

Scrutiny Committee – 13th May 2008

8. LIFT South West Bid - Enhanced Two-Tier Working

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Purpose of the Report

To inform Members of the progress made on the 'Pioneer Somerset' project. Pioneer Somerset is a programme of work, supported by LIFT South West funding, designed to radically transform and enhance the system of two-tier local government across the County. Members of the Scrutiny Committee may also consider the response of the District Executive to this report.

Action Required

Members are asked to consider the contents of this report alongside comments and recommendations made by the District Executive at their meeting on 1st May 2008. Any comments from the Scrutiny Committee will be passed to the Executive.

Comments made by District Executive

The following points were discussed by the District Executive at its meeting on 1st May 2008.

- Town and parish councils will be included in the process. They will be involved in any of the 9 work streams which are most appropriate to them.
- Statutory bodies will be added to the list of key stakeholders in the communications statement.
- £901,000 will be required from the partner authorities and Lift South West for the first year of the Pioneer Somerset Programme. SSDC will use existing resources and staff as its contribution.
- The Pioneer programme does not assume how the authorities will work together, it is designed to establish what may be required and the means by which it can be implemented.
- The Council's constitution will help to direct the decision-making process.
- A programme manager will be recruited on a fixed term contract to work on a project methodology.
- There is a need to keep the public informed of the proposals as they develop.
- A communications plan is being written.
- Members of all local authorities in Somerset will be invited to a briefing day on 16 June.

Members agreed the recommendations in the report with an addition that progress made on the Pioneer Somerset project be regularly reported to the District Executive.

Background

Members will recall the work undertaken as part of the unitary debate throughout the first half of 2007 and the resultant decision by the Government to retain the two-tier local authority structure within Somerset.

The decision to retain the existing two-tier structure of county and district councils by no means paved the way for retention of the current methods of delivering services. Quite the opposite, and the challenge has been set for the authorities within the county to radically change the way they -

- Provide Strategic leadership,
- Work together to deliver services,
- Interact at the local level with parish and town councils and local communities and
- Deliver material efficiency *and* budget savings.

There is an expectation that Somerset authorities will jointly deliver the savings.

Partner authorities are:

- Mendip District Council
- Sedgemoor District Council
- Somerset County Council
- South Somerset District Council
- Taunton Deane Borough Council
- West Somerset District Council

To meet this challenge, each of the above named authorities have been working together at Chief Executive and Leader level, with designated lead Directors, to develop a project brief that will deliver the results required. These are detailed in the Programme Initiation Document (PID).

It should be noted that the Pioneer programme does not make assumptions about the future and how the individual authorities should or will work together. The Pioneer Programme is designed to establish what may be required, what the most positive options are and the means by which these can be implemented if approved.

Content of the Programme Initiation Document

Section 2 of the PID sets out the vision and aspirations of Somerset's elected Leaders, and the outcomes they would ultimately like to see delivered through an enhanced system of two tier local government. Remaining sections of the PID (3-5) concentrate on the Pioneer Somerset Programme, establishing:

- The overall aims of the Programme
- A high level action plan
- Programme delivery arrangements

Final sections summarize the funding requirements from LIFT SW in order to secure the grant of £311,000 and identify the accountable body, Mendip District Council, and other lead contacts for the Programme.

What does Pioneer Somerset seek to deliver?

The Vision for Pioneer Somerset is provided below.

By 2013, the county and 5 district councils of Somerset will be working in a seamless and fully integrated way, delivering services of consistently high quality, generating substantial efficiency savings and making life better for our residents and diverse communities.

We will be recognised as a National leader, innovator and pioneer in enhanced multi-tier working.

This vision will be delivered through the work programme to be developed through Pioneer Somerset resulting in the following outcomes. These are detailed in full within the PID.

Outcome 1: Efficiency

To achieve annual savings, across all Somerset councils, arising from enhanced two-tier working of £20m, by March 2013.

Outcome 2: Customer satisfaction

For every principal local authority in Somerset, to achieve levels of overall resident satisfaction in the National top quartile, by 2013.

Outcome 3: Reputation

To achieve a marked improvement in the perception, reputation and recognition of Somerset and each of its local authorities, including positive direction of travel and use of resources ratings in the new Comprehensive Area Assessment of level 3 or above, by 2013.

