

**REPORT TO:** Organisational Improvement and Environment  
Commission

**DATE:** 16th April, 2007

**DEPARTMENT:** Corporate Policy & Improvement

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Executive Director (Corporate Policy & Improvement)  
*(Kevin Douglas)*

**SUBJECT:** **PLANNING SERVICES - REVIEW**

**WARD/S AFFECTED:**

**FORWARD PLAN REF:**

---

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 As part of its Corporate and Service Review Programme, the Council agreed a three-year rolling programme of reviews based upon undertaking a cross-cutting review and single service review each year.
- 1.2 In 2006/2007 the service review relates to Planning Services. Members have received a briefing note on the approach to be taken and the purpose of this report is to update Members on progress.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members note the current position and comment accordingly.

## **3.0 RECOMMENDED REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 It supports the Council's ongoing Improvement Agenda and programme for the review.

## **4.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDED FOR REJECTION**

4.1 None. The Council agreed the policy to undertake the review and the approach has already been agreed.

## **5.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

5.1 The Corporate and Service Review Programme agreed by Council in 2006 sought to concentrate on services where the Council had above average spend compared to the Council's nearest neighbours and below average performance.

5.2 The performance of the service in 2006/2007 has improved and the Council has moved out of being a Planning Standards Authority, however, the service is still part of the review process.

5.3 The review is specific to the Planning Service and will concentrate on core planning services. This will include:-

### **5.3.1 Planning Policy**

- ◇ Strategic and Regional Planning
- ◇ Structure and Local Planning
- ◇ Conservation and Listed Buildings
- ◇ Trees and Forestry
- ◇ Special Projects - projects securing Council's planning aims (AONB, etc)

### **5.3.2 Development Control**

- ◇ Advice
- ◇ Dealing with Applications
- ◇ Enforcement

5.4 The key focus of the review will be on:-

1. How decisions are made within the Council on policy and planning applications.
2. Value for money - looking at costs of service relating to performance, satisfaction and outcomes.

5.5 There are a number of more "local" issues that are proposed to be included:-

1. Quality and effectiveness of service following a change of Planning Committees.
2. Sustainability of service post-Planning Delivery Grant support.
3. Gershon savings - target of illustrating 3% cash savings.

## **6.0 REVIEW APPROACH**

6.1 The review will be divided into two distinct phases. The first phase is an External Peer Review which will be undertaken by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and ID<sup>e</sup>A.

6.2 This is an independent review undertaken by officers and Members from other authorities.

6.3 The second phase of work will be dependent upon the outcomes of the Peer Group Review and will also contain two further elements:-

6.3.1 Financial review of revenue budgets.

6.3.2 Consultation with the District Panel and focus groups.

6.4 The aim is to complete the work by September 2007 at the latest to feed into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Revenue Budget process.

## **7.0 EXTERNAL PEER GROUP REVIEW**

7.1 The External Peer Group review works to an agreed format and **Appendix 1** sets out the approach to the review.

7.2 The review will take place between 24th and 26th April, 2007 and a range of officers, Members and partners will be involved in interviews and providing information.

7.3 The first phase of the review is the submission of a self-assessment document to set the framework for the external review.

7.4 The self-assessment document is attached as **Appendix 2** for Members' information.

7.5 The outcome of the external review will be reported to the Commission at its meeting on 18th June, 2007 and the next steps then discussed and agreed.

## **8.0 FURTHER WORK**

8.1 In addition to agreeing the next phase, consultation with the District Panel will be undertaken in May 2007 to feed into the second stage work.

8.2 Officers are preparing the questions and the Scrutiny Officer has been consulted in the preparation of the questions.

8.3 It is planned to look at holding focus groups for residents relating to planning consultation on applications, etc. These will be programmed in June 2007.

8.4 The financial review will be undertaken following completion of the closedown of accounts. This will be in June/July 2007.

## 9.0 OUTCOMES

- 9.1 The review will lead to an Improvement Plan for the service which will be agreed by both the Commission and the Cabinet and will be monitored on an ongoing basis by the Commission.

## 10.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 10.1 The first phase of the review is currently planned and the outcome of this will frame the further work.
- 10.2 The self-assessment is the basis for the External Peer Group Review and the first stage of the challenge process.

### Background Papers -

**OFFICER CONTACT:** Please contact Kevin Douglas if you require any further information on the contents of this report. The officer can be contacted at the Department of Corporate Policy & Improvement, Council Offices, Crescent Gardens, Harrogate, by telephone on 01423 556705 or by email - [kevin.douglas@harrogate.gov.uk](mailto:kevin.douglas@harrogate.gov.uk)

## SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT/POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

		Implications are		
		Positive	Neutral	Negative
A.	Economy		✓	
B.	Environment		✓	
C.	Social Equity		✓	
(i)	General			
(ii)	Customer Care/People with Disabilities			
(iii)	Health Implications			
D.	Crime and Disorder Implications		✓	

If all comments lie within the shaded areas, the proposal is sustainable.