



To: The Leader and Executive Councillor for Strategy and Transformation: Councillor Lewis Herbert

Report by: STEPHEN KELLY – JOINT DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Relevant scrutiny committee: Strategy & Resources
20th March 2017
Scrutiny Committee

Wards affected: All

Progress Update on Shared Planning Service

Key Decision

1. Executive summary

This report updates members on progress in developing a Shared Planning Service between Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council. It seeks agreement to a number of key principles underpinning the development of the service, a multi-phase programme of delivery, and early use of a “Greater Cambridge” designation. It also sets out an initial high level action plan, seeks agreement to the procurement of additional resources to support this, and identifies two key issues which will require early decision.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended:

1. To note progress to date on the implementation of the Shared Planning Service.
2. To agree the development of the multi-phase programme for delivery of the project
3. To approve the broad principles of the proposed management structure (Appendix A) as the basis for the continued development of the organisational structure.

4. To note the allocation of additional resources to support the programme as set out in paragraph 5.3
5. To agree the early introduction of a “Greater Cambridge Planning Service” designation on signatures of emails from planning staff of both Councils
6. To note the need for seamless ICT systems across Greater Cambridge and to note the commitment to early work (and costs) on the procurement of a common ICT system for planning.

3. Background

- 3.1 Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council have been committed to the delivery of a shared service since 2015. A Shared Planning Service will provide the increased capacity and resilience that will enable both Councils to respond effectively to the challenges associated with the areas growth. In particular, the scale of the shared service will create opportunities for existing staff, to grow and develop, will allow the services to recruit and support specialist expertise amongst staff (in areas such as urban design and conservation), and to develop systems at a scale that will help improve resilience and reduce vulnerabilities caused by relatively small teams in areas such as enforcement.
- 3.2 As the complexity of planning appraisals grows, the scale and capability of a larger team will also allow the development of new specialist skills, in development appraisal and programme management particularly of large complex sites consistent with the objective of improving “cost recovery” in the planning process. Since the agreement to move towards the shared planning service, a number of other external factors have also served to further strengthen the case for the shared service. These include the continuing emphasis of national government on supporting housing delivery and economic growth, and the moves toward a devolved Combined Authority with associated expectation for strategic planning across the area. The expectation around greater integration with the Council Housing and County Transport strategies particularly and the greater emphasis post Brexit on regional economic and infrastructure planning will also require focus and capacity to be created.
- 3.3 The Greater Cambridge planning service will result in one of the largest shire district council planning service’s in the country, processing more applications each year than the city of Bristol. The Local Plan Team will be required to develop a joint local plan covering two complex and diverse districts that incorporate economic sectors and academic institutions/communities of national and global significance. The

services provided and the quality of outcomes secured by the existing Planning Team have led to a reputation for quality in new development which echoes the aspirations of existing communities across the area. This will need to be sustained.

- 3.4 Through the period of transition to a shared service, both Local Planning Authorities will also be engaging with significant planning policy related activities and complex planning applications. It is accordingly, important that during the project implementation phase, the Council can continue to provide an effective, trusted and accessible planning service which is capable of promoting high quality development outcomes.

4. Progress to date

- 4.1 The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development serving both the City Council and SCDC was appointed in June 2016. Collaboration between senior officers since June 2016 has led to the establishment of a project team comprising officers from both councils. Workshops to consider how the services' can be aligned and integrated, identifying priorities for action have also taken place. This project has also acquired the services of the 3C Programme Manager and Project Manager and an external "critical friend" [Fortismere Associates] with experience of planning service improvement programmes and shared service implementations.

- 4.2 The Project Initiation Document (PID) defines the scope of the shared service as comprising the following elements:

- Planning policy and strategy
- Neighbourhood Planning
- Consultancy/specialist services relating to development activity
- Planning and related Application Processing (including trees and Listed Building Consent) and decision making
- Planning Enforcement
- Support for corporate and sub-regional projects (City Deal/Duty to Co-operate/LEP/Combined Authority support etc.)
- Consultation and related responses on behalf of the local planning authorities
- Economic Development (as defined by Corporate Plan)
- Land Charges

- 4.3 The project team has also agreed the following set of high level objectives which have also been shared with all staff:

- a) To create and deliver an effective programme for the creation of a single, unified "Greater Cambridge" planning capability serving the Planning Committees of each of the participating Councils.
- b) To build a shared capacity and capability within the combined teams (and provide opportunities to support others) in a way that seizes opportunities for efficiency and quality improvements by providing services and products (including additional charged services) that meet the needs of users and the community at the lowest net cost.
- c) To deliver a service that can be flexible - in deployment and delivery
- d) To build/retain a reputation for professionalism, staff development, the delivery of high quality outcomes and competent "business management" amongst peers and partners.

