

## South Cambridgeshire: Working and improving together

### 1.0 Background

In February 2007 the Audit Commission published the findings of their Corporate Governance Inspection, which found that the Council did not meet minimum standards in three out of four key aspects of corporate governance. This improvement plan sets out how the Council will respond to the challenges presented by the CGI report and how it is embarking on a comprehensive improvement journey that not only addresses the concerns identified in the report but the wider improvement objectives of the Council.

### 2.0 The first steps

In order to ensure that improvement is deliverable and sustainable a number of building blocks need to be put in place and this work is well underway. The Council has accepted the findings of the CGI report and changed the way it works to focus on improvement. It has enlisted the support of partners and has set up an Improvement Board to oversee the process.

### 3.0 Leadership

In order to deliver its improvement objectives the Council will need to employ strong political leadership and pro-active decision making and it will need to demonstrate that it can act corporately and collectively to face issues that affect the whole district.

Progress is already being made in this area and the strong leadership model has been adopted by the Cabinet to ensure that tough decisions can be followed through. Members have re-opened the debate on whether to transfer the Council's

housing stock to a housing association and have entered into a new partnership with Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridgeshire Horizons to deliver joint planning arrangements. As well as this Members recognise that they need to be fully equipped for their roles and responsibilities and 10 Members are signed up to the IdeA Leadership Academy

There is also a need for strong political leadership to deal with poor Member behavior and to instill a culture of mutual respect and constructive engagement between staff and Members. The Council does take equalities seriously and will demonstrate this more forcibly by ensuring the necessary frameworks and training are in place. In order to deliver this improved leadership the Council will: -

- Consider whether to transfer the housing stock to a housing association by October 2007
- Pro-actively engage in the joint planning arrangements to deliver the growth agenda
- Address poor Member behavior when it arises by July 2007
- Carry out an audit of equalities by September 2007
- Achieve Level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government by December 2007

#### 4.0 Prioritisation

The Council already has a service planning system in place but this needs to be more clearly linked to its political priorities. A new set of corporate objectives will be agreed in the summer of 2007 setting out a clear direction for the Council. These objectives will link through a comprehensive and strategic service planning framework to individual accountabilities. This approach will ensure that each cycle of strategic planning is linked to the Council's political and budgetary priorities and will enable transparent and consistent decision making through all levels of the organisation. Most importantly it will ensure that resources are focused on the key priorities of the Council as set out in the corporate objectives. Improved prioritisation will be introduced through: -

- New Corporate Objectives set by the Council in summer 2007
- Comprehensive service planning framework adopted by Summer 2007
- Draft three year rolling service plans for 2008/9 being in place by October 2007

## 5.0 Performance Management

Robust strategic planning will provide the platform for the Council to focus on its priorities but this needs to be integrated with the performance management system to ensure the agreed outcomes are delivered. Each service plan will set clear improvement targets taking account of customer's views. The Council is already using business process re-engineering to deliver efficiency savings and the service plans will build on this approach to deliver improved performance. A culture of performance management will be embedded in the Council to improve service delivery by: -

- Performance reports reviewed quarterly by management team, Portfolio Holders and Cabinet
- The introduction of electronic performance management linked to the new service planning framework
- Over 50% of Direction of Travel PIs improving by the end of 2007/8

## 6.0 Capacity

Capacity building is the foundation for the Council's ambitious improvement programme. A revised Workforce Plan has already been adopted and targeted resources put in place. The impact of council tax capping and the pressures of increased population growth mean that long term planning is essential if the Council is to achieve its objectives. The Council has recognised that it needs to build capacity by engaging with staff to deliver its corporate objectives and it will do this by: -

- Communicating the new corporate objectives through a series of road shows for staff by September 2007
- Improving the involvement of staff in the development of service plans and target setting
- Achieving Investors in People accreditation for the whole Council by the end of 2008
- Working closely with Cambridgeshire Horizons, Cambridge City and Cambridgeshire County Councils to attract additional Communities & Local Government funding to support planning for growth.

## 7.0 Partnership

Effective partnership working through the Local Strategic Partnership will increase capacity and deliver better outcomes for local people. The Council is determined to improve its relationship with partners and has set up regular meetings with parish representatives and agreed a dedicated resource to support the LSP. The new Sustainable Community Strategy is being developed and will provide the link between the Council's own objectives and the new Cambridgeshire Local Area Agreement in 2008. The increased role of the LSP will ensure that the Council develops a community focus and engages with local citizens to shape their community. The Council will demonstrate its commitment to improved partnership working by: -

- Working with partners to agree the new Sustainable Community Strategy priorities by the Autumn of 2007
- Develop the Local Area Agreement with partners to ensure that the benefits of Local Public Service Agreement Reward grant are invested strategically to meet the needs of the local community
- Actively supporting the LSP and other key partnerships

## 8.0 Communication

The Council recognises that it needs to build a positive image in the community and has taken steps to do this by initiating regular meetings with local media. As well as this the Council needs to improve internal communication with staff. The benefits of Customer Relationship Management have not yet been maximised and the drive to improve customer care needs to continue in earnest. Improved communication will be achieved by: -

- Developing a comprehensive Corporate Communication Strategy by summer 2007
- Developing and adopting a corporate Customer Service strategy by summer 2007, based upon the existing Service First corporate customer service project

## 9.0 Political Structures

The Council has already embarked on the process of modernising political structures and has reduced the number of Council meetings and is reviewing the effectiveness of Advisory Groups. A dedicated officer is being appointed to support the scrutiny process and it is intended that an enhanced role for scrutiny will provide effective challenge to the executive as well as assisting in the development of policy. These improvements will ensure that: -

- There is a clear role for scrutiny which adds value to the Council's policy development and decision making role
- Comprehensive Forward Agenda plans are in place for all key decision making meetings i.e. Cabinet, LSP, Management Team etc. by Summer 2007

## 10.0 Delivering the improvement programme

The attached action plan sets out how the Council will deliver the first phase of its improvement journey up to the Autumn 2007. It is a detailed plan using a robust project management methodology to ensure that actions are implemented and milestones achieved. It is envisaged this plan will be revisited in the autumn to review its effectiveness and make the necessary changes to ensure the Council continues on its improvement journey and delivers its corporate objectives.