

REPORT TO CABINET

REPORT OF: Chief Executive

REPORT NO. CEX283

DATE: 7th March 2005

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| TITLE: | Review of Council Priorities |
| FORWARD PLAN ITEM: | Yes |
| DATE WHEN FIRST APPEARED IN FORWARD PLAN: | May 2004 |
| KEY DECISION OR POLICY FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL: | Yes |
| COUNCIL AIMS/PORTFOLIO HOLDER NAME AND DESIGNATION: | All |
| CORPORATE PRIORITY: | All |
| CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS: | Detailed in the Report |
| FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT IMPLICATIONS: | None |
| BACKGROUND PAPERS: | Previous Reports to Council Minutes from meeting of the Local Area Assemblies and Development and Scrutiny Panels (DSPs) |

1. Introduction and Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 In accordance with the Corporate Planning Framework approved by Council the authority has set a vision, core values, priorities and non-priorities for a four year time period. The purpose of this report is to formally review just one element of this framework namely the Council's priorities which are divided between Category A (where targets for step-change are set) and Category B (where targets for incremental change are set). It was determined by Council that this review should be undertaken annually (Minute 28 (7)).

1.2 When formulating its priorities the Council followed a robust and objective procedure, which applied the following three sequential tests:

1. What is the justification for considering it to be a priority at all?

The evidence accepted under this test was either local priority based upon a statistical survey of local people, national priorities based upon targets issued by Central Government, or future issues which whilst not currently priorities need action now to prevent them from developing into major problems in the future.

2. Taking all the consultation mechanism into account, is the weight of expressed opinion sufficient to justify it becoming a corporate priority of the whole Council?
3. Is there sufficient objective data to enable the Council to be confident that it can achieve sustainable improvements in outcomes for a cost effective investment?

1.3 This process led to the adoption by the Council of the following priorities:

Category A: Priorities for Step-Change

Anti-social Behaviour
Access to Council services
Street scene
Recycling
Development of the town-centres and Grantham as a Sub-regional centre.

Category B : Priorities for Incremental Change

Affordable Housing
Business Development
Vulnerable Persons
Communications and Consultation
Diversity
Planning and Conservation
LSP and Community Strategy
Council tax collection
Housing Management
Car Parks
Public Toilets

1.4 In October the Council completed this process by determining the Category Y and Category Z services.

2. Framework for this review

- 2.1 As Council only approved the determination of services coming within categories Y and Z in October 2004, and furthermore as many of the actions necessary to give effect to this decision have yet to be implemented it is not proposed to formally review the services in these categories.
- 2.2 It is intended to review the services in categories A and B by considering any new data available to the Council, in particular the results of the 2005 customer survey, reports from inspectors, any new government priorities and the performance of the Council against the targets set.

3. Results of the 2005 Customer Survey

- 3.1 This survey was undertaken on a statistically valid sample basis and completed by over 1,000 households. It therefore represents a robust and objective assessment of the priorities of local residents.
- 3.2 The full un-weighted results of this survey are enclosed as Appendix A. Weighting is currently being applied to ensure that the results reflect the demography of the district and these weighted results will replace this unweighted data when it is available.
- 3.3 The results which are particularly relevant to this review are as follows:
 - There is strong support for the priorities the Council has adopted with nearly 9 out of ten people (88.3%) agreeing with them.
 - 965 respondents (91.7%) supported the Council's vision "To ensure that the residents of South Kesteven are proud of their district and their Council"
 - Over three-quarters (77.0%) of respondents were proud of their local community. Nearly half (48.3%) were proud of their Council.

4. National Government Priorities

- 4.1 The major change here is that during the last year representatives of the ODPM and Local Government have agreed the following shared priorities:

Sustainable Communities and Transport
Safe and Strong Communities
Healthier Communities
Older People
Children and Young Persons
- 4.2 Unfortunately these priorities do not differentiate between the responsibilities of District and County Councils.
- 4.3 The linkage between the current priorities and these shared themes has been clarified in my report proposing amendment to the Corporate Planning Framework. From this assessment it is evident that there is already a high

degree of correlation between our current priorities and those shared nationally.

4.4 During the course of the year the Council has received a number of documents stating or proposing developments of Government policies. These include:

- Vibrant Local Leadership
- Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter
- Delivering Sustainable Communities
- Our Healthier Nation : A Contract for Health

4.5 The development of ambitions, approved by the Council at its last meeting, is intended to provide a means for examining in detail these proposals and considering the extent to which they should be reflected in future District Council priorities. Currently this work has not concluded.

