

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet
AUTHOR/S: Management Team

8th December 2005

COUNCIL PRIORITIES IN 2006/07 AND 2007/08 ONWARDS

Purpose of the Report

1. The report invites the Cabinet to:
 - a) Agree the continuation of our current Council priorities into 2006/07.
 - b) Initiate action to agree realistic actions to support those priorities in 2006/07.
 - c) Approve a process to re-think our priorities from 2007/08 onwards and achieve greater correspondence between the Council's aims and those of the Community Strategy.

Effect on Corporate Objectives

2.	Quality, Accessible Services	The report recommends the continuation of the Council's current priorities into 2006/07 which will support the Council's corporate objectives. It is also recommended that the Council reviews its long term objectives in the next year to reflect changing circumstances and the Community Strategy.
	Village Life	
	Sustainability	
	Partnership	

Our Priorities for 2006/07

3. Last year the Council agreed to adopt the following three priorities for the three year period 2005/06 to 2007/08:-
 - (a) To improve Customer Service;
 - (b) To achieve successful, sustainable new communities at Northstowe and other major new settlements
 - (c) To increase the supply of affordable housing.
4. Work is still "in progress" in all these three areas. The **Appendix** to the report outlines the progress that will have been made on each of the priorities by the end of 2005/06 and areas for future development - either areas that have already been agreed or further areas which Members may wish to consider. In particular, the implementation of the Transformation Project will continue into 2006/07 and is closely linked with the Council's ongoing plans to improve customer service through the Contact Centre and other means. Pressures to maintain progress on Northstowe and other growth areas will only increase in 2006/07 and succeeding years and will involve an increasingly wider range of services. The Council's financial position would make it difficult to switch resources to other potential priorities for 2006/07 at this stage.
5. The Council's capacity to progress its priorities will be limited in 2006/07 by financial and other pressures. The revised Medium Term Financial Strategy approved by the Council on 16th November makes no provision for additional resources to pursue our priorities next year. Nevertheless, it is still important to maintain focus on achieving priorities, not least because of the imperatives of external factors (such as the LDF and Northstowe timetable) and because of the need to maintain momentum and

maximise service benefits from projects the Council has already started and invested in (such as the Contact Centre).

6. In view of these considerations, it is felt appropriate to continue our current priorities into 2006/07. However, we must be realistic and specific about what can be achieved. To this end, it is suggested that work be undertaken to identify a limited number of outcomes, milestones and targets for 2006/07 in each of the three priority areas which can be achieved within existing resources and taking into account other pressures on the Council in the next year. It is envisaged that the number of milestones would be significantly reduced from the number for the current year.
7. Members of the Cabinet are invited to consider whether they wish to give direction at this stage as to what they would like to see achieved in 2006/07 in relation to the three priorities. The **Appendix** may be helpful in this context.

Longer Term - Council Objectives and Priorities from 2007/8 onwards

8. There is a case for a substantial rethink of our priorities from 2007/08 onwards. The change in the Council's financial circumstances will require a more focused and targeted approach to future priorities. By 2007/08 considerable progress will have been made in ICT development and improvements in customer service, with the emphasis from 2007/08 possibly being in embedding systems and approaches rather than any major change. Local Area Agreements and changes in national priorities and local circumstances may also call for a fuller review of our direction.
9. The current Community Strategy covers the period 2004/05 to 2006/07. A new Strategy will be required to run from April 2007. Our Corporate Objectives were agreed some years ago and we now have a timely opportunity to review our Corporate Objectives and priorities at the same time as the Community Strategy.
10. The Council approved a milestone in the CPA Improvement Plan to agree a timetable to review the Council's objectives at the same time as the Community Strategy so as to achieve a greater convergence of the two. Accordingly, an outline timetable has been prepared with officers from LSP partners for consideration by the LSP Board on 30th November and the Cabinet. The key steps in the timetable are:-
 - a) **January – April 2006:** Initial research, including an analysis of recent consultation undertaken by LSP partners (parish plan consultations, LDF consultation, Northstowe consultation etc) and quantitative and qualitative research to examine needs in different parts of the district and among different age, socio-economic and other groups.
 - b) **May to July 2006:** Develop priorities, objectives and targets for the Community Strategy and for SCDC using the research results, the agreed LAA and other research data. This part of the process would involve working with Councillors, the LSP Board and Executive etc to agree draft objectives and targets for the new Community Strategy and the Council
 - c) **Autumn 2006:** Consultation on the proposals using universal media such as South Cambs magazine, website etc to set out proposed objectives and targets and to seek final feedback from the entire community.
 - d) **Late Autumn 2006.** Agree more detailed programmes and milestones to deliver the Community Strategy and the Council's objectives for inclusion in the budget and planning processes. At this stage it will also be possible to take into account the first six-month update on the LAA and plans for its future development.

- e) **January – March 2007:** Final drafting and publication of Community Strategy and adoption by the Council of its objectives. The Council would build milestones targets etc into its service plans and appraisals etc.
11. The above process will need to be conducted in a spirit of realism about resources both on the part of the Council and LSP. It is intended to try to be more targeted, using research and consultation to identify needs more precisely. It will enable the Council to align its objectives more closely with those of the Community Strategy and partners, but recognising that the Council has statutory responsibilities which it must discharge which might not fall within the Community Strategy.
12. The timetable fits in with the LAA in that proposals will be available for input into the refresh of the LAA for April 2007 onwards. The timetable is felt to be realistic and achievable, but does not allow for any major slippage. Much will also depend on progress on the Transformation Project.

Implications

13. **Resources:** The implementation of the our priorities for 2006/07 and the development of priorities for 2007/08 onwards will need to be met within the Medium Term Financial Strategy approved by the Council in November. Hence proposals to pursue our priorities will largely rely on partnership and the targeting or switching of existing resources. Emphasis is likely to remain on maintaining statutory services. The programme for the review of our priorities for 2007/08 onwards can be achieved within existing financial and staffing resources, but there will be pressure on staff as a result of recent staffing cuts.
14. **Risk:** There are some risks to the achievement of the timetable in paragraph 10 arising from pressures on staff; the impact of the Transformation Project; the time taken in reaching approval of future priorities and unforeseen pressures. This will require the process to be effectively project managed.

Recommendations

15. Members are recommended:
- a) To recommend the Council to continue the Council's current three priorities (customer service, Northstowe and affordable housing) into 2006/07;
 - b) To request Management Team to report back on a limited number of realistic outcomes and milestones to be achieved in the three priority areas in 2006/07 within existing planned resources;
 - c) To consider whether to give any direction to Management Team on specific areas where Members would like to see progress under the three priorities in 2006/07 **and/or** request officers to involve portfolio holders in (b)
 - d) To support the proposals in the report for a substantial review of the Council's corporate objectives and priorities from 2007/08, combining the process with the review of the Community Strategy.

Background Documents: No documents which have not already been published have been used.

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