

REPORT TO: Cabinet
LEAD OFFICER: Director of Planning and Economic Development

20 April 2017

Progress Update on Shared Planning Service

Purpose

1. To update Cabinet on progress in developing a Shared Planning Service between South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCD) and Cambridge City Council (CCC).
2. This is a key decision because
 - (a) it results in the authority incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to this Council's budget for the service or function to which the decision relates; or
 - (b) it is significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards or electoral divisions in the area of the relevant local authority.

and it was first published in the December 2016 Forward Plan.

Recommendations

3. Cabinet is recommended:
 1. To note progress to date on the implementation of the shared planning service.
 2. To agree the development of the multi-phase programme for delivery of the project (see **Appendix 1**)
 3. To approve the broad principles of the proposed management structure (**Appendix 2**) as the basis for the continued development of the organisational structure.
 4. To agree the allocation of additional resources to support the programme as set out in paragraph 21 – 24.
 5. To agree the early introduction of a “Greater Cambridge Planning Service” designation on signatures of emails from planning staff of both Councils
 6. To note the need for seamless ICT systems across Greater Cambridge and to note the commitment to early work (and costs) on the procurement of a common ICT system for planning.
 7. To note the high level objectives identified by the project team and invite them to consider adding to them the need to retain and support an understanding of Place in the way shared service was structured, delivered and managed.
 8. Noting the competitive market for planning staff, officers are asked to explore measures that will strengthen the recruitment and retention of planning staff.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. The main purposes of the Shared Planning Service are to provide improved services for customers while achieving efficiencies through joint working and increasing the resilience of the service.

Executive Summary

5. This report updates members on progress in developing a shared Planning Service between Cambridge City Council (CCC) and South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC), as agreed by members in 2015. It seeks agreement to a number of key principles underpinning the development of the service, a multi-phase programme of delivery, and early use of a “Greater Cambridge” designation. It also sets out an initial high level action plan, seeks agreement to the procurement of additional resources to support this, and identifies two key issues which will require early decision.

Background

6. In 2015 members of Cambridge City Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council and Huntingdonshire District Council agreed:
 - To approve the development of a project to design a Shared Growth and Planning Service, to be implemented in phases, with further decisions to be taken at key points.
 - To agree that the District authorities should continue to work with Cambridgeshire County Council to develop effective services together, and to explore options around their involvement in a shared service.
 - To adopt Key Principles for the Shared Growth and Planning Service which will shape the new service design and implementation (these Principles are set out in para 1.2).
 - To agree sharing of the costs of developing this model, and the appointment of a temporary/interim Transformation Manager as Workstream Lead
 - To ensure that staff in the affected services are involved from the outset, including the establishment of an officer group to co- produce the detailed plans for the new service.
7. The principles agreed by members comprised:

Guiding Principles (strategic level)

- Service quality and improving services for customers will be as important as achieving efficiencies
- The service will aim to keep customers at its heart, ensuring a tailored and comprehensive approach
- Sharing staff, transforming and streamlining services will all be considered in order to deliver savings
- Increased resilience and capacity will be a focus of service sharing
- The shared service will aim to create a stronger negotiating and collaborating position with developers, key customers and other partners, like the County Council and DCLG

Service Design principles (detailed level)

- Remaining close to customers in localities whilst considering a co-located

strategy function.

- A single portal for customers to support a streamlined service and deliver efficiencies for the more transactional services.
 - A single leadership post would be key to ensuring a strong link between strategy, policy and delivery and to manage the capacity of the workforce.
 - Transport and the role of the County will need to be an integral and integrated part of the new approach.
 - A commissioning approach to specialist services will need to be developed in collaboration with stakeholders and partners, taking into account and preparing the ground for wider opportunities.
8. Since 2015 other matters external but relevant to the planning services of partner councils have strengthened the impetus for the shared service. These include the continuing emphasis of national government on supporting housing delivery and economic growth, the moves toward a devolved Combined Authority and City Deal, and the continuing pressure on improving productivity and quality against a backdrop of growing pressure on local government finance. The recent LGA Peer Review at SCDC is also relevant. Within planning, the difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified staff to deliver the agenda of partner authorities have intensified, and national government has continued to encourage local plan production and speed of planning decisions by a number of means.
9. The combined Greater Cambridge planning service will be the largest shared service project, in scale and complexity of work as well as budget, undertaken by the local authority partners to date. It will result in one of the largest shire district council planning services in the country – processing more applications each year than the city of Bristol and will have a significant impact on customers and the future physical, social and economic environment locally. In the next 12 months, the service will be required to engage with significant policy and growth related development proposals. It is therefore particularly important that the project is carefully thought through and adequately resourced.

