

REPORT OF MANAGEMENT TEAM

COUNCIL – 17 MAY 2001

**PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON NEW POLITICAL MANAGEMENT
ARRANGEMENTS**

Summary

Consultation has been completed in relation to political management structures and proposals for executive arrangements.

Recommendation

That Council consider the findings of consultation and determine the form of the proposals to be drawn up and submitted to the Secretary of State by the end of June 2001.

Contact Officer: Paul Wyles, extension 2021

1. The Local Government Act 2000 requires that Councils undertake consultation as part of the process for determining the proposals to be submitted to the Secretary of State on new political management structures (known as executive arrangements). Dover District Council has determined that it will adopt new political management structures with effect from May 2002, in line with the Government's timetable. Accordingly consultation has taken place in partnership with MORI on the three models: Leader and Cabinet, Mayor and Cabinet and Mayor and Council Manager.
2. At the Modern Local Government Working Group of 30 April Members received a report with the following recommendations:-
 - (1) That the Working Group note the findings of consultation which indicate support for the Elected Mayor and Cabinet option which would lead the Council to submit proposals to the Secretary of State for new executive arrangements on the basis of an Elected Mayor and Cabinet subject to a referendum together with outline fall-back proposals for a Leader and Cabinet system.
 - (2) That a special meeting of Council be arranged to fully consider the findings of consultation and determine the form of submission to the Secretary of State.
 - (3) That MORI be asked to attend this special Council meeting to make a presentation on their findings.
3. Having considered the report the Working Group made the following recommendations which have resulted in the calling of a Special Council Meeting and the attendance of Mr Ben Page from MORI to present the findings of the consultation:-
 - (a) That the findings of consultation which indicate support for the elected Mayor and Cabinet option be noted.

- (b) That a special meeting of the Council be arranged to fully consider the findings of consultation and determine the form of the proposals to be drawn up and submitted to the Secretary of State by the end of June 2001.
 - (c) That MORI be asked to attend the special meeting of the Council to make a presentation on their findings.
- 4. There have been four elements of consultation undertaken by this District Council but the results indicate that only one of these (the Citizens Panel) has sufficient statistical weight to be reliable and it is therefore recommended by MORI that this should form the basis of a way forward.
- 5. The results of the consultation undertaken are documented as follows.
 - (a) Consultation as part of the Dover District Council News

In the March District Council Newsletter a questionnaire and brief details were sent to each household. The return, whilst indicating a desire for a Leader and Cabinet, was in the region of 2½%. The nature of the self selection of those who chose to send their questionnaire back, coupled with a very low return, means that this consultation is unreliable for the basis of future decisions.
 - (b) Detailed document and questionnaire sent to partner organisations

Many organisations either failed to comment or stated that they did not feel in a position to comment on the internal structures of this organisation. Only 23 commented positively on any of the options and whilst indicating a preference for Leader and Cabinet, again a very poor turnout means that these results are not valid for the purposes of determining the way forward. A copy of the information document is attached as Appendix 1.
 - (c) MORI commissioned focus groups

MORI undertook focus groups on perceptions of the current system and the proposed models. The conclusion reached by MORI is that "the Mayor and Council Manager option receives most support, but based on the perception that it is most likely to deliver real changes to the quality of services. It is seen as offering the most radical change. Those primarily concerned with service delivery find it, as the only model which refers explicitly to the officer side of the Authority, appealing." This type of research is useful in identifying the issues and gaining an understanding of the perceptions across the District although the findings cannot be considered to provide statistically representative data and therefore this cannot be used as a source for decision-making on its own. A copy of the report from MORI on this element of consultation is attached as Appendix 2.
 - (d) MORI quantitative research using the Citizens Panel

A copy of the findings of this research is attached at Appendix 3 entitled "The Future of Dover". In this study the greatest response was in favour of a Mayor and Cabinet approach with a Mayor and Council Manager coming second. Lowest support was recorded for the option of Leader and Cabinet with only 13%. MORI state "When presented with the three options for change views are not clear cut but a majority choose one or other of the

mayoral options. One third of the respondents favour the Mayor and Cabinet (36%), one in five prefer Mayor and Council Manager (20%), and one in eight opt for Leader and Cabinet (13%). However three in ten respondents do not think they have enough information at this stage to make a decision (30%). Among those who state that they know at least a fair amount about the options for change, support for the Mayor and Cabinet option is even stronger – rising from 36% support amongst all respondents to 52% of those who are more informed. This is not always the case in our experience. It suggests that the Council does need to consider a referendum on the Mayor and Cabinet model."

6. These findings are supported by other questions within the survey relating to local democracy contained within their study. Again, MORI state "The Mayor and Cabinet model is seen to be the most effective way of improving how the Council works. It has the strongest impact potential to produce decisions that are in touch with local views. Half of the respondents state this option is likely to produce this result (52%), compared to only 9% of respondents who think that the Leader and Cabinet will be best suited to this, or one in five who see the Mayor and Council Manager achieving this (22%)."
7. Of the consultation methods undertaken, it is the Citizen Panel work undertaken by MORI that forms the most cohesive and reliable set of data. In fact it must be stated that the other consultation results, whilst a way of keeping the public informed and useful to identify general views, cannot be relied upon when making judgements about the wishes of the general population.
8. In a recent notification from DETR (see Appendix 4) it is clear that the Government expects that when a local authority sends its proposals to the Secretary of State it must demonstrate how it has consulted and how that consultation has influenced the decision on the choice of political management structure. The Secretary of State will have regard to the consultation statement accompanying the proposals in deciding whether to exercise his powers of direction so as to require a Council to hold a referendum on a proposed new constitution. Accordingly it appears, from this consultation, difficult for this Authority to do anything other than opt for a referendum for an Elected Mayor and Cabinet model. Such a referendum would take place in September or October 2001 with an election for Mayor, if such a referendum returned this option, being held in May 2002.
9. Also required within any proposals sent to the Secretary of State which include an Elected Mayor must be outline fall-back proposals which would be implemented if the result of the referendum is to reject the proposals for an Elected Mayor. These could be a Leader and Cabinet model or other alternative arrangements as determined by the Authority, but within clearly defined guidelines from the Government. Further consultation is required on these fall-back arrangements and this will be undertaken in the June edition of the Dover District News.

Background Papers

See Attachments listed below.

Resource Implications

These are difficult to identify at this stage although MORI have indicated that the total cost of a referendum and the election of a Mayor could rise to as much as £100,000. Ongoing costs thereafter would be related to salary for an Elected Mayor which has

yet to be determined and would be reliant upon the scope and time required for someone to undertake this office.

Impact on Corporate Objectives

The way in which the Council manages its political management structures will have a clear effect on the delivery of services and the Corporate Plan.

Attachments

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Appendix 1 | Guidance document sent to Partner organisations |
| Appendix 2 | MORI findings of qualitative research exercise (focus groups) "Political Management" |
| Appendix 3 | MORI findings of quantitative research exercise (Citizens panel) "The Future of Dover". |
| Appendix 4 | Guidance from DETR. |

MANAGEMENT TEAM

The officer to whom reference should be made concerning inspection of the background papers is the Democratic Services Manager, Chief Executive's Department, White Cliffs Business Park, Dover, Kent CT16 3PJ. Telephone: (01304) 821199, Extension 2352.