

PROPOSED REVIEW OF PLANNING SERVICES

Report By: HEAD OF PLANNING SERVICES

Wards Affected

County-wide.

Purpose

1. To agree both the principle of a review of the Council's Planning Service, and its terms of reference.

Financial Implications

2. There are none identified at this stage. Detailed matters may arise during the review.

Background

3. The proposed review was briefly discussed at the meeting on 31st March, 2008. It has subsequently been agreed that the matter should be brought back in detail to this meeting.
4. The Planning Service has enjoyed wide ranging success in recent years and in particular in relation to Development Control performance and the formulation of the initial stages of the Local Development Framework.
5. The challenge for the future is to respond locally to the national Planning Reform agenda. At its heart is the move from a land use to a spatial planning system as the Council rolls out the Local Development Framework and delivers the new Growth Points agenda.
6. At the time of preparing this report the Planning Service had been placed within the newly created Regeneration Directorate. Similarly at that time consultation was being undertaken within the Directorate on the potential for the incorporation of the Transportation Team into the Planning Service. These changes in themselves reflect key elements of the Planning Reform agenda. An important focus of any planning service is now expected to be its ability to deliver growth, and in a sustainable way linking housing and employment growth with transportation initiatives.

Proposed Terms of Reference

7. It was proposed at the March 2008 meeting that a cross party group should be established to undertake this review.
8. It is suggested that its Terms of Reference be as follows:-
 - (a) to explore the Key Lines of Enquiry (set out below) with both officers, Cabinet members and appropriate outside agencies.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Andrew Ashcroft, Head of Planning Services, on (01432) 383098

- (b) to explore other service delivery arrangements in local authorities in general, and in high performing Councils in particular.
- (c) to prepare a series of recommendations to the 24th November, 2008 Committee.

Proposed Key Lines of Enquiry

9. On the basis of the setting up of the Regeneration Directorate, the new growth points initiative and the financial and capacity issues which have previously been raised by members and officers, the following key lines of enquiry are suggested.
- How best can the Planning function deliver the growth required up to 2026?
 - How can the Local Development Framework best be integrated with the Growth Points agenda?
 - How will the Planning Service contribute to the regeneration of the County in general, and to the provision of infrastructure in particular?
 - Does the Planning Service have the capacity and the financial ability to deliver the wider agenda?
 - How best can planning policies be implemented through the development management function?
 - How effective are relationships between officers, members and parish/town councils?
 - What work needs to be done to develop process that support and enable good communication and relationships to be established and maintained?
 - What service delivery arrangements will assist in the ongoing modernisation of the service.

Other Issues

10. The undertaking of a review of the Service will bring its own capacity issues. It is suggested that a senior officer not employed in the Planning Service should support the review.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

- (a) a cross party group be appointed by the Committee to carry out the review.**
- (b) its terms of reference be those set out in paragraph 8 above.**
- (c) Its key lines of enquiry should include those set out in paragraph 9 above.**

(d) The group report back to this Committee on 24th November, 2008.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None

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