Achievement of all outcomes has been timed to coincide with the end of the Pioneer Somerset programme (2013).

The outcomes outlined above will be supported by the following *underlying principles* as developed jointly by the Leaders in December 2007.

- To work together effectively
- To reduce costs
- To increase value for money
- To establish governance arrangements when working in partnership
- To devolve service delivery to the most local level possible.

Interim targets for each of the above outcomes will be established early in the programme, alongside detailed and robust performance tracking and reporting procedures.

Work undertaken by the Pioneer Somerset programme will link directly with the emerging Local Area Agreement and support the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

Financial Implications

There are clearly significant financial implications in relation to this report and the Pioneer programme. The bid to LIFT South West has secured £311,000 in support of this first phase of the work but this funding has still to be allocated in detail across the programme. In addition each authority will be required to make staff resources available to support the various work streams and this may, in some areas, require a degree of backfilling. At this time there is no allocation for financing of this at SSDC, however, the Chief Executive would wish to find any required financing from existing resources.

As outlined earlier in this report and within the PID document at Appendix A, one of the key outputs required from this programme of work is the delivery of significant efficiency and budget savings. This requirement should be seen in the context not only of national government expectations but also the ongoing budget pressures that each authority is facing.

Other Implications

Legal Comments

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report but clearly as the work programme develops and proposals come forward each element will require full legal consultation and advice.

Any proposed changes in relation to joined up political leadership will require detailed legal assessment.

Equality and Diversity

The Pioneer programme of work has customer service and access at its heart and as such all work streams will seek to ensure that equality and diversity issues have been addressed. Any proposed changes to the way in which services are delivered or administered will be subject to a full equalities impact assessment including consultation with the appropriate agencies.

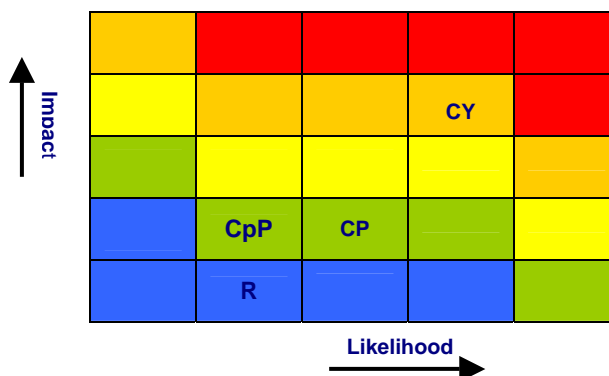
Asset Management Implications

Management of the Councils' assets will be a key work stream as the programme of work rolls out. This will include land and buildings and information systems infrastructure. In order to reduce costs effectively the programme team will be seeking to streamline assets where both possible and practical.

Risk Assessment

A risk log for Pioneer Somerset is attached to the PID as Appendix A but in considering this report Members need to be aware of the risks associated with the recommendation, as outlined in the matrix below.

SSDC Risk Matrix



Key

Categories	Colours (for further detail please refer to Risk management strategy)
R = Reputation	Red = High impact and high probability
CpP = Corporate Plan Priorities	Orange = Major impact and major probability
CP = Community Priorities	Yellow = Moderate impact and moderate probability
CY = Capacity	Green = Minor impact and minor probability
F = Financial	Blue = Insignificant impact and insignificant probability

Implications for Corporate Priorities

The delivery of corporate priorities is not likely to be affected by this programme in the short term it is likely to support them. As outlined above the authorities of Somerset are required to deliver on the savings indicated in the various proposals submitted at the time of the unitary debate. In addition each will face its own challenges in relation to balancing their annual budget and continually improving the quality of service delivery. The Pioneer programme of work can assist in securing the delivery of the savings required and at the same time mitigate the reputational risks facing the region (see also section of financial implications above).

Should the authority choose not to adopt Pioneer Somerset and work with the other councils, it will need to seek alternative means to deliver its efficiency and performance aspirations.

Conclusions

The Pioneer programme as outlined in the attached PID provides an opportunity to address the challenges facing the county and district councils across Somerset. The funding available from LIFT South West will support this programme of work and provide for the procurement of support in the achievement of the outcomes identified.

This is an exciting and challenging time for the region which provides an opportunity to develop a way of working that can demonstrate best practice in strategic political governance, local engagement and public service delivery.