

DRAFT RESPONSE TO THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S STRATEGIC PLANNING REVIEW

Strategic Planning Review Recommendation 1:

That the Finance and Management Committee accepts this report

Finance and Management Committee Response

This paper sets out the Finance and Management Committee's response to the specific recommendations contained in Strategic Planning Review Report.

Strategic Planning Review Recommendation 2:

That the Council adopts the proposed planning process within this municipal year

Finance and Management Committee Response

This year, significant changes have been made to the way in which the Corporate Plan is being developed, especially in terms of consultation and engagement with internal and external stakeholders. The process is still underway and there is more to be done before the Plan is finalised in June.

In terms of the planning process, the Committee considers that additional stages of consultation (as envisaged in the Review) would be 'too much' and could lead to 'consultation fatigue' amongst stakeholders.

The process of preparing the Plan started much later than the Committee would have liked. This meant that visioning, prioritising and the development of proposals was effectively 'rolled up' into one activity over a relatively short period of time, in order to meet budget deadlines.

The Committee recognises that next year, the process of plan preparation needs to commence earlier in the municipal year and the Committee will be working with the Corporate Management Team to agree a realistic timetable and to further refine and improve the process.

The Committee has also agreed to include the development and monitoring of the Corporate Plan within the new 'Achieving More' performance management framework.

Strategic Planning Review Recommendation 3:

An exercise in visioning and priority setting is carried out in order to identify a long-term vision that clearly represents the aspirations of the residents of South Derbyshire

Finance and Management Committee Response

The new Corporate Plan has changed significantly from previous versions. It contains a new Vision for South Derbyshire, a more concise statement of the Values that will guide actions across the Council and a grouping of proposals under six 'cross cutting' themes.

These changes were prompted by the publication of the first Community Strategy for South Derbyshire, together with the Council's clear commitment to put local people at the centre of service delivery.

The Community Strategy is particularly important in relation to this recommendation because it was developed by the broadly based Local Strategic Partnership; it covers all aspects of life in the district; and; it was agreed following extensive consultation with local people and groups about local needs and priorities.

The Committee is particularly pleased that the new Corporate Plan embodies the political ambitions of the Council.

The new Corporate Plan has also been the subject of consultation with local people and other stakeholders. This has led to changes to the Themes and Action Areas and use of consultation feedback to develop a long list of proposals for further community comment and evaluation. This year, for the first time, bids for new capital and revenue spending have received additional weighting in the assessment criteria for priorities determined through the corporate planning process.

In summary, the Committee considers that the arrangements outlined above are appropriate and meet the requirements of this recommendation. However, it will continue keep these arrangements under review (in the light of experience and best practice).

Strategic Planning Review Recommendation 4:

This process becomes an integral part of our corporate planning

Finance and Management Committee Response

This is agreed in principle – see also previous comments on recommendations 2 and 3.

Strategic Planning Review Recommendation 5:

Ensure that arrangements are in place across the Council, which support policy research and will ensure it is co-ordinated effectively (especially on cross cutting issues)

Finance and Management Committee Response

The Committee recognises the important role played by good quality research in supporting and directing the work of a modern, forward thinking Council.

Responsibility for research is devolved across the Council – this is considered to be a strength, as it allows departments to focus on priority areas and gain in depth experience of specific topics; and, is also appropriate for the size of the organisation.

This research (and the associated findings/policy implications) is co-ordinated through a number of mechanisms, including Corporate Management Team, Corporate Improvement Groups and Departmental Management Teams.

Findings are disseminated (to members and officers) in a numbers of ways including reports to policy committees, Members' Bulletins, Team Briefs and the intranet.

The new Corporate Plan (which is based on six cross cutting themes) is already promoting cross service working in such areas as social inclusion and environmental management and this will act as a driver for more research on cross cutting issues.

The Finance and Management Committee considers that the present arrangements are 'fit for purpose' and meet the needs of the business.

Strategic Planning Review Recommendation 6:

The Council must do what it has already undertaken to do in its Consultation Strategy and latest Corporate Plan. Practice outlined in the strategy must be carried out in order to meet the demands of modern day living.

