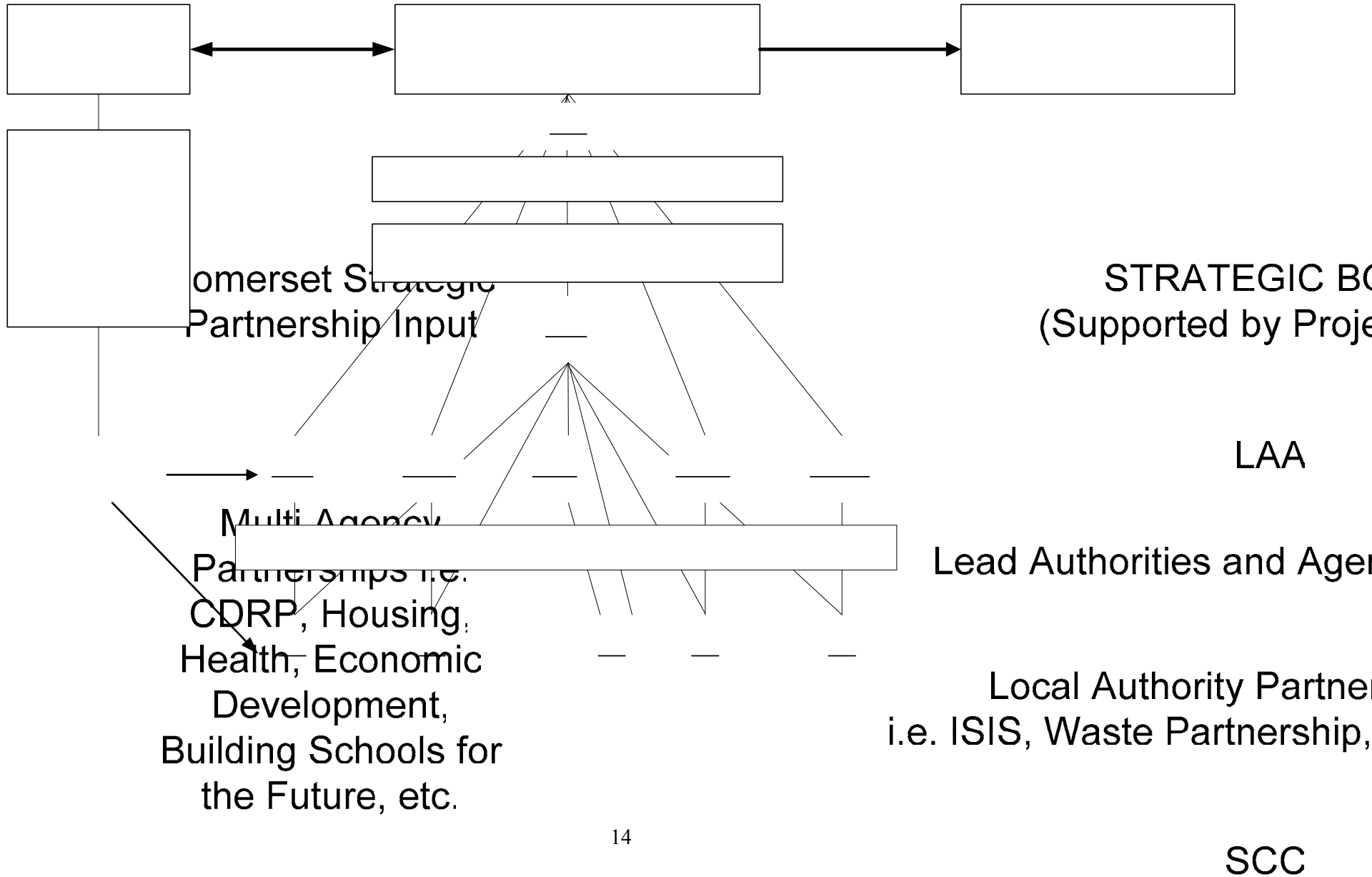
As part of facilitating a more joined up approach with a local focus we will establish Community Partnerships across Somerset. These Partnerships would comprise County and District Cllrs for that area and a representative of the LSP, all members of the CP would have equal voting rights. They would also include representatives from the Parish Councils in that area. These Community Partnerships would have executive functions delegated to them by County and District Executives and a budget to enable them to affect change for their local communities. They would also be responsible for community planning within their area. It is anticipated that each Community Partnership would serve a population of between 30,000 to 50,000 people depending on the nature of the area, this would probably create between 11 to 15 CP's.

CP's would have a local call for community action role where local communities could represent their views/hopes/aspirations/concerns via their representative of the CP in accordance with the aims of the White Paper

Somerset is made-up of a diverse range of communities and the CP's need to reflect this. It is proposed that there is a range of options for the management of each CP so they can serve the local distinctive needs of their communities. This could include the option to co-opt representatives from other sectors such as voluntary and community sector and business community.

To ensure that the CP's are able to effectively operate within the parameters of the strategic framework for Somerset there would be clearly defined delivery levels or County-wide minimum standards that each CP would have a responsibility to achieve.

Illustration Example of Enhanced Two Tier Working



DRAFT **11th January 2007**

The Right Choice for Somerset West:

A Unitary Proposal

Executive Summary

Firstly, we welcome the opportunity to consider transformational change to improve service delivery and outcomes for all of our customers.

