

RESPONSE TO CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL'S CONSULTATION ON THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ACT

To: **Cabinet**

Date: **7th July 2009**

From: **Executive Director: Environment Services**

Electoral division(s): **All**

Forward Plan ref: **None** *Key decision:* **No**

Purpose: **To consider the proposed response to Cambridge City Council's consultation on their Sustainable Communities Act submission to Government.**

Recommendation: **To approve the proposed consultation response.**

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Sustainable Communities Act 2007 forms part of a package of legislation aimed at empowering communities and strengthening democracy. The Act places a duty on the Secretary of State to invite local authorities to make proposals that they consider would contribute to promoting the sustainability of local communities. This is defined as improving the economic, social or environmental well-being of local areas. In simple terms, this means asking the Secretary of State to change something that is currently preventing the local authority from doing what it wants to do on behalf of local people. An example might be to amend, rescind or introduce legislation.
- 1.2 Proposals, once submitted will be considered by the LGA. The indication from the LGA is that they will only support proposals from two tier areas where both tiers of Local Government support them.

2. PROPOSED CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL SUBMISSION

- 2.1 Cambridge City Council is proposing to submit proposals to Government under four headings – Waste reduction, transport, affordable housing and sustainability.
- 2.2 Appendix 1, attached to this report, contains a draft response to the City Council on the issues raised. Cabinet comments on the contents of this are sought. It should be noted that these comments have informally been reported to the City Council, subject to a final Cabinet decision, given that their Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee considered the potential submission under the Act on 29th June.

3 SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

The following paragraphs set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

3.1 Finance, Resources and Performance

A number of the proposals within the City Council's submission could have financial implications on the County Council, most particularly the transport proposals. The County Council opposes these for a variety of reasons including the resource implications. The transport proposals could also have performance implications on the operation of the wider transport network and again the County Council opposes these for this reason.

3.2 Statutory Requirements and Partnership Working

The County Council has a good partnership working relationship with the City Council. Whilst some of the proposals within the proposed submission are ones that Cabinet is not recommended to agree with, the Council will continue to work in close partnership with the City Council and there are real benefits to the local community in this being developed further.

3.3 Climate Change

A number of the proposals in the consultation are focused around sustainability and recycling. These will if implemented to contribute to reduced emissions. Even if they are not introduced, the City and County Councils will continue to work together to reduce the impact of climate change.

3.4 Access and Inclusion.

The transport proposals will not improve overall accessibility and risk creating worsened transport opportunities for the wider Cambridgeshire public. The Council will, however, continue to work with the City Council to maximise the transport opportunities not only in Cambridge City but across the County.

Source Documents	Location
Cabinet Report 6th January 2004 Transport Infrastructure – Future Procurement Strategy.	http://cccs086.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/db/reptrack.nsf/af8076762df199c580256b14003ef043/c2937922aec77b5280256e05004f8b1f?OpenDocument

Appendix 1 – Draft Response to Cambridge City Council’s consultation under the Sustainable Communities Act

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The City Council have invited the County Council to respond to a consultation on their proposed response to Government on the Sustainable Communities Act. The County Council understands that the City Council is proposing to put a number of requests into Government as set down below.

A. Reducing Packaging

Introduce legislation to significantly reduce the amount of packaging on all retail goods (food and non-food) and require all remaining packaging to be biodegradable.

B. Transport in Cambridge

Introduce legislation giving joint powers over all aspects of Transport Policy and Planning within Cambridge to Cambridgeshire County and Cambridge City Council. These powers to include regulation of all public bus transport within Cambridge.

C. Affordable Housing in Cambridge

Change current arrangements to allow Cambridge City Council to keep ALL revenue collected from Council Housing rents and ALL receipts from Right to Buy sales of Council Homes. The additional money (currently given back to government through negative subsidy) to be spent on:

- a) Building new Council Housing to at least Code Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes (or higher wherever possible) and in accordance with “Lifetime Homes” standards.
- b) Energy efficiency improvements and maintenance to existing City Council Housing Stock such as improved insulation and renewable energy.

D. Sustainability

The City Council urges Government to act quickly to:

- a) Make it much easier to introduce renewable energy schemes.
- b) Legislate to require high energy efficiency standards for ALL new buildings before 2016.

2. CONSULTATION RESPONSE

2.1 The County Council’s response to these issues is as follows.

Reducing Packaging

In principle, the County Council supports any measure to reduce waste arising

and the reduction of excess packaging has an important part to play. The County Council is, however, also sensitive to trade arguments that insufficient packaging can lead to the spoilage of goods or complex transport (and potentially increased wastes of different kinds). The removal of 'superfluous' packaging should be the objective.

There is existing legislation - the Producer Responsibility Obligation on packaging (2005) which already governs producers with either 50+ tonnes of packaging annually, or an annual turnover of £2m+.

The costs/benefits of a move to make all packaging biodegradable would not be measurable simply by the output as regards waste management. An understanding would be needed of the environmental impacts in manufacture, storage and transport of goods so contained. The County Council's main drive as regards waste would be that packaging be made from materials that need not be land-filled - i.e. all remaining packaging should be recyclable OR biodegradable. County and District Council waste treatment facilities can handle either.

Transport in Cambridge

The County Council does not support the City Council's bid to share powers for all aspects of transport policy and planning. The principal reason for this is that transport planning needs to be undertaken at a strategic level and that transport and travel do not respect boundaries. For example, over 50% of work related trips within Cambridge come from outside the area - the majority from South Cambridgeshire and from in and around the neighbouring market towns such as Huntingdon and Ely. A joint planning approach between the City and County Council would not allow the needs of all these users to be addressed at a strategic level. Joint responsibility would be very confusing to the public and could well lead to a situation where it was not clear which authority was responsible for the delivery of schemes.

In terms of the regulation of passenger transport, the County Council does not support the view expressed by the City Council.

Our view is that an approach of working cooperatively with the bus industry has produced very impressive results and is the best way to continue this in the future. Bus patronage in Cambridge increased by 100% between 2001 and 2008 as a result of the County's partnership working with the bus companies. This is well above the national average for bus patronage. The city has a modern bus fleet and an award winning park and ride system. As a result, most of the city is covered by commercially viable, high frequency services. Our view is that to move to a more regulated system would diminish these benefits and result in significantly higher costs for the local authorities.

The County Council's view is that a far better way forward on both of these issues would be for the City Council and the County Council to further develop their already good partnership working to deliver sustainable transport solutions. The County Council has already put the mechanisms for this in place through, for example, the Joint Transport Forum. The County Council would be pleased to discuss further the development of these mechanisms given the difficult economic times that face us all.

Affordable housing

The County Council supports the City Council's proposals regarding revenue from affordable housing. The Council also supports the principles of building energy efficient homes and this is in accordance with our broader environmental objectives.

Sustainability

The County Council supports the intention of the City Council to urge action to make it easier to introduce renewable energy schemes as long as these respect wider environmental considerations. The Council also supports the City Council's desire to promote high energy efficiency standards for all new buildings before 2016 and indeed promotes this within its own building estate.