Finance and Management Committee Response

The Council's current Consultation Strategy was produced in 2000.

Since then, there have been many developments in this area of work – Area Meetings have grown in stature; new methods of consultation have been established, such as the Citizens' Panel and TACT, and more recently, the Council newsletter; the Council has gained experience in the use of a range of tools and techniques by working with partners on for example, the Crime and Disorder

Strategy and the Community Strategy; joint working with other Derbyshire Councils and agencies like the Police and Health has become firmly established; more use is now being made of ICT (e.g. web site and e-forms) to support consultation; and there have been important legislative changes – in particular, the requirement to produce a Statement of Community Involvement as part of the Local Development Scheme.

Government has also indicated in various policy documents that effective participation and engagement underpins the delivery of sustainable communities and that it has a role in driving up service standards.

The Council has already recognised that more needs to be done in this area and has committed in the current Corporate plan and the CPA Improvement Plan to review the existing Consultation Strategy and develop an annual programme of communication and consultation. These actions are the responsibility of the Finance and Management Committee.

Strategic Planning Review Recommendation 7:

The capacity of the Council to deliver a planned and coordinated consultation programme must be considered with the development of the Consultation Strategy.

Finance and Management Committee Response

Capacity issues will be addressed as part of the development of the Strategy.

Service Development Bids were made in the 2006 budget round towards the cost of a post within South Derbyshire CVS to undertake consultation with hard to reach groups (on behalf of the Local Strategic Partnership) and for a Corporate Consultation Officer (within the Policy and Economic Regeneration Division) to support the development and delivery of the Council's Consultation Strategy.

Whilst the CVS bid has been successful, a final decision on the Council post has still to be made.

The Committee has also asked officers to look at other ways of maximising the use of existing resources and/or 'drawing in' additional resources for this important area of work.

Strategic Planning Review Recommendation 8:

Arrangements should be made to provide political groups with officer support to assist their own policy development

Finance and Management Committee Response

At the present time, the Council is not planning to bring forward proposals for Political Assistants.

Strategic Planning Review Recommendation 9:

The Council's current response to the CPA Inspectors report should be developed to address the aspect of Member engagement and wider stakeholder involvement within the Corporate planning process.

Finance and Management Committee Response

Additional measures have been taken to engage Members and other stakeholders in the development of the new Corporate Plan. This represents a significant improvement compared to previous years.

At the start of the process, INLOGOV (University of Birmingham) was commissioned to facilitate engagement by the Majority Group and to determine a way forward.

This engagement was then extended to all members, employees, LSP partners, Parish Councils, local people and other stakeholders through a number of different mechanisms including workshops. Feedback has been used to determine priorities and action areas in the new plan.

Whilst the Committee considers that members and other stakeholders have had a significant opportunity to shape the new Corporate Plan, it will be carrying out an evaluation of the process later in the year, when the Plan has been finalised.

On a more general level, the Committee welcomes the establishment of regular meetings between the Corporate Management Team and leading members to discuss the future direction of the Council.

Strategic Planning Review Recommendation 10:

That a presentation and report on the Finance and Management Committees' agreed outcomes from this report is delivered to key stakeholders. To include:

- All Council, staff
- Parish Council Leaders
- Area Meetings
- The Local Strategic Partnership
- Residents

Finance and Management Committee Response

In most respects, this recommendation has been overtaken by events – the Council now has a new Corporate Plan (which is nearing completion) and this will be the focus of the Committee's communication with internal and external stakeholders.

Key to this approach will be the production of the final version of the Plan produced in an attractive and easy to read format by public relations and graphic design specialists, along similar lines to the Community Strategy.

OTHER COMMENTS (FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE)

The Committee would like to be formally consulted on the scope and terms of reference on any future reviews that affect its area of responsibility. This will help to clarify the process at the outset and facilitate the development of shared outcomes.

The Committee would welcome the opportunity of commenting on the scrutiny committee annual work programme. This will ensure that the scrutiny and policy functions work synergistically in support of Council aims and priorities.