

SELBY DISTRICT COUNCIL

THE TEN YEAR VISION

Introduction

The Council needs a longer-term vision than the three or four years implied by budget planning and the Council's term of office. The task of defining this vision is made more difficult by the current debate on regional and local government. The debate makes the future of the Council uncertain; indeed the very existence of the authority is very much in doubt. However, we owe it to the people of the District to look beyond possible changes in structures and boundaries. The Council must devise plans and policies, which will improve the quality of life for local people, *whatever* the future form of local government.

The paper falls into two parts:

- **The ten year challenge.** The paper begins by describing our vision of where we feel the area served by SDC should be in ten years time.
- **The Council's response.** We then outline the tasks we need to undertake to achieve that vision. These tasks may be taken over by a successor authority, but we can start work on these tasks now.

In describing "how we would like things to be in Selby District in ten years time" it is inevitable that parts of our description will sound like a "wish list", or a utopian vision. However, the vision presented here is intended to be ambitious but realistic.

Preparing this statement - *The Ten Year Vision* - has helped us to focus the Council's efforts on a set of key priorities. One of the criticisms made of the authority in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in January 2004 was that we lack clarity in our priorities. We have therefore listed the Council's priorities in a single short document, "Our Aims and Priorities". This does not set new priorities for the Council, but it does provide a central reference point for communicating our priorities to customers, staff and partners. It will also guide us in decisions about how the Council will use its resources.

The ten year challenge

National developments

- 1 **Wide view of public services** - We expect that public services will be seen increasingly as a seamless whole: Inland Revenue, Benefits Agency, Environment Agency, Police, Development Control, etc. all regarded as a single set of services for the public.
- 2 **Access to services** - We expect to see dramatic improvements in the ease with which the public can access these services.
- 3 **Joined-up services** - Increasingly, the boundaries between agencies will be blurred so that people can pursue their complex needs through a small number of contacts (preferably one) rather than having to piece a picture together from many agencies.
- 4 **Focus on outcomes** - We expect continued pressure for high performance and good value for money with the focus on outcomes (the achievement of measurable results) rather than inputs or processes.
- 5 **Customer focused** - The value attached to outcomes will be the value to customers and customers' views will be driving service provision rather than professional interests.
- 6 **Many channels of access** - Although e-government will have grown in ten years, and the take-up of Internet access will have increased, there will still be a need for direct contact, telephone services, mobile and kiosk services, etc.
- 7 **Small households** - A widespread demographic trend towards an older population living in smaller households: retired people, young people who have no family as yet, and divorced or separated singles. It will be more difficult for young people to become owner-occupiers. These trends will change the demands placed on all public services.

Regional scene

- 8 **Stronger regional structures** – Even after the "no" vote in the North East in November 2004, we expect that over the next ten years there will be a move to stronger regional structures of some sort, and that unitary local government will become the norm throughout England.
- 9 **More regional coordination** - We expect to see a stronger regional government, with many fewer, but more powerful, elected representatives.
- 10 **Regional Economic Development** - We expect growth in the regional economy will continue to the benefit of the people in our District. We expect that their interests will be reflected in the development of the Regional Spatial Strategy and the Regional Economic Strategy.
- 11 **More commissioning, less "direct" provision** - More and more services will be provided by private sector companies with the public sector operating as a purchaser on behalf of the local community. This implies an increase in public surveys and questionnaires to achieve increased customer focus.
- 12 **More centralised procurement** - We expect that, to gain economies of scale, contracts will be offered for larger areas than at present and will therefore be managed by big businesses rather than by small councils.
- 13 **Strategic Links** – We expect that our Vision will continue to complement our partners' plans, strategies and vision statements.

These developments could be seen as bad news – the growth of remote, powerful public bodies, relying on big businesses for services, with few channels for democratic influence. But the trend need not be for an increased democratic deficit if communities can be given greater power too. While management gets bigger we hope to see, in our ten-year vision, community power coming from smaller areas than the current Selby District. We think parishes are too small and that something at the level of the CIP areas (Community Investment Prospectus) will be needed.

