

## **Summary of Consultation Responses**

There has been a healthy response to the consultation process with 112 comments received in total. A frequency distribution of summarising the comments made is included as a table and individual replies are available as a background paper. All replies have been redacted to prevent specific comments being attributable to a particular respondent.

Many of the comments represent an individual's preference about where a particular department should report or alternatively raise questions about process. Where these preferences score a frequency of 2 or less I have considered whether they raise any substantive concerns that should be addressed by either changing the structure or adapting the implementation process. None of these lower frequency comments represent 'show stoppers' and whilst the structure could be changed as suggested, I have decided not to amend the proposal on the basis of an individual's personal preference. However, some of the suggestions about process would improve things and will be, or already have been, adopted e.g. seeking external legal advice about the draft report, change processes and appointments.

Comments scoring a frequency of 3 or more are paraphrased below together with my observations.

### **a) Explicitly in favour of the proposals and / or the values and behaviours**

It is very encouraging that the comment with the highest frequency is recording strong support for the values and behaviours. Nearly as many responses registered explicit support for the proposals.

### **b) Concerns that the new titles for Directorates would cause confusion**

It is clear that the proposed names for the new directorates have caused concerns with many. The title of the Place directorate was disliked by a number of respondents because they thought it would cause confusion with the public when answering the phone. A smaller number wanted to keep the word Housing as part of the Communities directorate for the same reason.

My personal view is that the general public are less concerned than we are with the titles of internal departments. By and large the public want the person who answers the phone to take responsibility for dealing with their query. I would much prefer that staff answer the telephone "Epping Forest District Council" rather than using internal departmental titles. If staff can't answer a query directly they should find someone who can rather than handing off the caller to the switchboard or someone else who isn't responsible either.

The "One Council" value is particularly relevant here and I think it is important that the restructure signals a change rather than just restacking departments under the same old titles. Having said that, I accept that it is important for staff to feel connected with their team so I am considering alternative names for the Place directorate which was clearly unpopular.

### **c) Put Forward Planning and Development Control back together**

The next most frequent concern was about the proposal to restructure the planning function. Many were concerned about what they saw as a separation of Forward

Planning from Development control because they thought there is a large overlap of skill sets and considerable cross working between the two departments.

I understand these concerns and I have given the matter a lot of thought both in drafting the original proposal and in considering consultation responses. Whilst I agree that there is a large overlap of skill sets and a considerable amount of cross working, I don't see why this would stop because of the new structure – in fact it is essential that this doesn't happen. The proposal isn't really about splitting these functions and building a wall between them. It is more about recognising that Forward Planning 's focus is more about policy development and strategy setting and Development Control is more focussed on implementing and administering policies. Clearly both departments have an important contribution to make to place shaping and I think this can be achieved in the proposed structure.

**d) Various functions should report directly to the Chief Executive**

Some respondents felt that particular functions should report directly to the chief Executive, most notably Public Relations, Performance Improvement and Internal Audit.

I suspect these suggestions arise from concerns about the cross cutting nature of some of those functions or the need to maintain an independent reporting line. Whilst I recognise that these functions have an important Corporate aspect and clearly as Chief Executive I would take a particular interest in them, I don't think this means staff in them need to report directly to me. The important thing is that these functions should have direct access to the Chief Executive on relevant matters rather than being managed directly.

**e) Various views about the capacity of senior management to handle the transition**

Some respondents thought that there might still be too many senior managers in the structure and that increasing financial constraints would probably mean further changes. Others thought that the proposed changes would require considerable management resource and were concerned that there is insufficient capacity in the new structure. I have to say that I can understand both points of view. My experience in transformation or organisations has been that it is very important to invest enough senior management capacity to drive changes. I agree that increasing financial constraints will probably require us to continually review ways of working and that in a steady state we might be able to manage with fewer directors. However, my personal view is that stripping out too much capacity will jeopardise the change management process and cost more in the long run.

**f) Keep Support and I functions separate in the directorates and concerns about GIS staff and Executive Assistants**

Some respondents were keen to keep separate IT and Support functions in the directorates whilst others observed that no mention was made of Executive Assistants and were concerned that their roles had been deleted.

There is no intention to delete the Executive Assistant roles and I am sorry if that impression was created by not specifically mentioning these roles on the organisation chart. The chart was intended to explain the logic of the re-organisation of senior management directors rather than show every individual role and function.

In respect of the comment about maintaining separate IT and Support functions in the directorates, I can only say that I fundamentally disagree. I recognise that it is vitally important to have the right support for all directorates but I believe we need to fundamentally review how we use new technology to optimise the delivery of customer service and administrative support. This doesn't necessarily mean that we should move everyone working in administrative support or IT within a directorate into one centrally located function but it does mean that we should keep an open mind, consider how the new telephone software can create a virtual call centre and look to remove duplication of effort.

In closing I would like to thank all those that have responded for their thoughtful and constructive comments. You will see when I issue the final report that many suggestions have been adopted. I hope that this summary explains why others haven't.