

TITLE OF REPORT: PRIORITIES FOR THE DISTRICT 2012-2013

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR, FINANCE, POLICY & GOVERNANCE
PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR MRS C.P.A. STRONG

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 To propose the Priorities for the District 2012/13 document.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report contains recommendations on a key decision and was first referred to in the Forward Plan in March 2012.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 As members will be aware the Council's Corporate Plan covers a 10 year period from 2005-2015. The plan was reviewed on an annual basis until 2011 when the Council replaced the Corporate Plan with a new document called our Priorities for the District. In view of the changes proposed in the Localism Act and the Local Government Finance Bill, this document has necessarily taken a shorter term view and has provided the policy foundation throughout the 2012/13 budget setting process.

- 3.2 Members will be aware that it was agreed at the Council meeting in September 2011 that the priorities for 2012/13 would be; Living within our Means to Deliver Cost-effective Services; Working with Local Communities; Protecting our Environment for our Communities. This set the policy context for the work on budgets as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.

- 3.3 The Council's Priorities for the District document gives us the opportunity to set out what we want to achieve for our community and sets the policy context for our subsequent budget decisions. It is the over-arching strategic document which sets the direction for the Council and once there is greater certainty around the future financial position, it is the intention to return to a document which takes a longer term view.

- 3.4 In April 2011 Full Council, supported the new Priorities for the District Document, a stream-lined plan for 2011-12. A review of this document was undertaken by the Policy Portfolio Holder and Officers to describe in more detail the work which the Council would undertake to deliver the new priorities for 2012/13. The Portfolio Holders and the Group Leaders were asked for their comments which have been incorporated into the document.

- 3.5 This report is to bring the final draft of the Priorities for the District to the Cabinet for approval prior to its consideration at Council on 12th April 2012

4. PRIORITIES FOR THE DISTRICT 2012/13

- 4.1 Council confirmed on 8th September 2011 that the three priorities for 2012/13 would be amended to; Living within our Means to Deliver Cost-effective Services; Working with Local Communities: Protecting our Environment for our Communities. The budget agreed at Council on 9th February 2012 reflects these priorities.
- 4.2 The Policy portfolio-holder met with the Strategic Director, Finance, Policy & Governance, the Head of Policy & Community Services and the Performance & Risk Manager to commence work on a draft document (Appendix A). This was sent to the Portfolio Holders and Group Leaders to enable them to comment.
- 4.3 The document again focuses primarily on one year, 2012/13, due to the uncertainty surrounding local government finance for 2013 and beyond. Once greater clarity on longer term finances is obtained, the intention is to revert back to a 5-10 year plan.
- 4.4 Once again the focus in the document is the key project work we are leading on for 2012/13 where we can directly influence the delivery timescales and be held accountable for delivery. Major capital programme works are reflected in the plan and linked to one of the three priorities.
- 4.5 The focus is on new or varied things rather than the elements of “business as usual” which are covered in the individual service plans which Heads of Service and Corporate Managers produce and which are management work planning tools rather than strategic, Member-driven documents.
- 4.6 The document has a small number of high-level actions under each of the priorities instead of a separate action plan. We will then report back on progress at 6 months and year end, making use of the Council Tax leaflet and an edition of the Outlook magazine to tell the public what we have achieved.
- 4.7 The attached document at **Appendix A** is the proposed “Priorities for the District 2012/13”.

5. PRIORITIES FOR THE DISTRICT 2013/14 AND ONWARDS

- 5.1 Work will start soon to review priorities for 2013/14 so that they can lead the Corporate Business Planning process. The first high level report to confirm the priorities for 2013/14 is due at Cabinet in June.

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 This report is another important step in the annual Corporate Business Planning process and completes the cycle for the 2012/13 process. The high level priorities finalised in September 2011 provide the policy foundation for the Council’s medium term financial strategy. The narrative and actions included here are those made in the light of available financial resources, and within the context of setting the Council’s budget for 2012/13. The Council always seeks to move its limited resources towards delivery of its priorities.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The terms of reference for Cabinet allow it to advise the Council in the formulations of those policies within the Council's terms of reference.
- 7.2 The terms of reference for Council confirm that it is responsible for approving or adopting the policy framework which includes the Corporate Plan.
- 7.3 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report, albeit individual actions identified within the Document may be subject to specific legal requirements or constraints and will be subject to more detailed consideration at the appropriate time.

8. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no direct Human Resources Implications arising from this report. However, the Council's priorities and actions as set out in the document provide the starting point for much of the work we do. Matching staff resources with areas of priority is a key task, particularly important in the light of the ongoing financial constraints.
- 8.2 As an Investor in People, an aim is to maximise the potential and contribution of our staff through appropriate learning and development opportunities to enable delivery of the Council's priorities.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1st October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5th April 2011. There is a General duty, described in 9.2, that public bodies must meet, underpinned by more specific duties which are designed to help meet them.
- 9.2 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of its functions, give **due regard** to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 9.3 Each of the actions described within the 'Priorities for the District' is subject to Individual consideration under the terms of the Council's agreed equality analysis. This means that those which directly affect more than two wards, cost more than £50,000, constitute a significant change to service delivery, or any proposals including significant restructure of staff are required to undertake separate assessment of equalities implications, and to be reviewed by the Head of Policy and Community Services.

9. CONSULTATION

- 9.1 The draft document has been prepared through electronic consultation with Portfolio Holders and Group Leaders.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approve the Priorities for the District – 2012/13 as attached at Appendix A and refer this to Council for adoption.

11. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 The Council is required to have a suitable, high level strategic planning document to inform its budget setting and strategic financial processes, and Council is required to approve the final Priorities for the District document as the formal policy framework for the authority.

12. APPENDICES

Appendix A – Priorities for the District 2012/13

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