

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet
AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive and Improvement Team

12 April 2007

AUDIT COMMISSION CORPORATE GOVERNANCE INSPECTION (CGI) UPDATE AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to request the Cabinet to:-
 - Recommend the draft Improvement Plan for approval by the Council
 - Establish three new posts to be financed from the £300,000 approved by the Council to strengthen the Council's capacity to address CGI findings.
 - Report on the first meeting of the Improvement Board on 29 April

The Draft Improvement Plan

2. The Council is required to submit an Improvement Plan to the Audit Commission by the end of April. An Improvement team has been assembled and a draft plan has been prepared and is attached as **Appendix 1**. This plan is still under development to ensure that it is fit for purpose and is substantially similar to the draft considered by Members after Council on 22 March. Some additional activities have been added to Workstream A; and some revisions have been made to the timings of activities.
3. The main features of the Improvement Plan are:-
 - (a) It has been prepared on a project management basis following the principles (but not the exact documentation) of the Council's Project Management Toolkit
 - (b) It contains 7 workstreams, each with a separate leader and team, in order to spread workload and ownership.
 - (c) It represents a phased approach. The first phase is the period up to October 2007. In this phase the emphasis is on getting the building blocks in place – eg
 - Developing and gaining agreement to a Council Vision, Objectives and Values
 - Maximising resources and building capacity
 - Member developmentThe second phase is seen as starting in October 2007, when the main bulk of the change and development work will take place – enabling congruence with the Council's vision and values and ensuring that the project is adequately resourced. It will also be possible to take advantage of emerging guidance on the Local Government White Paper and, possibly, the results of the Audit Commission's autumn follow up inspection.
 - (d) The Improvement Plan takes a holistic approach to the issues facing the Council, starting with the development of a vision, values and objectives. The aim is to build on firm foundations and address the culture of the organisation.
 - (e) There are certain key events that the project plan works around – for example, the elections, audit commission deadlines, the White Paper legislation and guidance. One of the major constraints is the timetable for the development of the

Sustainable Community Strategy. All five Cambridgeshire Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are planning to complete their strategies by October, which will then be used to input into the development of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) from April 2008.

- (f) The scope of the plan is broad. This causes the improvement team some concern. It reflects the breadth of the Audit Commission's findings and our concern to ensure that all corporate change processes are co-ordinated. We recognise that management of the change process is going to be difficult and resource intensive. We will need good project management arrangements to maintain control.
 - (g) At present the objectives in the plan are also broad and not as SMART as the Improvement team would like. One of the next steps in project planning will be to prepare project initiation documents (PIDs) for each area of activity in the workstreams (A1, B5, F6 etc) and this will enable clearer objectives to be defined for each activity. It is also intended to review the overall project objectives when the Council has agreed the Vision, Objectives and Values.
4. There is still a good deal of work to be done before the Improvement Plan is submitted to the Audit Commission
- (a) Preparing PIDs for each area of activity in the workstreams – to set out milestones, resource needs, outputs, outturns etc
 - (b) Review the overall resources, timings and dependencies for the project in the light of the PIDs
 - (c) Have in place effective arrangements for project managing the project.

Consideration of the Improvement Plan by Council and the Improvement Board

5. A Member workshop took place immediately after the Council meeting on 22 March to discuss the draft Improvement Plan. Members were supportive of the plan. A number of issues were raised – for example relating to:-
- Developing the role of non Executive Members
 - Managing risks effectively
 - The challenge of the Improvement Plan and the importance of focusing on it.
 - Scrutiny support and development
 - The fact that the change to all out elections every four years would require Council approval
6. At the meeting Members were invited to give their comments subsequently to the officers and to come forward if they wish to be involved in the work of any of the work streams.
7. The Improvement Board met on the 29 March and its members acknowledged that the Council had already undertaken considerable work and felt the plan was heading in the right direction. They did suggest improvements including:-
- a) The need for the improvement plan to make more explicit reference to actions already taken and progress already made in securing improvements.
 - b) The need to ensure the work surrounding the development of the Growth Agenda was properly integrated within the improvement plan.
 - c) The need to reflect the substantial corporate work stream that may evolve through consideration of the Council's housing finances.
 - d) The need for greater integration of the interfaces between work stream B (Vision & Culture Change) and work stream E (Political priorities & Decision

making) in order to recognise that a clear statement of political priorities should drive resource allocation and the corporate agenda.

