

REPORT TO CABINET

REPORT OF: Chief Executive

REPORT NO. CEX326

DATE: 8th May 2006

TITLE:	Annual Review of Priorities and Non-Priorities
KEY DECISION OR POLICY FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL:	Yes
COUNCIL AIMS/PORTFOLIO HOLDER NAME AND DESIGNATION:	All
CORPORATE PRIORITY:	All
CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS:	Yes
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT IMPLICATIONS:	This report is available via the Local Democracy link on the Council's website www.southkesteven.gov.uk
BACKGROUND PAPERS:	CEX294

Background

1. In accordance with the timescale approved by Council on the 27th October 2005, the Authority is mandated to carry out a full review of its Priorities in the Spring, leading to a consideration by Council in May or June. This then enables the service planning process to be commenced in July and the budget preparations in August.
2. The following actions have been taken in preparation for this:
 - 1) A full residents survey has been executed by the authority in February
 - 2) A Gateway Review attended by Members of the Cabinet and all of the DSP Chairs and Vice Chairs was held on Wednesday 26th April where the following 6 questions were posed:

- i. Do we have a good understanding of the problem and the solution?
- ii. Is there an ambitious and clear action plan with milestones, targets and risk assessment?
- iii. Has there been adequate consultation leading to identifying and securing the resources required?
- iv. Has sound project management been deployed?
- v. What evidence is there that our targets have been met?
- vi. What's left to do?

3) A programme of consultation with the public through the Local Area Assemblies has been initiated.

Consideration of the Progress on Current Priorities

3. Category A Priorities

1. Anti-Social Behaviour

Anti-social behaviour was granted the highest weighting by residents in all our consultation exercises when the priorities were first established in 2004. Since the establishment of our Anti-Social Behaviour Team, the Council has made very rapid and excellent progress in addressing both the causes and consequences of anti-social behaviour. During the year, the team received over 459 reports of anti-social behaviour, of which over 77% were successfully resolved. As a consequence of this 173 warning letters were issued (against a target of 20), 7 anti-social behaviour orders made and 57 Acceptable Behaviour Contracts agreed. The only target not met or exceeded by the team was for violent offences where the target was 10 per 1,000 of population and the outcome was in excess of 16. The reason for this is because of the use by the Police of Fixed Penalty Notices, which was introduced during the year, and therefore could not have been taken into account in the setting of the original target.

Of course, all of these targets are measures of activity, but it is reassuring to see that residents have already begun to notice a difference and the residents survey showed a 2% year on year reduction of their perception of anti-social behaviour being a significant problem (from 29.7% to 27.6%). In support of this, 23% less of residents now think that the problem is increasing (46% to 23%).

The Gateway Review gave this priority a green light.

Although very good progress has been made, with the introduction of community policing teams funded by the District and County Councils acting in partnership with the Police, from this year we can expect further improvements to come. It is, nevertheless, the case that concern regarding anti-social behaviour remains high in spite of the district's relatively low crime rate and it is therefore recommended that it remains a Category A priority.

2. Street Scene

In the setting of the budget for 2005/06, the Council provided considerable additional resources for Street Scene which has provided a comprehensive programme including the employment of 3 urban rangers and the procurement of additional street washing and cleaning equipment. The results of this investment are manifest in the outcomes of the indicators set by the Council for monitoring its services. In particular, PI 199(b) is a sophisticated measure of how clean our land and highways are. The indicator works by measuring the percentage of streets that do not meet the satisfactory standard. The best authorities in the country reached levels around 12% in 2004/05. South Kesteven achieved 19% and a target of 17% was set for 2005/6 and achieved an outcome of 10%. This was particularly secured by a clampdown on littering offences with over 300 fixed penalty notices being issued - a level of activity which is comparable with many of the major cities in the country and far exceeds anything in the County. At the same time, the average time taken to remove flytipping was 1 day - an improvement on 2 days set as the target. Again, it is heartening to see that this attention to detail for the street scene has been recognised by our customers. In the 2005/6 residents survey, public satisfaction with street cleanliness improved by 7% from 54% to 61% and equally impressively, those residents noticing improvements, outnumber those stating it had got worse by three to one.

The Gateway Review gave this service a green light and in view of the achievements made from the investment already committed it is now appropriate for this to move from Category A to Category B in order that we can continue to deliver incremental improvement.