4.4 The project team have taken the principles above and alongside drafting an initial action plan (focusing on project establishment) has begun to explore the potential organisational form of the service (see appendix A). Officers are seeking member's agreement to use this preliminary "structure" as the basis for future development of the formal structure and as a means to explore future operational models. These will be subject to consideration by the Committee later in the year before the service begins the formal change processes with all affected staff. The arrangements outlined reflect existing patterns of working in both Councils but with additional segmentation in the policy area to reflect the changing strategic context (with the Combined Authority and City Deal) and the significant economic role of Greater Cambridge.

4.5 Further engagement will take place with staff, users and members across both Councils on the way in which the planning service is delivered across the greater Cambridge area, both in terms of the way that work across the area may be managed within defined areas and on matters such as the location of staff across the respective Council offices. A comprehensive data capture exercise (based upon the Planning Advisory Services resources review process) is underway to inform recommendations to this committee later in the year.

4.6 To make the best use of the combined skills/resources of the service based in potentially multiple sites, the service will need to extend the use of matrix management alongside enhanced project and programme management capability. As the service seeks to improve income management and collection to reduce its net cost on the two

authorities in line with the shared service objective, additional business and financial management capabilities are also expected to be required.

- 4.7 Before a finalised structure (to be used as the basis for consultation and recruitment) is prepared, informal consultations with staff and the data analysis are expected to be used to help develop a recommendation for member's future consideration. A skills audit is also expected to highlight any additional capabilities required for the effective service implementation.
- 4.8 An initial Action Plan for Phase 1 of the project has been prepared focusing on the project initiation and information gathering (on process and procedures, staffing and performance/financial data etc). The action plan also promotes early opportunities for joint work on the "(re)-alignment" of service delivery processes and systems – the emphasis being on progressive evolution of both services' ways of working through phased implementation of new ways of working rather than a higher risk and potentially more disruptive single step change process deployed in some of the 3C service implementations. Some of these areas of work were already programmed/identified for review in respective service plans (e.g. pre-application process) and can now be unified for clarity and simplicity of service users/members. The final iteration of the shared service will accordingly require implementation to take place in a number of phases, and members' understanding and agreement to this approach is sought.
- 4.9 One action which officers suggest can be taken quickly and is highly symbolic of the move towards the integrated shared service is that all relevant staff should have below their email signatures a strapline stating "Greater Cambridge Planning Service" as well as that of their current employing authority. This will form part of a wider move to define the "shared service" as a single entity (with common templates and consistent processes) in the minds of members and users. Both services will, for example, be collaborating in delivery of a planning "open day" showcasing the work of the two services and seeking to re-engage more with residents and local businesses and to help build an understanding of forthcoming changes.
- 4.10 Through analysis of and visits to earlier shared service implementations', the importance of resolving key ICT infrastructure decisions has been repeatedly emphasised. Planning, and particularly Development Management, is highly dependent on an efficient ICT system. This includes customer access and communication, GIS and management information capabilities, as well as the ability to produce

documentation associated with planning decisions and committee reports at minimal cost. In the case of Greater Cambridge, a seamless Geographical Information System enabling electronic mapping of both council areas will be essential, and will need to be integrated into the overall ICT. The two authorities currently operate different ICT systems neither of which embraces fully the capacity for agile, mobile and multi-site working. The review and commissioning of an appropriate ICT solution is therefore a critical part of the programme towards integrated working and should be commenced now to enable the process optimisation/re-design central to the successful implementation of the shared service.

- 4.11 The consideration of the ICT system will break down into three main phases: scoping the requirements, specifying, and procuring and implementing the system. Officers have begun to identify potential process improvements and efficiencies which logically would form part of the scope of a new, joint system. As procurement is likely to take some time, it is proposed that resources will be assigned to this element in order that officers are able to provide recommendations to the Committee on programme and cost considerations associated with ICT integration alongside other organisational change costs later in the year.

