

25 July 2007

Chief Executive
Shropshire County Council

Our Ref:
Your Ref:

BY EMAIL

Dear Chief Executive,

PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE UNITARY STRUCTURES

In response to the Invitation to councils in England issued by the Secretary of State on 26 October 2006, your council submitted a proposal for future unitary structures by the 25 January deadline. I wrote to you on 8 February 2007 informing you that your council's proposal conformed to the terms of the Invitation and on 27 March 2007 informing you that your proposal, together with the further information that you provided to explain and clarify it, would be proceeding to stakeholder consultation.

I am now writing to inform you that, in the Secretary of State's judgement, there is a reasonable likelihood that, if implemented, the proposal would meet the outcomes specified by each of the criteria set out in the invitation. Consequently, she is minded to implement your proposal if and when the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill is enacted.

This decision was reached having regard to your council's proposal, the further information that you have submitted, the responses to the stakeholder consultation and all other relevant information available. In relation to each of the five criteria the Secretary of State reached the following views on your council's proposal:-

P Rowsell
Deputy Director Local Democracy
Department for Communities and Local Government
5/E8 Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU

Tel

Strong, Effective and Accountable Strategic Leadership

The Secretary of State believes that the proposed corporate structure with an inclusive approach towards all Members, has the potential to maximise talent and capacity and contribute to strong strategic leadership. She also recognises that there is commitment to embed strong partnership working across the public sector and plans to have three Area Partnerships in addition to the Local Strategic Partnership to focus on 'place' rather than 'interest'. She concluded that there is a reasonable likelihood of the proposal achieving the outcomes specified by this criterion.

Neighbourhood Flexibility and Empowerment

The Secretary of State considers that plans for delegation of services to 27 local joint committees will ensure that local communities have sufficient opportunity to influence local service delivery. She concluded that there was a reasonable likelihood of the proposal meeting achieving the outcomes specified by this criterion.

Value for Money and Equity on Public Services

The Secretary of State considers that the proposal is likely to provide opportunities for improved service delivery, such as the proposed 'One-Door' access to services. In addition, she considers that a single unitary authority will be able to exploit economies of scale. Accordingly, she concluded that there is a reasonable likelihood of the proposal achieving the outcomes specified by this criterion.

Affordability

The Secretary of State considers that the financial case is reasonably robust and there is little risk that the proposal would be unaffordable. Accordingly, she concluded that there was a reasonable likelihood of the proposal achieving the outcomes specified by this criterion.

Supported by a Cross Section of Partners and Stakeholders

The Secretary of State considers that whilst there is strong opposition from some district councils, the proposal has the support of key stakeholders in the public sector and business. In addition, whilst certain districts carried out polling which came down heavily against the proposal for a unitary council for the County, the Secretary of State considers that the climate in which the polls took place, including the information that was available to voters either directly or as a result of press debate suggests that the results need to be viewed with caution. Overall therefore, she concluded that there was a reasonable likelihood of the proposal achieving the outcomes specified by this criterion.

Conclusion

If you have any queries about the substance of the decision you should write in the first instance to Leigh Bura at leigh.bura@communities.gsi.gov.uk .

Yours sincerely,

P Rowsell