3. Recycling

In 2004/05, South Kesteven recycled or composted 15% of household waste and in recognition of this priority status a target of 18% was set for 2005/06 which accords with the national targets set by DEFRA.

The spectacular success of the Council's green waste scheme coupled with the continued support of residents in the south of the district for the green box scheme has meant that our recycling rate has risen to 26.8%. This figure would have placed us in the upper quartile for 2003/04, however we recognised that all councils are improving.

This year, of course, was the roll out of our twin bins, which will ultimately give the authority a recycling rate of 50% making it one of the leading authorities in the country for recycling.

It is encouraging to see that the residents survey reported increases in customer satisfaction with an 8% rise in satisfaction, with kerbside recycling (from 53% to 61%) and 11% rise in satisfaction with collection arrangements (60% to 71%) and a 10% increase in satisfaction, with the reliability of the service (61% to 71%).

The Gateway Review gave this service a green light and in view of the ambitious targets set for future years, it is strongly recommended that it remains a category A priority service.

4. Access

The Council's priority for Access reflects the concerns voiced by residents about the ease of contacting the council and our historic failure to resolve issues at first point of contact. Access is a fast developing field with the introduction of new technology opening up new channels and significant differences in preference regarding access demonstrated by different customer groups.

The Council has met all of its targets for Access which are seen by the increasing self-service transactions, thereby securing Gershon Efficiency savings, resolving issues at first point of contact and improving the percentage of interactions delivered electronically.

During 2006/07 residents will begin to see the tangible results of the investments in Business Process Re-engineering with the opening of the new Customer Services Centre in Abbey Gardens. At the same time, the Council has dramatically improved the number of places where one can make payments to the district council from 4 to over 60.

However, there are major developments still to be facilitated in order to provide residents with a quality and type of access channel which is equitable for the 21st century. In particular, the area offices at Stamford, Bourne and the Deepings need to be reviewed and there is a partnership agreement with Lincolnshire County Council to deliver a network of public service centres, giving customers the benefit of one stop shop services for all council and public services.

The Gateway Review also gave this service a green light and it is recommended that, in order to deliver the transformational government agenda, this remains a Category A priority.

5. Town Centre Regeneration and the Development of Grantham as a Sub Regional Centre

Although this is one of the most important priorities for our communities, it is also an area that is hardest to measure and one where the results from our investment are not seen quickly, and cannot be in a short timescale.

The Council has met all of its targets set for 2005/6 which included comparisons of a checklist, improvements in the number of new retail units and a reduction in the number of vacant retail units. Equally importantly, the year has seen significant progress in the development of iconic schemes such as the Grantham Canal Basin, progress in the redevelopment of the Bourne Core Area and securing all the funding for the Stamford Gateway scheme. In addition to this, we have ended the year with town centre managers in place for each of the district's four towns and rejuvenated management partnerships.

APPENDIX 1

The residents survey indicated that there was increasing satisfaction on this priority with a 5% rise in shopping within the district (82% to 87%), 11% rise in satisfaction with the choice of shops (47% to 58%) and 4% rise in satisfaction in car parking facilities (44% to 48%).

The Gateway Review gave this service an amber light because of:

- 1) concerns over whether the management solely by TCMPs was the most appropriate way of facilitating improvement
- 2) whether the timescales for the achievement of these priorities were to lengthy, and
- 3) whether there was sufficient attention paid to the identification and gathering of clear and robust data to establish the baseline position and measure the improvement being made.

It is therefore recommended that this remains a Category A priority and that the issues raised in the Gateway Review are addressed.

6. Affordable Housing

Affordable Housing became a priority A following the Council's resolution in September 2005. During 2005/6, partly as a result of the lessons learnt from the Statutory Housing inspection and partly as a result of improved management and focus, there has been a dramatic improvement in the quantity of affordable housing delivered in the district and the quality of the strategic housing service.

Turning first to the quantity in 2005/6, the Council has secured the provision of 112 new units of affordable rented accommodation. This compares with the previous year's figure of 50, 2003/4 of 35 and a figure in 2002/3 and 2001/2 of only 4. In addition to this, as a result of our planning applications, we have negotiated and secured over 350 units of affordable housing which will be delivered in future years. In both cases, these outcomes dramatically exceeds the targets that were set.

