

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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| <b>REPORT TO:</b>         | Scrutiny and Overview Committee   | 4 November 2010 |
| <b>AUTHOR:</b>            | Paul Howes, Corporate Manager Community and Customer Services   |                 |
| <b>Portfolio Holders:</b> | Cllr Ray Manning, Leader<br>Cllr Simon Edwards, Portfolio Holder Finance and Staffing<br>Cllr Tom Bygott, Portfolio Holder Sustainability, Procurement and Efficiency (plus Value for Money)<br>Cllr Tim Wotherspoon, Portfolio Holder Northstowe (plus Communications) |                 |

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### UPDATE ON THE SCRUTINY REVIEW BY THE FINANCE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

#### Purpose

- 1 To report on the progress made by the Cabinet on its action plan of 13 May 2010, provided in response to the work of the Finance Task and Finish Group's final recommendations.

#### Options

- 2 The committee may wish to note this report and ask for a final update in March 2011.

#### Background

3. The final report of the task and finish group was presented to the Cabinet on 8 April 2010, making three recommendations for improving communication, benchmarking and consultation.
4. In response, at their meeting of 13 May, the Cabinet provided the action plan at Appendix A. This was an extract from the Council's response to the 2009 Corporate Area Assessment.

#### Progress made

5. The action plan at Appendix A has been updated to show the current status of the actions, which were scheduled for completion by September 2010, March 2011 and December 2010 respectively. Progress against each is detailed below.

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

6. A Council-wide communication plan regarding all aspects of communications including value for money (vfm) has been drafted and is currently being finalised. Its completion has been delayed by a number of factors but most significantly by the recruitment of a new Communications Manager. It was felt that they should have time to input into any new strategy/plan and gain ownership of it by being part of the process. Following the deletion of a number of National Indicators and the abolition of the Place Survey, discussions are ongoing as to the best way to consult with residents around Vfm. These discussions will allow us to coordinate our consultations with those of other agencies around the County therefore increasing Vfm and minimising resident consultation fatigue. As a consequence, members are asked to note the change of completion date for this action to December 2010.

**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.**

7. It should be noted that a number of changes have been made to the action plan following the abolition of CAA by the new coalition government. This has also had the impact of allowing the authority to 'take a step back' and consider how VfM can be best implemented in the authority, as opposed to designing a process to primarily satisfy CAA Key Lines of Enquiry.
8. A self assessment template has been provided for all managers carrying out service planning for 2011/12, encouraging them to include benchmarking and vfm assessments in the process. This is being actively promoted by the policy and performance team.
9. Following the roll-out of the self assessment template a draft corporate vfm strategy was completed in September 2010.
10. Existing benchmarking groups were reviewed in May 2010 to ensure that they are relevant and fit for purpose and will increasingly be used as a part of VfM and service planning work.
11. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee is continuing to improve the Council's work on demonstrating vfm through another task and finish group, looking at vfm in the housing landlord service.

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

12. The county-wide Communications Partnership agreed in May 2010 to look at carrying out a joint consultation by December 2010. Following a number of policy decisions, e.g. the abolition of the place survey etc, the intention of MRUK (who currently provide a consultation service to authorities in Cambridgeshire) to withdraw from local government work and the recently announced CSR, these discussions are still ongoing.
13. The Council is also exploring /intending to introduce a web-based participatory budgeting tool that will allow residents to provide views on how to prioritise services and spending decisions.

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| Financial              | The expectation is that the actions recommended in this report can be achieved within existing resources   |
| Legal                  | None   |
| Staffing/<br>capacity  | The expectation is that the actions recommended in this report can be achieved within existing resources   |
| Risk<br>Management     | If the recommendations in this report are not implemented, there is a risk that value for money, communication and consultation will not improve, which could adversely affect any future external assessments or peer reviews and value for money |
| Equal<br>Opportunities | All proposed changes to policy or services require an Equality Impact Assessment   |
| Climate<br>Change      | None   |

**Consultation**

14. All relevant officers have been consulted during the drafting of this report.

## **Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives**

15. 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".

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