5. Resources

- 5.1 Any significant service transformation requires focused and dedicated core resources to ensure effective implementation. This is particularly important given the large number of strategic projects that both planning services' are engaged in or are directly supporting, as well as the critical "front line" services provided in both councils. Most of the core project team are managers with existing roles whose time available for implementation alongside their existing workloads is limited.
- 5.2 It is therefore proposed that a small internally sourced implementation team is created, comprising two experienced members of staff seconded full time to the project to work alongside the 3C project support resource and the SCDC Service Excellence Officer. The two officer posts will need to be backfilled to release these staff to focus fully on the significant practical and operational measures required to align and then integrate the two services successfully. Specialist ICT input to scope a new system will also be required, most likely from 3C ICT. The ICT procurement will require further investment (later in the project) with a dedicated project plan once scoping and preliminary

costs have been obtained. Additional project management support, business improvement and critical friend input is also to be retained to ensure that the project can benefit from the insight provided from other shared planning services and service optimisation activities across the country. This role is currently being provided by Fortismere Associates but will need to be tendered again as the project continues.

- 5.3 The service has made a bid for £25K to the Council transformation programme for the year ahead. The balance of the costs are anticipated to be drawn from a corresponding investment from SCDC and the service budgets of both Authorities – which are expected to be supplemented by the Governments recent announcement of a 20% increase in national planning fees in July 2017. The current resources plan for the project will need to be reviewed again to reflect estimates for ICT implementation and the costs of change within the service – as the organisational structures and operational format for the service are developed in the future.

6. Implications for Other Services

- 6.1 The scale of the proposed Shared Planning Service will have implications for a number of “support” services, such as HR, Finance and ICT in providing input to the development of the shared service. The extent of these costs will become clearer based upon a number of future decisions – including those concerning ICT and organisational and operational relationships. Wherever possible, the project will seek to integrate with existing transformation projects (e.g. Smart working and the associated workforce strategies).

7. Implications

7.1 Financial Implications

The implementation of shared services has an expectation that net service costs to the constituent authorities will be reduced in the medium term. The shared service model is exploring how it can build capacity and capability through improved systems and processes to achieve improved cost recovery on a range of discretionary services to support greater efficiencies in securing savings on net cost without impacting negatively upon the quality of outcomes and service to customers. At this stage, officers are continuing to explore how the benchmark (for shared services) 15% net cost reduction attributed to the other shared service projects might be secured in future years once the service has been successfully established.

7.2 Staffing Implications

There are clear implications for staff affected directly by the move to a shared service, including some who may currently be managed outside the planning service. A staff engagement processes (including appropriate engagement with the Trades Unions) will be followed in line the respective corporate processes of the constituent authorities. In addition, staff newsletters, data sharing exercises and informal information briefings and experience sharing activities are already underway to improve understanding between the respective services.

7.3 Monitoring and Scrutiny

The Shared Planning Service will sit alongside the shared Waste service and shared Audit services. Other potential options for shared services with SCDC may also emerge in the future. Officers are accordingly reviewing the most appropriate means by which each authority can undertake appropriate scrutiny and monitoring of each of these services. A further report to both Councils explaining how Planning (and other) shared services with SCDC will be monitored will therefore emerge later in the year.

7.4 Equality and Poverty Implications

An EqIA has been carried out for this project.

7.5 Environmental Implications

Low to Medium Positive Impact.

The opportunities offered by increased resilience in service delivery and the ability to recruit and to provide specialist support over the wider Greater Cambridge area should result in a positive impact on the quality of new development.

The likely reduction in accommodation and energy use associated with a shared service will have a positive impact. Potential negative impact from increased travel will be mitigated by increased mobile and remote working.

7.6 Procurement

The shared service will require appropriate advice to be secured throughout implementation, as well as the likely procurement of a new ICT contract for both Councils.

7.7 Consultation and communication

This will be conducted in accordance with the Council's agreed policy.

7.8 Community Safety

There are no direct effects on community safety.

8. Background papers

These background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

9. Appendices

A – Broad Principles of Future Structure

10. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact:

Author's Name: Stephen Kelly

Author's Phone Number:

Author's Email: Stephen.kelly@cambridge.gov.uk