The Gateway Review gave this service a green light and considered that, because of the potential for a further dramatic increase in the quantum of affordable housing that could be delivered if the stock transfer proceeds, it should remain a category A priority. However, they did think that there was benefit in widening the scope of the service to include, not only the delivery of affordable housing, but the prevention of homelessness in our housing solutions service.

7. Communications

Communications was also upgraded from a Category B to Category A priority in September of last year in recognition of the importance of sound communications to the achievement of the Council's aspirations to Excellence.

APPENDIX 1

During 2005/6, performance has focussed on improving the consistency with which the authority provides its key corporate newsletter, SK Today and in establishing a proper procedure for internal communications, through both the staff newsletter (Skoop) and a systematic approach to team briefings.

The results from the public survey demonstrate a dramatic increase in the number of people who say they receive the Council's newsletter (from 30% to 59%) and also from those who read it (26% to 50%).

As a Communications Manager has only been in post for 6 months, the full impact of the investment made by the council in seeking to improve its communications has not yet become apparent. However, all the indicators set for this service have been met or surpassed and the Gateway Review gave it a green light. It is recommended that Communications remain a Category A priority.

4. Category B Priorities

The Council has set 8 services as Category B priorities. These are as follows:

1. Financial Services

This was recently added to the list of Category B priorities in recognition of the improvement needed to achieve a Use of Resources judgement at Level 3, which is a pre-condition of achieving a CPA judgement of Excellence.

Now that the authority has had the benefit of considering the Use of Resources judgement made by the Audit Commission in 2005/6, it has become apparent that considerable investment will be needed in order to demonstrate to the public the highest standards of financial stewardship.

The Gateway Review spent some time considering this service and the implications of the improvement required to reach level 3 on the Use of Resources Score.

The Gateway Review made a judgement that the scale of the improvement justified that Financial Services be elevated from a Priority B to a Priority A service and given a wider remit of "effective use of resources".

2. Business Development

The Gateway Review had a presentation on the work being undertaken by the increased establishment within the Economic Development unit. It was noted that the target set for the year had been met and it was considered that this service justified continued improvement as a category B priority.

3. Diversity

During 2005/6 the District became the first in Lincolnshire to reach a level 2 on the Local Government Equalities scheme. This achievement was due to the clear commitment to improving equalities demonstrated in the training and development of both members and managers and the introduction of equality

monitoring and the commencement of a programme of equality impact assessments.

The Gateway Review complimented the service manager on achieving this milestone and resolved that the service remain as a Category B priority.

4. Housing Management

During 2005/6 the authority undertook a major restructuring of Housing management in order to provide a focused and customer orientated service, which comprehensively addresses all the housing management issues. The appointment of the Director of Tenancy Services, who commenced work in March, has given this team the leadership it needed to now improve the housing management service.

The Gateway Review noted that most of the targets had been met, including the important target for void times, which had required concerted effort by multidisciplinary teams of staff through the whole year. However a concern was raised about the level of rent collection and the data for this indicator is currently being checked.

The Gateway Review concluded that although the early signs of improvement were comprehensive, there was still some way to go if the Council was to achieve its objective of providing a 2* Housing Management service and therefore this should remain a priority B category.

5. LSP and Community Strategy

During 2005/6 a fundamental restructure of the LSP was undertaken leading to the establishment of an executive and a new Chairman. Since then a new Community Plan has been produced and an action plan drafted. The 2005/06 residents survey indicated that over 75% of residents agreed with the priorities set by the LSP in the community plan, which were, in turn, supported by a comprehensive area programme.

The Gateway Review noted the employment of a co-ordinator in 2006/07, however there was still capacity for further incremental improvement and recommended that this remain a priority B.

The future development will predominantly be around ensuring the LSP has the capacity to manage the Local Area Agreements and the new roles being envisaged for LSPs in the growing neighbourhood agenda.

6. Planning and Development Control

The improvement of our Development Control and Planning Services became a priority for the council following a poor Planning and Delivery Grant received for 2003/04.

Since that time the improvement in both the speed of Development Control decisions and improvements in quality of the service, as monitored by

APPENDIX 1

E-Access and progress in the interaction of the Development framework, has resulted in significantly enhanced performance grants and indeed, the level for 2004/5 was one of the highest received by any authority in the East Midlands.

