

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Scrutiny and Overview Committee 24 March 2011  
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**Portfolio Holders:** Cllr Ray Manning, Leader  
Cllr Simon Edwards, Portfolio Holder Finance and Staffing  
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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 on recommendation A at a later meeting in 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.

#### 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 development of a corporate approach to value for money. It was felt wise to wait for the conclusion of the recent scrutiny task and finish group looking at VfM in Housing, before developing a corporate approach so that lessons learnt through this review could be incorporated into the new framework.
7. Another factor was 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 still ongoing as to the best way to consult with residents around VfM. Originally discussions were held with other authorities around the

County however following the withdrawal of MRUK from their countywide framework agreement these discussions have not progressed as far as hoped. Other alternatives are now being investigated, e.g. SCDC citizens panel. As a consequence, members are asked to note the change of completion date for this action to July 2011.

**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.**

8. 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.
9. 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 has been actively promoted by the policy and performance team, with value for money self assessments now forming a key part of the service plans currently being agreed through Portfolio Holder meetings in March 2011.
10. Following the roll-out of the self assessment template a draft corporate vfm strategy was completed in September 2010. As outlined in 6 above, this will be finalised shortly in ensure that it captures any lessons learn through the recent task and finish group.
11. 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.

**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, MRUK (who currently provide a consultation service to authorities in Cambridgeshire) withdrawing from local government work and the recently announced CSR, these discussions are still ongoing.
13. The Council is also intending to introduce a web-based participatory budgeting tool that will allow residents to provide views on how to prioritise services and spending decisions.

Financial	The actions recommended in this report can be achieved within existing resources
Legal	None
Staffing/ capacity	The actions recommended in this report can be achieved within existing resources
Risk 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 Opportunities	All proposed changes to policy or services require an Equality Impact Assessment
Climate Change	None
Consulting Young People	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".

**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

None

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