

**INTEGRATED PLAN 2012/2013 – REPORT OF THE SAFER
AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

To: County Council

Date: 21st February 2012

From: Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Electoral Division(s) All

Purpose: To report the outcome of the Committee's scrutiny of the Cabinet's proposals for the overall Council Integrated Plan for 2012/13.

Recommendations: The Council is asked to:

- Consider the Committee's report in its deliberations on the Integrated Plan 2012/13
- Remove the current requirement for all bidders to the minor highways improvement scheme to contribute at least 10% of the required project funding
- Devolve the management and funding of the minor highways improvement scheme to local Member groups
- Agree, as a general principle, to devolve management and funding to local Member groups, where appropriate
- Agree that Local Members are systematically involved in issues relevant to their division
- Agree that the future design and questions within the 'SIMALTO' consultation should be subject to 'Overview' by the Committee prior to publication

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1. SCRUTINY OF INTEGRATED PLAN 2012/13

1.1 The Committee's remit covers the following Council services:

- Libraries
- Community Engagement
- Adult Skills and Learning
- Culture (Arts, Museums, Sport)

1.2 The Committee met on Thursday 9th February 2012 and questioned the following Members and officers about the Cabinet's proposals for the above services within the Integrated Plan 2012/13:

- Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Councillor Mac McGuire
- Cabinet Member for Learning, Councillor David Harty
- Service Director: Community Engagement, Mike Davey
- Service Director: Strategy & Development, Graham Hughes
- Head of Libraries, Archives & Information, Christine May (part of the item)

1.3 The Committee's comments need to be read in conjunction with the Council's Integrated Plan 2012/13, which provides both the context and detail on the proposals. The following commentary is restricted to those issues on which the Committee has specific concerns or comments to make or that they consider should be highlighted for the Council's attention. The minutes of the meeting provide a full record of the deliberations.

2. LIBRARIES

Book fund

2.1 The Committee examined the proposals to develop a '21st Century Library Service'. In particular, Members noted that the current Integrated Plan (i.e. 2011/12) stated that funding totalling £423,000 for the book fund would be reinstated over the period 2012/14 with £380,000 being added in 2012/13. However, the implementation of the new proposals would result in the reinstatement of this funding over a longer period, 2012/15, with £180,000 less funding in 2012/13 than had been agreed last year¹.

2.2 Members explored the rationale for the proposals to delay the reinstatement of a significant portion of the funding for the book fund, particularly as the Integrated Plan stated that:

'Note, library performance will inevitably be negatively affected by the delayed reinstatement of the book fund option in this IPP²

2.3 The Cabinet Member for Learning confirmed that this change would have negative implications and that it was the intention of Cabinet to continue with this policy.

¹ *Integrated Plan 2012/13*, pg 365

² *Ibid*, pg 362

- 2.4 Following the discussion, the Committee agreed that they have concerns about the change in policy as they believe that re-profiling the reinstatement of book fund over three years rather than all in 2012/13 could delay the very transformation objective of a modern, accessible, sustainable, value for money 21st century library service that the Council is seeking to achieve.

Risk Management

- 2.5 The Committee reviewed the risk analysis associated with the library proposals³. Committee Members noted that the risk analysis assessed the likelihood and impact of a risk occurring on a scale of one to five (five being high likelihood / impact).
- 2.6 Members noted that six of the seven risks highlighted had a relatively high 'likelihood' rating of three and were concerned that the impact associated with the Council failure to meet its statutory duties was only rated as two. Members were also concerned that no mitigation measures had been identified in the risk analysis and that no account had been taken account of the risk associated with the extensive use of volunteers.
- 2.7 In response, the Head of Libraries, Archives and Information agreed to reconsider the risk analysis and agreed that the risk of failing to meet statutory duties would have a high impact. It was also agreed that mitigating actions would form part of future risk analyses. However, in relation to the comment about the risk associated with the use of volunteers, the Head of Service advised that the proposals were not dependent on volunteers coming forward (although there had been significant levels of interest).
- 2.8 The Committee concluded that the risk analysis should be reworked, to take into account the above points, and welcomed the assurances that this work would be undertaken.

3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND LOCALISM

- 3.1 The Committee challenged whether the Council was being sufficiently ambitious with regard to 'localism' and it was acknowledged that the cultural changes across the Council and some of the localism initiatives were currently at a relatively early stage. The Committee agreed to conduct a Member Led review into this topic.

Devolved Budgets - Minor Highways Improvements

- 3.2 The Committee asked the panel to provide details of specific examples of initiatives associated with the localism agenda. One of the examples cited in response related to funding available for minor highways improvements. This scheme enables Parish Councils, community and residents groups and charities to bid for up to £10,000 for measures such as improved signing and lining, speed reduction measures, dropped crossing points, new bus shelters and improved street lighting. These bids are then assessed by an advisory

³ Ibid, pg 367

panel of local County Councillors, which then make recommendations to the County Council⁴.

- 3.3 However, Members noted that the bidders for the additional funding would be expected to contribute at least 10% of the costs of the project. The Committee challenged this on the basis that residents groups had been specifically targeted as potential bidders, but had no power to raise a precept. One Member quoted a scenario where a resident group wanted a local passage way to be lit, but had no means of raising the minimum 10% contribution required.
- 3.4 The Committee therefore felt that the criteria for accessing funding through the minor highways improvement scheme were unduly restrictive, as they only realistically applied to Parishes and Town Councils. Clearly, this meant that areas with without Parishes and Town Councils (such as Cambridge City) would be particularly affected. Members recommend that the contribution requirement should be removed.
- 3.5 The Committee also agreed that as the Council's policy was to promote localism, the Council should seek to devolve funding to Local Member Groups where appropriate. The Committee recommends that this should apply to the minor highways improvement scheme.

Local Member Involvement

- 3.6 The Committee had some concerns that the Council was not systematically engaging local Members about local issues. The Cabinet Member for Learning agreed that a systematic approach should be adopted and the Service Director: Community Engagement commented that a shift in culture was required whereby all Officers were more comfortable talking with Local Members.
- 3.7 The Committee recommends that Local Members are systematically involved in issues relevant to their division.

SIMALTO Consultation

- 3.8 The Committee discussed the SIMALTO consultation process used as part of the Integrated Planning Process. The Committee recommended that the design and questions for future SIMALTO consultations should be 'overviewed' by the Committee prior to publication, as a means of quality assurance.

Source Documents	Location
Agenda and reports of the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 9th February 2012	Room 116, Shire Hall Cambridge

⁴ Press release about the scheme:

<http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/CMSWebsite/Apps/News/Details.aspx?ref=350>