Having reviewed the evidence, we have developed a governance model that we strongly believe will provide the right structure for our communities to access the services they require to meet their needs, and to effectively plan for and shape our communities for the future.

This submission is for a Unitary Authority for Somerset West, based on the areas presently covered by Taunton Deane, Sedgemoor and West Somerset District Councils (population 252,200, total area 1,751 sq. km).

The remainder of the present County of Somerset is the subject of a separate but complementary proposal for a Unitary Authority "East Somerset" - the current area presently covered by South Somerset and Mendip District Councils' boundaries with a population of 263,400 and total area of 1,698 sq. km.

This proposal outlines a clear opportunity for the people of Somerset West to have a Council that is large enough to think and act strategically and deliver national and regional outcomes, for

example, on driving-up economic productivity, achieving value for money and also able to offer greater flexibility and empowerment to communities, taking forward the opportunities offered by the White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities".

We believe that a Unitary Somerset West Council will be better placed to:

- Take advantage of economies of scale to deliver value for money
- Have the critical mass to work with partners to influence regional and national thinking
- Provide focus to deliver and balance the housing and economic growth sought by the Regional Strategies for the M5 corridor, and through the joint delivery of the Taunton and Bridgwater Regeneration Visions, as well as economic revival of the more remote rural areas
- Create capacity and combine expertise into multi-disciplinary teams and through joint working on specialist areas, such as regional strategy and improving educational outcomes
- Understand and respond better to the detailed needs of its diverse communities, through more innovative and holistic approaches to community engagement and participation, partnership working and service delivery
- Provide the right balance between strategic capability and local focus to create capacity to tackle pockets of acute deprivation and social exclusion
- Enhance locality working through local service hubs and community partnerships to further develop and integrate multi-agency service delivery to ensure targeted and individualised support for customers. The aim will be to create the right conditions and choices to give local people the power to improve their lives

- Implement democratic structures that avoid the democratic deficit that would arise in a Unitary County and provide citizens with robust and responsive representation and strategic leadership
- Review current informal and formal partnership working to identify opportunities to transform business processes and drive-up efficiencies

Local Government boundaries rarely describe or, indeed, make real communities and places. This is particularly true of communities defined by their history, economic function and future role. Historically, the present County of Somerset has developed economically around the growth of market towns and their rural hinterlands. These natural economic communities have continued to grow and have been increasingly influenced by external market forces, and other more recent developments, such as the M5 and A303 road corridors. As a result, the County is not a homogeneous economic zone. The reality is more complex and comprises a number of clearly distinct economic areas with distinctive social, demographic and economic characteristics.

Whilst historically Somerset has been content to quietly exist and function through this market town framework, the creation of Regional Strategies, Local Strategic Partnerships, Community Plans and the Local Development Frameworks, created an opportunity for Somerset to reconsider and re-establish its position. We have the ambition; we now need to bring together the evidence and capacity to follow through on service delivery, to achieve the outcomes required. Somerset West's approach is to further champion economic growth, to positively shape future communities and places, plan future investment and to integrate growth with other strands of service delivery. The importance of developing a

strategic framework to attract investment, enhance development quality and improve all aspects of local well-being, are key factors.

The progression of joint long-term planning working between the current Taunton Deane, Sedgemoor and West Somerset Councils now provide a platform from which to further progress the delivery of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies', housing and economic growth area along the M5 corridor, and the continued development and delivery of the Taunton and Bridgwater Visions and related local development and regeneration plans, together with the regeneration ambitions and strategies of the communities in our smaller towns, rural centres and remote rural areas.

There is a strong socio-economic and practical service delivery case to consider the County as two distinct governance areas, one based around Taunton, Bridgwater and Wellington along the M5 corridor, and the other, based around Yeovil and the other smaller towns along the A303 and A37 road corridors to the east. The single unitary model would be likely to detract from a strategic focus on the delivery of the achievement of the M5 economic growth area.

To maximise the potential of such arrangements, joint working on specialist areas of advice or service delivery would be a key characteristic to avoid duplication, to maximise efficiency, to add value to current two-tier arrangements. In some cases, particularly in regional, spatial, transport and economic development planning, strategic working and linkage with governance arrangements in Greater Somerset will be important, through a Multi-Area Agreement model.

Somerset must develop the capacity and capability to better define its long-term strategic direction, generate evidence to support the

arguments, and to secure a seat at the negotiating table to influence regional funding allocations and other external funding streams. We need Local Government to reflect the geography of Somerset and its increasingly diverse communities. Customers do not accept a "one size fits all", they want to influence service standards and they want choice. Somerset West will achieve this.

This document provides the evidence and ambition to support the case for a Somerset West Unitary Council.

This proposal is about developing a sustainable model that is balanced to achieve greater efficiency and improve outcomes, but it is also about leadership and creating capacity.

It is about playing to strengths, building on expertise and sharing it, rather than duplicating activities, and celebrating local communities, closely engaging customers in service design, priority setting and developing performance standards. Joint arrangements, shared or agreed leadership on key issues, services, and projects will be the norm.

This is a positive proposal for better Local Government in Somerset, one which we believe has significant merits and advantages when compared to a single Unitary Council based on the present administrative area of the County of Somerset – which would result in an essentially rural authority of an unmanageable geographical scale, too remote from its dispersed communities, providing little focus to shape the numerous towns and places and directly tackle deprivation and exclusion in a way that is genuinely sensitive to the needs of local communities.