5. **Progress to-date**

5.1 In October 2004 targets were set for all category A and B priorities on a three to four year time horizon. It is therefore rather premature to review performance, particularly as some of the investment being provided from non-priority areas is not yet available. However in the light of developments in 2004/5 it is appropriate to review the status of the following services:

- a. Recycling

5.2 Although performance in 2004/5 has not increased significantly from 2003/4, the success of the Council in securing nearly £1 million in grant aid from DEFRA means that we are able to predict that we will reach our four-year target of 18% recycling by the end on 2005/6.

5.3 Of course this is currently only a prediction and still depends upon actual take-up of the green bin-composting scheme. Whilst the initial response to this scheme was good, requests for containers has slowed-down recently.

5.4 Given the severe financial limitations being imposed on the ability of the Council to raise additional revenue from Council tax income, our ability to meet future recycling targets is becoming increasingly dependent upon our success in securing DEFRA grants. In this regard our previous approach, which has not placed us at the forefront, will prejudice our application. If additional Council tax income cannot be secured, delivery of higher recycling targets will require a significant increase in the number of services included within category Z (non-priorities).

5.5 Recently DEFRA have made it clear that priority for future grant applications will be given to those Councils who, of their own volition, have elected to exceed the minimum targets and "get ahead of the game" by setting higher targets. Increased targets for this priority would also resolve the dissatisfaction being experienced by our residents as a consequence of the inequity caused by current variations in the patterns of recycling services across the District. Furthermore, it would also enable the Council to formally

consider future refuse collection options and invest to make efficiency savings.

5.6 As a result of this it is recommended that the Priority A status for recycling be maintained with the following new targets set:

| Year | Current Target | Proposed new target |
|--------|----------------|---------------------|
| 2005/6 | 18% | 18% |
| 2006/7 | 18% | 21% |
| 2007/8 | 18% | 24% |

b. Affordable Housing

5.7 When the priorities were set by the Council in May 2004, there was an amendment made seeking to make the provision of more affordable housing a Priority A (step-change) rather than a Priority B. As members will recall, the reason why incremental improvement was the only improvement considered to be sustainable was because of the housing figures being imposed on the District in the Lincolnshire Plan imposing severe limitations on the quantum of affordable housing that could be delivered through the planning system.

5.8 As a category B priority Council approved the following targets in October for the provision of affordable housing:

| YEAR | NEW AFFORDABLE HOMES |
|--------|----------------------|
| 2004/5 | 60 |
| 2005/6 | 70 |
| 2006/7 | 80 |
| 2007/8 | 90 |

5.9 For historical comparison, performance in 2003/4 was 35 and in 2002/3 just 4 homes.

5.10 Since last year the Council has received a Strategic Housing Services Inspection, which has challenged several aspects of the Council's performance in this area and suggested ways of improving. An action plan has been prepared to reflect the findings of this inspection.

5.11 Improvement in our ability to deliver affordable housing would need to be reflected in the targets set for this activity as a category B priority. In informal session, the inspectors expressed the perception that the targets already set represented, in their view, a step-change.

5.12 In addition to the Housing inspection we also have the very earliest outcomes from the Stock Options Appraisal Commission, which has indicated that stock transfer may emerge as the recommendation that will come to Council. This has been coupled with a valuation of the housing stock, which has intimated that transfer could deliver a considerable capital receipt to the authority, which could be used to fund the delivery of affordable housing. Neither the size of this capital receipt, nor the willingness of tenants to consider transfer, were known to the authority when it set its priorities last year

5.13 Taking all these factors into account there would appear to be a clear justification in moving this service from a Category B to a Category A priority with consequential adjustments to the targets:

| YEAR | NEW AFFORDABLE HOMES |
|--------|----------------------|
| 2004/5 | 60 |
| 2005/6 | 80 |
| 2006/7 | 100 |
| 2007/8 | 150 |

c. Planning and Conservation

5.14 The Council has made substantial progress in improving the speed of planning applications and has indeed exceeded most of the targets set. As a result of this, new targets have been set and will be included in future Best Value Performance Plans. In view of the importance of the service to our residents and the present large incentive grants from the ODPM, it is not recommended that the Priority B status of this service be changed.

6. Recommendation

6.1 Taking all the factors into account it is recommended that the cabinet endorse and consult the Development and Scrutiny Panels on the following proposals:

- A) Affordable Housing is moved from a Priority B to a Priority A
- B) New targets for both Affordable Housing and Recycling as set-out in this report are adopted

Duncan Kerr
Chief Executive