

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Housing & Major Projects Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING DATE:	31 January 2012	AGENDA ITEM NUMBER
TITLE:	Service Action Plan	
WARD:	ALL	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Service Action Plan for Development and Major Projects• Equality Impact Assessment		

THE ISSUE

The Service Action Plan for Development & Major Projects is presented to the Panel for its consideration.

- To enable issues to be highlighted for consideration by Cabinet in February as part of the annual budget setting process.
- To enable issues to be referred to the relevant portfolio holder in advance of Cabinet's consideration of the overall budget.

It should be noted that there is a special meeting of the Resources Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel on 6th February, at which time it is intended to take an overview of all of the comments that have been submitted by each of the Policy Development & Scrutiny Panels. This will be the final opportunity for the Resources Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel to highlight issues and options for Cabinet.

At all times it is crucial to apply financial rigour to the Service and Resource Planning process. This means that where Panels identify aspirations to increase activity or expenditure they need to be clear about how such a change will be resourced and, in particular, to identify compensating savings or sources of finance.

An issue of increasing profile is that of equality impact assessments. It is essential that equities issues are properly considered as part of the decision making process and the Panel is encouraged to review this aspect of the proposed budget and service changes.

RECOMMENDATION

The Housing and Major Projects Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

Comment on the Service Action Plan, taking into account the matters referred to above.

Identify any issues requiring further consideration at the special meeting of the Resources Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel on 6th February and subsequently by Cabinet in February as part of the annual Service Action Planning and Budget process.

Identify any issues arising from the draft Service Action Plan it wishes to refer to the relevant portfolio holder for further consideration in advance of the Cabinet meeting in February.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial context for Service Planning was set out in the Medium Term Plan reports to the November meetings of Policy Development & Scrutiny Panels. The draft Service Action Plans are in line with the Medium Term Plans and the budget limits used to compile those plans. There has been a move away from simply using departmental cash limits so that special factors, such as the transition within the local education authority role, demands on social care, the Change Programme etc., could be properly taken into account.

The financial climate for Local Government and the public sector has deteriorated rapidly as a result of the recession and its impact on Government debt. The Chancellor's Autumn Statement made it clear that the cuts will continue for the foreseeable future and beyond the existing comprehensive spending review period. 2012/13 is the second year in a two year national settlement for Local Government. 2013/14 will see a new financial regime and some return of Business Rates for local use.

The Local Government grant figures for the 2012/13 settlement have since been confirmed, albeit in draft. The consultation about changes in funding for academies (to so called 'top slice' from local authorities) has been put back, as has the implementation of recovery of land use planning costs. Council Tax grant will be payable to local authorities with a Council Tax increase of 0% to cover the equivalent of a 2.5% increase. Those that increase Council Tax above 3.5% will be subject to a local referendum. Government has advocated pay constraint in the public sector and their restrictions are in line with assumptions already made in the Council's Medium Term Plan. The various proposed changes to pensions have no impact in the short term. Other adjustments will be set out in the annual budget report but these are not expected to affect the interim conclusions in the various Medium Term Plans.

Business Rates will increase by 5.6% but the Council simply collects this on behalf of central Government and even when the new system comes in during 2013/14 the rate will be set nationally.

THE REPORT

This report forms part of the Service and Resource Planning process. The next steps include:

- Policy Development & Scrutiny meetings - review of Service Action Plans at all January meetings.
- Resources Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel takes overview of PDS comments – 6th February 2012
- Cabinet recommendations to Council to enable budget setting - 8th February 2012 cabinet meeting
- Council approval of budget - 14th February 2011

There is a reserve date for Council to reconsider the budget if there are any major amendments which cannot be dealt with on 14th February. The reserve date is 23rd February.

At its meeting in February the Cabinet will consider:

- The draft annual budget report so that recommendations can be made to Council
- New Vision and Values for the Council to be incorporated into a revised Corporate Plan in spring 2012.

The Medium Term Service & Resource Plans and annual Service Action Plans will be important background documents as will the various equalities impact assessments

Each Service Action Plan contains commitments for the year ahead. Those commitments support the Medium Term Plans which aim to cover the next three years, albeit that the uncertainty about the funding of years 2 & 3 has meant that only a direction of travel could be indicated for future years.

Service Action Plans and Medium Term Service & Resource Plans will be ratified by the February meeting of Council but will not be presented to the meeting of Council. They will be a relevant background paper. With that in mind it is timely for Policy Development & Scrutiny Panels to consider matters that need highlighting and to raise such matters with portfolio holders in advance of the February Cabinet meeting.

Issues highlighted by Policy Development & Scrutiny Panels will be collated and summarised for the Resources Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel meeting on 6th February. This information will also be included with the papers presented to both Cabinet and Council when the budget is considered.

RISK MANAGEMENT

A risk assessment of the Council's budgets and reserves will be contained in the final budget papers to be presented to Cabinet and Council in February.

EQUALITIES

Service Action Plans contain relevant references to equalities. An important consideration for the Panel is whether those Service Action Plans contain the right actions to help mitigate equalities issues arising from those plans.

The associated equalities impact assessments are published on the Council website and a copy is provided as an appendix to this paper for Panel members. To be lawful the decision making process needs to take into account equalities issues.

CONSULTATION

The corporate implications of this report have been considered by Strategic Directors Group (SDG), including the Section 151 Finance Officer; Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer.

Further consultation has taken place as part of the previous Corporate Plan and Sustainable Community Strategy processes. Members of the Council are being consulted about the emerging new Vision and Values.

A Budget Fair was run in October 2011 to receive comments on the emerging budget plans. Separate consultation is also being arranged for the local business community.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

All the following issues are relevant to Service Action Planning: *Social Inclusion; Customer Focus; Sustainability; Human Resources; Property; Young People; Human Rights; Corporate Plan; Health & Safety; Impact on Staff; the Legal Considerations.*

ADVICE SOUGHT

The Council's Monitoring Officer (Council Solicitor) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report.

Contact person	<i>John Betty, Strategic Director, Development and Major Projects – telephone 01225 477500</i>
Background papers	<i>Medium Term Service and Resource Plan as submitted to November meetings of Policy Development & Scrutiny Panels.</i>
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	