

Report to the LDF Cabinet Committee

Report reference: LDF-002-2009/10
Date of meeting: 10 September 2009



Portfolio: Planning & Economic Development

Subject: Planning Advisory Service – LDF Diagnostic

Responsible Officer: Amanda Wintle (01992 564543).

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) To note the decision of the Chief Executive to participate in the LDF Diagnostic as offered by the Planning Advisory Service; and
- (2) To receive the report from the Planning Advisory Service once it is complete, and to consider any recommendations made

Executive Summary:

The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) offers all local authorities an opportunity to undertake a diagnostic assessment of their process in preparing the Local Development Framework (LDF).

This assessment will provide an independent review of the way in which the LDF will be prepared. Suggestions will be made for potential improvements, and elements of good practice will be passed on to other local authorities.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Undertaking the assessment at this early stage in the preparation of the Core Strategy will help identify any risks to achieving a sound LDF, at a point where action can still be taken.

Other Options for Action:

To not participate in the LDF Diagnostic.

Report:

1. The Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) requires that each local authority prepares a Local Development Framework (LDF) to replace existing Local Plans. The central document in the LDF is the Core Strategy. The Core Strategy must be able to demonstrate strong links to the Sustainable Community Strategy (prepared by the Local Strategic Partnership) and other Council strategies.
2. The LDF must also accord with the Regional Spatial Strategy for the area, the case of EFDC this is the East of England Plan (EEP). Harlow, the north and west of Epping Forest District, has been identified as a Key Centre for Development and Change, and requires that Epping Forest, East Herts and Harlow District Councils work together to deliver a strategy for Harlow. Policy HA1 of the EEP requires that "Joint or co-

ordinated Development Plan Documents...should determine the appropriate distribution between urban extensions, including the more detailed location and scale of required development."

3. As a result of this requirement for joint or co-ordinated working, the three authorities have been invited by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to undertake a diagnostic assessment in parallel. The aims of the diagnostic process are to:
 - Review the foundations for, and management of, the production and implementation of the local development framework as an effective spatial plan within an authority;
 - Provide an insight to the authority with respect to spatial planning and the relationship to their other strategies;
 - Identify any changes required to improve the way the production and implementation is being undertaken;
 - Identify the support required to deliver any recommended changes to make the structures, organisation, processes and culture associated with the local development framework more fit for purpose; and
 - Identify good practice

(Planning Advisory Service, April 2008)
4. The diagnostic process involves a review of key documents, data and other information, followed by a visit (over a single day) from an external assessor to interview key councillors, staff and partners including the relevant Government Office. The assessment identifies the issues for the service, suggested improvement, areas for action by the authority, and the package of support which might be provided by PAS.
5. As the LDF is the key strategy for delivering a number of the Council's objectives, the PAS diagnostic offers a timely opportunity to gain an objective view of the Council's processes and resources available to deliver a sound LDF. This will include issues relating to the Core Strategy, but will also provide useful information for the preparation of all other Development Plan Documents.
6. The PAS advice and recommendations come with access to support modules (below). These support packages are tailored and prioritised to the specific needs of the individual Council. PAS covers the cost of providing this support. If training or support is required that is not within the existing modules then further packages can be developed by PAS.
 - **LDF member training** – training for Councillors directly involved with the LDF. This covers pre-production, purpose and operation of the process
 - **LDF project management training and support** – training to develop officers' skills in applying the principles, tools and techniques of project management specifically to cover the LDF
 - **Sustainability Appraisal** – advice and support to ensure that the sustainability appraisal is sufficiently rigorous, cost effective and fit-for-purpose
 - **Effective community involvement** – advice and support in developing, reviewing and implementing the Statement of Community Involvement. It also addresses how the council can use suggested consultation tools and techniques to effectively engage with the community throughout the LDF process
 - **Delivering the common vision** – advice and support around how to bring key stakeholders together in order to develop and agree the delivery of a common spatial vision linking across strategies and administrative boundaries
 - **Options generation and appraisal** – guidance on the generation and appraisal

- o of realistic options and alternatives
 - o **Evidence base** – guidance in assess the coverage and robustness of evidence. There is also provision of advice on key issues to be considered during the evidence gathering process and maintaining a comprehensive and appropriate evidence base
 - o **Spatial planning module** – guidance to help create a greater understanding of spatial planning practice amongst planners, senior managers, partners and Councillors
 - o **Spatial planning peer programme** – provides officers with constructive peer to peer LDF support, mentoring and challenge. This support has been designed specifically to help Councils with the LDFs
7. Consultants on behalf of PAS will be visiting the Council on **12 October 2009**. The three authorities charged with delivering the regeneration and growth of Harlow will have separate assessments carried out at a similar time. An overview of the three authorities will also be completed to assess the extent to which the co-ordinated or joint working required by the EEP is being undertaken.

Resource Implications:

The PAS LDF Diagnostic is free, as are delivery of any of the PAS training modules that may be recommended as a result of the report.

Some Forward Planning staff time will be required to prepare the relevant documentation, however this will not be onerous because the majority of the requirements will already exist.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Will aid the preparation of the Local Development Framework in accordance with the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended)

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

Policies in the LDF addressing climate change could be delayed if the relevant document was found unsound.

Consultation Undertaken:

The Corporate Executive Forum (with the Leader present) have already agreed that the Diagnostic assessment should be undertaken.

Background Papers:

Local Development Frameworks: Findings from a year of diagnostics – Planning Advisory Service, April 2008

Impact Assessments:

None at this stage.