Progress to date

10. Huntingdonshire DC, through the 3C Joint Advisory Group, has decided not to proceed with active integration of the planning service at this time. In 2016 therefore a Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development serving both the City Council and SCDC was appointed. A project team of officers from both councils has been established and has held several workshops to consider how the services can be aligned and integrated, identifying priorities for action. This work has been supported by a 3C Programme Manager and Project Manager, who also support other shared service projects.
11. The associated Project Initiation Document(PID) for the project determines the scope of the shared service as comprising the following:
- Planning policy and strategy
 - Neighbourhood Planning
 - Consultancy/specialist services relating to development activity
 - Planning and related Application Processing (including trees and Listed Building Consent) and decision making
 - Planning Enforcement
 - Support for corporate and sub-regional projects (City Deal/Duty to Co-

- operate/LEP/Combined Authority support etc.)
- Consultation and related responses on behalf of the local planning authorities
- Economic Development (as defined by Corporate Plan)
- Land Charges

12. The high level objectives underpinning the project are as follows:

- a) To create and deliver an effective programme for the creation of a single unified "Greater Cambridge" planning capability serving the Planning Committees of each of the participating Councils.
- b) To build a shared capacity and capability within the combined teams (and provide opportunities to support others) in a way that seizes opportunities for efficiency and quality improvements by providing services and products (including additional charged services) that meet the needs of users and the community at the lowest net cost.
- c) To deliver a service that can be flexible - in deployment and delivery
- d) To build/retain a reputation for professionalism, staff development, the delivery of high quality outcomes and competent "business management" amongst peers and partners.

13. Work has begun to explore the potential future structure of the service, using the principles set out above. Officers recommend that the project proceed on the basis of a single unified "Strategy & Economic Development" division (all titles are provisional working titles at this stage), with subdivisions responsible for Planning Policy, Strategic Planning and Specialist Services.

14. For Development Management, given the size of the geographic area to be covered and the complexity and number of applications captured by the service the proposal is to continue to draw a distinction between the focused work of the strategic growth teams (new communities/neighbourhoods) and the more conventional "development management" activities – including enforcement activities. Officers are currently exploring the most appropriate means to organise these activities across the Greater Cambridge area and expect to bring recommendations following the conclusion of the current data analysis to a subsequent meeting of the Committee.

A diagram of the proposed management structure is included at Appendix 2.

15. Integration, communication and appropriate consistency across the service are important considerations in order that service can be delivered in line with members' agreed principles. To make the best use of the combined skills/resources of the service, the service will need to extend the use of matrix management and will expect to increase project and programme management capability in order to optimise scarce planning resources and realise the broader objectives for the shared service.

16. A more detailed structure will be used as the basis for formal consultation will be prepared, further analysis is being undertaken using the data framework provided by the PAS resources review process. At this stage therefore members are being asked to approve the outline for the new management structure. The structure will continue to be developed, and a further report including a recommendation on future structure for formal consultation with staff and unions will be brought to a future meeting. A skills audit is also expected to highlight any additional capabilities required for the effective service implementation.

17. An Action Plan is in place which demonstrates that a number of actions can be taken (and are already being taken) forward quickly to align the two services before formal integration, a fully shared service will require implementation takes place in a number of phases, and members' understanding and agreement to this approach is sought. Future work will identify a number of critical points at which "stop/go" decisions can be made.
18. One action which officers suggest can be taken quickly, and is highly symbolic of the move towards the integrated shared service, is that all relevant staff should have, below their email signatures, a strapline stating "Greater Cambridge Planning Service" as well as that of their current employing authority. This will form part of a wider move to define the "shared service" as a single entity (with common templates and consistent processes) in the minds of members and users. Both services will, for example, be collaborating in delivery of a planning "open day" showcasing the work of the two services and seeking to re-engage more with residents and local businesses and to help build an understanding of forthcoming changes.
19. Through visits to and reflections upon earlier shared service implementations, the importance of resolving key ICT infrastructure decisions has been repeatedly emphasised. Planning, and particularly Development Management, is highly dependent on an efficient ICT system. This includes customer access and communication, GIS and management information capabilities, as well as the ability to produce documentation associated with planning decisions and committee reports at minimal cost. In the case of Greater Cambridge, a seamless Geographical Information System enabling electronic mapping of both council areas will be essential, and will need to be integrated into the overall ICT. The two authorities currently operate different ICT systems – neither of which embraces fully the capacity for agile, mobile and multi-site working. The review and commissioning of an appropriate ICT solution is therefore a critical part of the programme towards integrated working and should be commenced now to enable the process optimisation/re-design central to the successful implementation of the shared service.
20. The consideration of the ICT system will break down into three main phases: scoping the requirements, specifying, and procuring and implementing the system. Officers have begun to identify potential process improvements and efficiencies which logically would form part of the scope of a new, joint system. As procurement is likely to take some time, it is proposed that resources will be assigned to this element in order that officers are able to provide recommendations to the Committee on programme and cost considerations associated with ICT integration alongside other organisational change costs later in the year.

