Note of meeting between South Ribble BC and LGBCE

5 February 2013, at SRBC offices in Leyland.

Attendees:

SRBC: Cllr Mrs M Smith (Leader); Cllr M Tomlinson (Leader of Labour Group); Cllr P Smith (Conservative member of Boundary Committee); Cllr Watts (Labour member of the Boundary Committee); Mike Nuttall (Chief Exec) Maureen Wood (Director of Corporate Governance) and Martin O’Loughlin (Democratic Services Manager)

LGBCE: Dr Colin Sinclair CBE, William Morrison

Dr Sinclair opened the meeting, stating that he would run through some questions and comments that he had regarding the Council’s submission on Council Size.

He stated that he was pleased to see cross-party co-operation in the formation of the submission, and started by asking why the Council had settled on 50, as opposed to having 48 or 52 etc.

Cllr M Smith responded, saying that the Council did not want to make a radical departure from the existing arrangements, as she felt they worked well, and while she favoured a reduction, she did not want a reduction that would over-burden the councillors.

She highlighted the increased workload in terms of representation that has arisen from the formation of the ‘My Neighbourhood Forum’ initiative. She felt that the increase in electors per councillor (from about 1500 to about 1800) would not result in an unmanageable workload for members.

She also noted that the reduction to 50 was not for cost-saving reasons – SRBC already has very low councillor allowances, and so reducing the council size by 5 would not have a significant impact on costs.

Dr Sinclair then asked about Committee arrangements, and how they would change under a council size of 50.

Martin O’Loughlin noted that there are presently 55 councillors and there are 51 seats on the various committees to fill. Three councillors are not on any committees.

The Leader did not foresee any changes to the existing scrutiny or planning committee structures, noting that both were currently working well.

Dr Sinclair asked how issues like health were dealt with by the Council, and Cllr P Smith replied that Cabinet members handle the variety of portfolios which are not handled by committees.
The Leader and others then talked about the My Neighbourhood Forums program. There are 5 forums across the borough, and they meet four times a year to discuss local priorities and projects with local people. Cllr Tomlinson added that there are informal meetings of members on the Forums to plan courses of action for the Forums, which are then presented to the Forum meetings. Cllr P Smith noted that the Forums are a way for residents to get involved, and that they highlight the Council’s approach of working in a ‘bottom up’ rather than a ‘top down’ way.

The Chief Executive noted that the Forums are quite different in their focus and priorities, with the Leader adding that the forums have short-term projects as well as very long-term ones. She went on to say that the advent of the Forums has increased the constituent-facing workload of Members.

Dr Sinclair commented that the Council focus is for members to represent local people than to serve on a lot of committees.

The meeting concluded with William Morrison going through the review’s timetable, highlighting the stages at which the Council should expect to be involved.