

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee



SCRUTINY



Subjects: Report of the Task and Finish Panel concerning Value For Money in Planning Services. Future Improvements in the Planning Directorate.

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Committee Secretary: Simon Hill (01992 56 4249)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- 1. That the Committee consider and agree the conclusions and recommendations contained within the report of the Task and Finish Panel on Value For Money in Planning Services.**
- 2. That the Committee agree that the Planning Services Standing Scrutiny Panel develop an Improvement Plan for the Planning Directorate.**

Report:

The Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel prompted the setting up of a Task and Finish panel to consider Value for Money and Performance issues within Planning Services; this reflected on a number of decisions of the Council to expend resources on a 2005 restructure thereof, on ICT improvements, and to deal with a backlog of Planning applications.

That Task and Finish Panel commenced work in October 2007, and the Panel was taken into the Standing Scrutiny Panel for Planning Services when that was set up this municipal year.

The Panel chose to update a 2001 Best Value Review that had been undertaken of the Development Control functions. That has been done in such a way that ensures there is a complete time series of data, and which can be revised annually.

The Panel is now ready to report its findings in the attached document. A key finding is that Planning provides value for money in its Development Control functions in comparison with others.

The Standing Panel will be continuing to scrutinise other services provided by this Directorate within its agreed terms of reference.

The Directorate continues to face major challenges, perhaps the key one being to deliver a sound Local Development Framework, but not forgetting other areas such as Gypsies and Travellers.

The Directorate has also faced other major challenges such as recruitment and retention of staff, and Planning is always an area of controversy; accordingly this is seen as an opportune moment to start to develop an improvement plan for the Directorate, which will help focus priorities for the next eighteen months. Such an Improvement Plan is a good way to show a present position, and to guide the work of the Directorate in that time.

In suggesting this now it is clear that more than just improvement plans for key performance indicators are required, but also that there have been many quiet successes upon which to build. Indeed a key part of the original Best Value ethos was to secure continuous

improvement, and this document can be seen positively in that light, and can guide the senior staff in the work they undertake to produce the Directorate business plans for 2009/2010.

Reason for Decisions:

The Task and Finish Panel's main initial piece of work has now been concluded; that needs to be recognised

Options Considered and Rejected:

To not agree with the document attached.

To only report to this parent Committee at intervals about the progress to date (i.e to continue with tasks but not bring about a finish)

Consultation Undertaken:

The Task and Finish panel undertook consultation with a number of groups as indicated in the report.

Staff within the Directorate, and within the Council, will work on the details and actions in the improvement plan.

Resource Implications:

Budget provision: From existing resources at this stage.

Personnel: From existing resources at this stage.

Land: Nil

Community Plan/BVPP reference: The Task and Finish Panel work centres on key performance indicators such as NI 157 a, b and c.

Relevant statutory powers:

Background papers:

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications:

Key Decision reference: (if required)