Resources

21. Experience from 3C service implementations indicates that a focused and dedicated core resource is required to ensure effective implementation. This is particularly important given the large number of strategic projects that both planning services are engaged in or are directly supporting, as well as the critical "front line" services provided in both councils. Most of the core project team are managers with existing roles whose time available for implementation alongside their existing workloads is limited.
22. It is therefore proposed that a small implementation team is created, comprising two

experienced members of staff be seconded full time to the project to work alongside the 3C project support resource and the SCDC Service Excellence officer in order to provide local, professional insight and input into the project. The two officer posts will need to be backfilled to release these staff to focus fully on the significant practical and operational measures required to align and then integrate the two services successfully. Specialist ICT input to scope a new system will also be required, most likely from 3C ICT. Additional project management support, business improvement and critical friend input is also to be retained – to ensure that the project can benefit from the insight provided from other shared planning services and service optimisation activities across the country. This role is currently being provided by Fortismere Associates but will need to be tendered again as the project continues.

23. The resources plan for the project will need to be refined to reflect estimates for ICT implementation and the costs of change within structures etc. – as the organisational structures and operational format for the service are developed. The Project PID identifies current combined resource requirements as follows:
- 2 No Principle/Senior planning officer posts (backfilling for initial period of 10 months) (£85K)
 - Additional communications/stakeholder engagement and service definition costs £10K
 - ICT consultancy costs (system capability audit/review) £20K
 - Critical Friend and project/programme support £XXX
24. The additional resources required to carry out this project may, subject to details on implementation, be offset against the 20% increase in planning fees from July 2017 flagged in the recent government White Paper “Fixing Our Broken Housing Market”, which is predicated on the revenue raised being invested in the planning service. The White Paper also raises the possibility of further fee increases being available to councils which are delivering housing. Other potential avenues for offsetting the additional short term resourcing required for the project implementation are being explored.

Implications

Financial

25. The implementation of shared services has an expectation that net service costs to the constituent authorities will be reduced. At this stage, officers are continuing to explore and will need to model the potential benefits offered by the shared service operations following set up but are basing the service assumption on an aspiration to achieve the 15% net cost reduction amongst partners sought through the other shared service projects.

Legal

26. 3C Legal Services has been identified as a workstream of this project and will be liaised where necessary during the life of this project.

Staffing

27. There are clear implications for staff affected directly by the move to a shared service, including some who may currently be managed outside the planning service. A staff engagement processes (including appropriate engagement with the Trades Unions) will be followed in line the respective corporate processes of the constituent authorities. In addition, staff newsletters, data sharing exercises and

informal information briefings and experience sharing activities are already underway to improve understanding between the respective services.

Risk Management

28. Risk register in place and will be reviewed throughout the project.

Equality and Diversity

29. An EqlA has been carried out and will be reviewed and updated during the phases of the project.

Climate Change

30. Low to Medium Positive Impact.
The opportunities offered by increased resilience in service delivery and the ability to recruit and to provide specialist support over the wider Greater Cambridge area should result in a positive impact on the quality of new development.
The likely reduction in accommodation and energy use associated with a shared service will have a positive impact. Potential negative impact from increased travel will be mitigated by increased mobile and remote working.

Procurement

31. The shared service will require appropriate advice to be secured throughout implementation, as well as the likely procurement of a new ICT contract for both Councils.

Consultation and communication

32. This will be conducted in accordance with the Council's agreed policy.

Effect on Strategic Aims

33. This project will assist in meeting the following corporate objectives
Homes for the future
Connected Communities

Background Papers

These background papers were used in the preparation of this report:
Shared Service Overview – Strategy and Resources – 13 July 2015

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Process Chart
Appendix 2 - Broad Principles of Future Structure

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