Our vision for the development of this new layer of local governance, to balance the concentration of power at the regional (or unitary) level, is as follows:

Community needs

- 14 Powerfully grouped communities** - Because many of our parishes are so small, we hope to see the development of groups of parishes – clusters of villages - with a strong voice in local affairs.
- 15 Empowered villages** - This will not necessarily be based on the current CIP areas, but will give a voice to small areas, covering the whole of the rural area of the district, so that rural communities can have significant influence on developments.
- 16 Capacity for powerful villages** - We foresee a role for local government in fostering these village communities and building the capacity of each grouping to shape events in their patch.
- 17 Re-vitalised towns** - For each of the three largest communities (Tadcaster, Sherburn and Selby) we hope to see strong centres acting as an attraction for shopping and business and as the hubs of rural communities. The towns will act as alternatives to the big magnets of cities like Leeds and out-of-town centres like Clifton Moor.
- 18 Lively culture / leisure scene** - There will be a vibrant and varied leisure scene with local sports and cultural activities. However, this will not be provided by direct municipal leadership but by local enterprise and community activity.
- 19 Access and power for marginal groups** - Just as we hope to see a stronger voice for villages, we hope that all sections of our community will be included in a more lively district. We will listen to the voices of disabled people, the elderly, ethnic minorities, and those in danger of being excluded from our society.
- 20 Service providers more responsive** - If these various community developments are successful, the concentration of local services into larger contracts, whether administered from Northallerton, Beverley, or Wakefield, need not be a threat.
- 21 Balance of resources and expectations** - We also hope to see an area in which there is a better balance between people's expectations of the public sector and the resources available to meet those expectations. This will be achieved by a combination of increased funding; improved efficiency and effectiveness; and a better understanding of people's real needs and expectations.

District identity

We now turn to a vision of the state of the SDC area as a whole in ten years time.

- 22 **Influencing unitary / region** - We expect that the district will have a more effective influence on regional affairs, on behalf of the people who live and work in the area, than at present.
- 23 **Focus and sense of direction** - There will be a clearer sense of direction for local people with a tighter focus on a few key issues. The district will be seen as a rural area, with strong market towns, and not as a suburban overspill.
- 24 **Strong image and community** - We also intend to see a stronger sense of image and better visibility for the area. We don't want the district to be seen as "the place where the train crashed" or "where all the mines were closed". Instead, we want a district which is well known in the UK as "*a great place to live, work, learn and enjoy*".
- 25 **A prosperous community** - Selby is already, by national standards, quite a prosperous area. We hope to see that position at least maintained, and preferably improved over the ten year period. We hope to see this prosperity measured by more than just economic indicators. We hope to see quality of life issues and sustainability driving changes, as well as a growth in local enterprise.
- 26 **Skilled workforce** - We also hope to see an employment pattern in the area which includes a higher proportion of highly skilled and professional jobs, *located in the area itself*, and fewer of our skilled residents commuting to work elsewhere.
- 27 **Balanced community** - The district will also have strategies (for example on affordable housing), which ensure a balanced mix of ages, skills, family types, social and economic groups, etc.
- 28 **Continued inward investment** - The district will have new employers and businesses and a network of support for existing businesses. The downturn in agriculture will have been halted and the district will have a lively and confident farming community.
- 29 **Community safety** - The district will continue to be a low-crime area with a high degree of public confidence in the safety of their working, home and social lives.
- 30 **Better 'managed' rivers** - The flood defences of the area will have improved and new areas for residential and business use will have been opened up as a result.
- 31 **Healthy, sustainable environment** - The economic improvement will have been won without damage to the ecology of the area. We will have pleasant countryside and rivers with opportunities for walks and countryside diversions. The towns will also be attractive, healthy and enjoyable places to live and visit.
- 32 **Responsive to demographic trends** - The trend to an older population will have been met by appropriate changes in service provision in support of independent living, especially in housing, public transport, and in the integration of services.
- 33 **Balanced affordable decent housing** - Young people will be able to set up home without crippling debt or having to leave the area.
- 34 **Sustainable transport network** - the transport network in the district will have improved. There will be moves towards greener transport provision in rural areas, and more generally, with both a better network to link village communities into major transport systems, and improvements in our links with the national networks.
- 35 **Help for pockets of deprivation** - The small areas of low income and deprivation will have been given support and help to become active, prosperous parts of the local economy.

- 36 Lively political (democratic) culture** - The involvement of local people in political decisions will be greater. This will not be expressed only through political parties there will also be active pressure groups and special interest groups campaigning in the area. People will be helped by the local government system to develop their own solutions to local problems. Elections will attract high turnouts and talented people will more readily offer to be candidates.
- 37 Compacts with other providers** - Although there will have been a dramatic increase in the use of non-governmental and private sector solutions, the public will feel that there are ways to influence service providers and that a wide range of services is organised in a coherent way.

Selby District Council's response

If the vision above is where we want to be, then we must ask what actions Selby District Council can take to make this vision of the future more likely?