- e) The need to make the proposals for the involvement of Members much more specific within the document.
8. The Improvement Board also considered that it was important for the Council to take a phased approach as suggested but in phase one i.e. before October 2007, concentrate on:
 - Developing and gaining agreement to a Council Vision, Objectives and Values.
 - Maximising resources and building capacity
 9. The Officer improvement team met on 30 April following the Improvement Board and agreed that the Improvement Plan will need to be updated to reflect the views of the Improvement Board, and of Cabinet following consideration on 12 April before the plan is submitted to Council on 26 April for approval and submission to the Audit Commission (by the end of April).
 10. The changes to the improvement plan proposed, in addition to those mentioned in Paragraph 4 above, are: -
 - a. The inclusion of an Executive Summary, which highlights the Council's acceptance of the CGI report findings; identifies the successes and progress to date, the phased approach with important milestones, and outcomes, especially those issues to be given priority in Phase 1 (paragraph 3c).
 - b. The joining up of the 'Council vision and cultural change' and 'Political priorities and decision making' work streams.
 - c. The addition of two work streams (as already planned but not currently included in the Improvement plan) concerning the Growth agenda and future housing options.
 - d. More explicit references to the role and involvement of Members in the Improvement journey.

Strengthening Capacity

11. As Members will be aware, Cecilia Tredget, Deputy Chief Executive at East Cambridgeshire District Council, has joined the Council in the post of Improvement Manager on a one year secondment. An application for the costs of the secondment is being made to Building Capacity East.
12. Discussions are also taking place with IDeA and Building Capacity East on other potential areas for external support – these include support with Member training, ongoing mentoring and leadership; manager mentoring; performance management; equalities; and revision of the constitution.
13. The Council has approved an additional sum of £300,000 pa to strengthen the Council's capacity to address the findings in the CGI report. The use of that sum has been delegated to Cabinet. The Improvement team has identified an urgent requirement for the establishment of the following three new posts to build corporate capacity in priority areas for improvement:-
 - a) **Scrutiny Support Officer** (Salary grade pts 22 to 29, £22,805 to £28,575)
Members have been aware of the need to improve and develop the scrutiny function to enable the committee to play a more effective role in enabling the Council to achieve its objectives. These concerns were confirmed in the CGI report. It is proposed that an officer be appointed whose role would be to support the development of scrutiny skills and processes and who would assist the committee to focus more effectively and add value. The officer would provide

advice, research and enable the scrutiny function to be more outward looking and contribute to other CGI themes such as community focus and partnership.

A review of the scrutiny function and its relationship to Cabinet, advisory groups and other council structures is included in the draft Improvement Plan. This will need to take into account the Council's vision, values and objectives and be part of an overall approach to Corporate Governance. However, it is recommended that the appointment of a Scrutiny Support officer should not be delayed for the review, as the role and skills required will be generic and adaptable to any scrutiny function. Consideration is also being given to the appointment of a temporary officer with external funding to assist in developing scrutiny before the appointment of the new officer.

- b) **Strategic Partnerships Officer** (Salary grade 34 to 41, £33,795 to £41,763). For some time it has been a concern that the effectiveness of the LSP has been hindered by a lack of officer support. The need will become even more acute as the role of the LAA and LSP develop as a result of the recent White Paper. The CGI report identified this area and the Council's engagement with strategic partnerships as a weakness. The role of the post would be to develop the Community Strategy; to support the involvement of the Council and LSP in the LAA; and support the LSP and its links with topic groups.
- c) **Equalities and Diversity Co-ordinator.** (Salary grade 28 to 35, £27,751 to £34,894) One of the three main recommendations in the CGI report is to address the Council's equalities responsibilities. It is envisaged that the role of this post would include working with HR to develop the Council's policies and processes to ensure a diverse workforce and comply with legislation. The main role of the job would be to work with services to help them ensure that the service they provide to the public reflects the diversity and needs of the residents we serve. A key responsibility of the post would be to enable the Council to increase its scores against the CRE standard and Race Equality Scheme checklist. Action to fill this post will proceed expeditiously to enable the Council to raise its baseline position as quickly as possible.

Recommendations

- 14. The Cabinet is recommended to:-
 - a) Recommend the Council to approve the Improvement Plan (with any changes requested by the Cabinet and the Improvement Board);
 - b) Note the secondment of Cecilia Tredget as Improvement Manager and thank East Cambridgeshire District Council for releasing her;
 - c) Approve the establishment of the three new posts of Equalities Co-ordinator, Strategic Partnerships Officer and Scrutiny Support Officer. These posts to be funded from the £300,000 allocation approved by Council for its response to the CGI report.

Background Papers: Papers to the Improvement Board on 29 March 2007
Job descriptions for the three posts

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