The service has recently received a Peer Review and the results of this indicate that the authority may need to consider how best to maximise the use of the current resources and whether continued improvement in the speed of processing is a satisfactory way of measuring progress.

The Gateway Review appreciated the progress that had been made to date but felt that now a period of rationalisation and qualitative improvements were required and therefore felt that it would now become a category Y service.

7. Vulnerable Persons

The Council Priority for Vulnerable Persons was centred around improving the service to our care service customers.

Unfortunately, as the Gateway Review revealed, although there has been extensive marketing and promotion of this service, the introduction of Supporting People and the associated charges to those residents not on benefits, had meant a slight decline rather than increase in our customer base.

In the light of this, the Gateway Review felt it was appropriate for the Affordable Housing Priority to be enhanced to encompass services to people at risk of homelessness and that this specific priority for care services clients may no longer be needed.

8. Public Toilets

During 2005/6, the Council operated for a full year the new toilet at Red Lion Square, Stamford, resolved the location for the new attended facility in Grantham and also determined that new public toilets in Bourne would be provided as part of the core area redevelopment.

The residents survey for 2006 reported a notable increase in public satisfaction with toilets from 14% to 21% and it is hoped that the completion of the works in Grantham and Bourne will progress satisfaction even higher.

In the light of this progress and the investment already made, the Gateway Review felt that the Council's strategy had now been delivered and that there was no longer a need for this to be a priority B service.

Non-Priorities

Category Zs and Gershon Savings

5. The Gateway Review analysed progress being achieved by the Council in securing savings from non-priority areas, which is essential to provide the funding to deliver our Category As and Bs.

APPENDIX 1

The report presented to the Review by the Director of Finance and Resources painted a mixed picture. Targets for savings from Tourism had been surpassed. Targets from savings in Pest Control were clearly taking a little longer to achieve than had been predicted. Targets from savings in grants and other matters were proving to be more difficult to obtain than had been envisaged and expenditure on travel vouchers appears to have increased in spite of the restrictions on new applicants being required to be 70 or over.

Overall, the situation is that against targeted savings of £323,000 in 2005/06, the authority is likely to have achieved £136,000 and projected savings in 2006/07 are £296,000 against a target of £460,000.

The Gateway Review therefore gave this area a red light requiring urgent action to identify how the savings mandated by Council could be secured.

6. Essential to this analysis will have to be a reconsideration of our strategy regarding travel vouchers. Although we have restricted eligibility, the publicity given to free bus travel has resulted in a significant increase in awareness, and therefore demand, for this provision. This has resulted in an increase in cost of travel vouchers from £220,000 in 2005/6 to an estimated £280,000 in 2006/7. This, coupled with an increase in expenditure on bus passes of £152,000 between the same years, indicates results in expenditure predicted for the current year of nearly £600,000 on the concessionary travel scheme.

With the introduction of free bus passes nationwide in the future, it is an appropriate time to consider whether the council should still be making travel vouchers available to residents who live in areas well-serviced by local buses and whether future eligibility should be restricted to those residents in rural areas, who suffer disadvantages of infrequent or absent bus services.

I am also mindful that as the current scheme of eligibility for travel vouchers is determined on the basis of age, it may not comply with new age discrimination legislation due to come into effect in October 2006.

7. The consideration by Council of the Priorities was scheduled for June, however in our calendar of meetings agreed for the Council there is no scheduled meeting in June. The scheduled meeting in May would be too early to take into account the findings of all local area assemblies, or to have heard from the On-line Citizens Jury that has been formulated specifically to consider these priorities. It is therefore recommended to Cabinet that an Extra-Ordinary Council meeting is held in June, solely to consider the Council's priorities.

From speaking to members who attended the Gateway Review, it may be felt beneficial, that this meeting receive similar presentations and information on the Council's progress on its priorities and, therefore, contributions on how we could do better in the future, could be entertained from the whole Council membership.

Recommendations

8. i) that the consideration of Council of its priorities be undertaken at an Extra-ordinary meeting in June.

APPENDIX 1

- ii) This report and the notes from the Gateway Review meeting be made available to the On-Line Citizens Jury.

Duncan Kerr
Chief Executive