1. SUMMARY

1.1 Readers of this report will almost certainly be familiar with the emerging debate on the structure of Local Government that would strike the right balance between overall costs, effectiveness and local involvement/representation.

1.2 This report attempts to summarise the stage this debate has reached at the time of drafting, seeks member advice on whether or not to pursue this debate jointly between Adur and Worthing Councils and offers the opportunity for Leaders and Senior Officers from both authorities to report back on any significant matters that arise at the Local Government Association Conference.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Adur Policy and Strategy Committee and the Worthing Cabinet are recommended to:

(a) note the position on Local Government Reorganisation summarised in this report and note the feedback provided by those attending the Local Government Association Conference

(b) agree that wherever practicable Adur and Worthing Council Officers and Members should engage in the Local Government Reorganisation debate on the basis that this should be undertaken from a joint perspective
3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Local Government Reorganisation of 1996, after long debate and substantial consultation, produced a hugely mixed set of arrangements. Almost before these were implemented, debate has continued about whether this is the best way forward. Over the years this has stimulated numerous rumours and comment suggesting that further change is taking place on the structure of Local Government. However, until recently, this had not produced anything specific.

3.2 Prior to the recent Cabinet reshuffle Central Government, in the form of the Minister, David Miliband MP, at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) launched an extensive debate and specific investigation into the form, function and financing of Local Government. This was initiated with a view to a Government White Paper being published this summer.

3.3 Following a recent Cabinet reshuffle, David Miliband MP, was moved on to a different department and a new department, headed up by Ruth Kelly MP, has taken on responsibility for the local government brief. This is now known as the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

3.4 After a relatively quiet spell, when there was some speculation that this issue might be shelved, it is now becoming apparent that this is not the case.

3.5 Various Government statements have been made and speaking engagements accepted (including Ruth Kelly to speak at the LGA Conference) which indicates that change looks more likely now than it may have done a few weeks earlier.

3.6 Other actions have raised the temperature, such as the recent publication of the South East Counties document proposing an improved approach to local government based on county boundaries. Predictably this has stimulated much debate amongst district and borough councils and Parishes. And additionally, it is stating the obvious to say that it has made relationships between the two tiers more tense than they were previously.

3.7 Clearly, the period between now and the publication of the White Paper, expected in November/December will require discipline if local government is to keep its eye on its main tasks and the continuing development of services, etc.

3.8 For Adur and Worthing Councils, where partnership working has been a priority and has been given recognition nationally, each Authority has to decide whether or not it wishes to pursue a collective approach to the debate or whether they wish to go their separate ways. As the Adur/Worthing model is such a positive exemplar of how to improve two tier working, it is suggested that the authorities should reinforce this approach.
by continuing to develop services through this period and in any discussion of future structures emphasise the importance of taking this strong partnership environment into account in any new arrangements. In this way there is a greater chance that collectively we may have some influence over the outcome. In this context Ruth Kelly MP is being invited to visit Adur and Worthing on her tour of district borough councils.

3.9 Naturally, this topic will develop and evolve over the months ahead. Members of SEMs may expect a standing item on this Agenda for meetings to come.

Ian Lowrie  
Interim Chief Executive WBC  
Chief Executive ADC  
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