

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet

13 May 2010

AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive / Corporate Manager (Community and Customer Services)

RESPONSE TO FINANCE TASK AND FINISH GROUP – ACTION PLAN

Purpose

1. To present, and seek endorsement for, an updated action plan in response to the recommendations made by the Finance Task and Finish Group to Cabinet at its meeting on 8 April 2010.
2. This is not a key decision.

Recommendations and Reasons

3. That Cabinet consider, and endorse, the attached action plan (**Appendix A**) for monitoring throughout 2010/11.
4. This report and recommendations are necessary to ensure that improved outcomes are achieved for the authority in terms of value for money, benchmarking and consultations.

Background

5. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee agreed on 19 June 2008 to set up a cross party task and finish group with the following terms of reference:

To investigate and make recommendations for improving the Council's financial management, and budget setting processes, and to recommend improvements to future scrutiny of the budget and integrated business reports.

6. The task and finish group made an interim report to the Cabinet in March 2009, with eleven recommendations; all but one were accepted at the time. Cabinet deferred a decision about the eleventh one until the new Executive Director was in post, when it too was accepted and included in the Cabinet's action plan.
7. The final report of the task and finish group (reported to Cabinet on 8 April 2010) provided an update regarding the recommendations made in the interim report. It also set out the later work on value for money and public consultation, with the resulting recommendations.

Considerations

8. The report outlined in para 6 above set out a body of work undertaken in relation to value for money, communication and consultations leading to 3 key recommendations that the Task and Finish Group saw as needing a strategic response. These were as follows;

Recommendation A: That officers develop a Council-wide communication plan for improving residents' understanding of the value for money achieved by the District Council.

Recommendation B: That some service areas' excellent approach to benchmarking and value for money testing in the service-review and service planning process be rolled out to all service areas.

Recommendation C: That officers explore a mechanism for working with the other bodies who share the council tax, to carry out joint consultation.

9. Cabinet accepted these recommendations requesting that an updated action plan be drafted. This is attached as Appendix A.
10. The action plan addresses each of these recommendations, setting out a number of milestones under each to ensure that progress can be effectively monitored.

Options

11. Cabinet has already accepted the outlined recommendations and requested that an action plan should be drafted. The only options therefore relate to the way in which these actions are approached and the milestones attached to them. It is felt that the milestones outlined in Appendix A will result in positive outcomes for the authority.

Implications

12. Financial	Actions detailed in the attached action plan can be achieved within existing resources
Legal	None
Staffing	Actions detailed in the attached action plan can be achieved within existing resources
Risk Management	If actions are not implemented, there is a risk that value for money, communication and consultation will not improve which could adversely affect external assessments and value for money
Equal Opportunities	None
Climate Change	None

Consultations

13. As part of the Finance Task and Finish Group's work, a residents' focus group was held on 16 December 2009. Cabinet have also been previously consulted on the recommendations in the action plan at their meeting on 8 April 2010.

Effect on Strategic Aims

14. Improvements to the Council's financial planning, communication and consultation will help to meet the Council's aim to be "a listening council, providing first class services accessible to all".

Conclusions / Summary

15. The report of the Finance Task and Finish Group, outlined in para 6 above, set out the results of a body of work undertaken in relation to value for money, communication and consultations. This led to 3 key recommendations that the group saw as needing a strategic response. An action plan has been drafted to cover these areas and ensure that positive outcomes are achieved for the authority. This action plan contains a number of milestones under each recommendation to enable close monitoring to be undertaken.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Finance Task and Finish Group report to Cabinet - 8 April 2010

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