Some of these actions may be handed on to a successor authority, but all our actions should be designed to be effective in as many as possible of the different futures opened up by the debate on unitary councils and regionalism.

Community development

To achieve the vision, the first part of our response should be to develop public participation and influence at the community level. As explained above, this would be achieved using groups of less area than Selby District, but greater than the area of parishes. In some cases (in the three main centres at least) a larger parish council may be big enough, but in the rural areas we will need to promote groupings of parishes.

- 38 Capacity development in the community** - We have already begun, with partner organisations, to help Community Investment Prospectus (CIP) groups to develop their sense of identity and purpose. We should make available training and advice for these CIP groups so that the drive and ownership comes from them, but assistance and expertise is available as their plans develop.
- 39 Smoother planning** - The changing framework for land-use planning and development control will, we believe, open up opportunities for CIP areas to be influential. However, this will only happen if we encourage outward-looking, collaborative leadership within our rural communities. Strong links between services - especially education, housing and transport – coupled with an outward looking approach, will support the continued liveliness of our many village communities.
- 40 Grouping Parish Councils** - We should strengthen links between ourselves and parish councils, but also develop bonds between neighbouring parish councils to form a "critical mass" to maximise their influence.
- 41 Renaissance Project** - In the three urban areas of Sherburn, Tadcaster and Selby we will play a part in the renaissance project, bringing a new lease of life to the three towns. This will be done in a way that aids the prosperity of the rural areas.
- 42 Devolution of spending power** - We should allocate a small, but significant budget to be spent by the CIP groups on projects of interest to them. The amount of money need not be huge. Even a small amount of money will encourage engagement at the CIP level if it brings genuinely local decisions and local results.

To enable local people to have a long term influence on their area, these community-level tasks should be begun by Selby District Council now, even if they must later be passed to a successor authority.

District tasks

Next we turn to tasks for the District Council itself. These too may pass to a successor authority, but this is how we must begin the work of turning our ten year vision into a reality which will improve the quality of life for those who live and work in the district.

- 43 **Openness to change** - We must develop a culture within the Council of openness to change. Whatever the future form of local government in the area, we must encourage staff and councillors to develop the positive aspects of new systems.
- 44 **E-Government initiatives** - We must press on with e-government work, making the best use of partnerships wherever possible, so as to build a more accessible and modern interface for all our customers.
- 45 **Cultivate awareness of neighbours** - We should use the CIPs developments to explain the emerging picture on regional and local government to leaders at the CIP level. We should offer assistance to CIP projects in obtaining funds and assistance from regional and national bodies. We could offer training courses in such skills as village surveys, advocacy, funding applications, etc.
- 46 **Develop strong "brand"** - We should develop a strong brand for Selby District Council, but also for the area as a whole. This will help with the economic regeneration of towns, inward investment, the engagement of local people and businesses, and the exercise of influence on behalf of local people.
- 47 **Learning new skills** (staff and councillors) - We should analyse the future skills needed by councillors and staff and devise a training programme to meet any gaps in skills. Skills associated with web-based systems are an obvious need.
- 48 **Future of major services** - We should extend the "options appraisal" approach from options for Council Housing to other areas and see whether, for example, the Abbey Leisure Centre could be better managed by a Trust than directly. This will be consistent with the consult-challenge-compare-compete approach of best value.
- 49 **Willingness to develop exit strategies** - We should acknowledge that, as services are more often commissioned than provided directly, we may need to develop exit and transfer skills and strategies.
- 50 **Robust, influential development frameworks** - As the new Planning systems are introduced, we must ensure that they assist and develop such projects as the renaissance of our town centres and that they foster sustainable enterprise in the district as a whole. The new emphasis on local consultation should be emphasised as an aspect of our CIP level work.
- 51 **Consultation, Simalto etc** - As changes come in we need to improve our consultation skills and ensure that the citizen's view is not lost in the upheaval of new regional and unitary systems.
- 52 **Modernised Constitution** - We should develop the Council's constitution to obtain speed and simplicity at boards and committees. This will involve moving our present arrangements closer to the "Executive" model.

53 Youth Councils and other forums - In order to develop the next generation of community leaders, and ensure the continuing relevance of CIP processes, we should consider the introduction of a Youth Council. Similar forums may be needed for other specialist groups (carers, businesses, etc.)

Regional connections

54 Forging productive partnerships - Finally, we must ensure that we build a rich network of links with regional bodies. We must do this now to ensure the long-term influence of local people in decisions affecting the quality of life of those who live and work in the District of Selby.

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