



Council Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee
17 April 2012

**Responses from the Cabinet to Issues Referred by the
Committee**

Purpose of the report: Policy Development and Review

To provide feedback from Cabinet on issues and comments raised by the Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 15 February 2012.

Introduction:

1. The Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered the following items at its meeting on 15 February 2012:
 - a) Fairness & Respect Strategy
 - b) Involvement & Transparency Strategy

The Committee's recommendations were considered by the Cabinet on 27 March 2012, and this report provides an update on the Cabinet's responses.

Fairness & Respect Strategy:

2. Following discussion of this topic by the Committee, the following comments and recommendations were submitted to the Cabinet:
 - The Committee has considered a report setting out the draft priorities for the Fairness and Respect Strategy and the process for ensuring that these aligned with the Council's Corporate Strategy for 2012-2017.
 - The Committee noted that key groups, including representatives of the voluntary, community and faith sectors, had been involved in the development of the Strategy to help ensure that it reflected their needs and that the priorities identified were relevant to the work of the Council and deliverable. Some concern was expressed at the meeting that the Council was relying to some extent on a top-down approach, although it was recognised that it was difficult to address the desires of all the residents at all times. The Committee suggested that the resident

forums set up by the Borough and District Councils could be used to help understand the aspirations of local people.

- In considering how effectively the draft priorities addressed those of the Corporate Strategy, it was suggested that the priority to increase training and employment opportunities in Surrey should not just focus on young people aged 19-25. Also, whilst understanding the value of having a workforce which was representative of the communities served by the County Council in terms of effective service delivery, it was important to ensure that the processes to achieve a representative workforce should themselves meet the principles of fairness and respect.
- Overall the Committee supported the general direction of the draft Strategy, subject to the comments below, and agreed to receive a progress report at its meeting in October 2012. Relevant issues would also be considered at a future meeting of the Environment & Transport Select Committee.

The Select Committee therefore recommends to Cabinet:

That the following amendments be made to the draft Fairness and Respect priorities contained in the Strategy:

- a) The phrase 'and aspirations' should be added to the penultimate priority to read 'Increase our understanding of the needs and aspirations of Surrey's residents and their differing experiences of Council services.'
- b) The implications for the Strategy of the urban/rural split in the County should be considered further.
- c) The priority in relation to the Corporate Strategy outcome of being a low-carbon and sustainable County ('ensure rural communities have access to services through new technology') should be included in the economy section, and replaced with a more appropriate priority along the lines of 'preventing pollutants getting in to the biological chain'.
- d) The priority to increase employment and training opportunities should have a broader focus than just young people aged 19-25.

Mr Mel Few

Chairman of the Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Response from the Cabinet:

3. Recommendation a): Accepted – amendment made

Recommendation b): Within the Fairness and Respect Strategy the Council has included the priority, "increase our understanding of the needs and aspirations of Surrey's residents and their differing experiences of Council services". As

part of the Council's work to implement this priority there will be an opportunity to undertake specific research that enhances the Council's understanding of Surrey's urban and rural areas.

Recommendation c): Protecting Surrey's environment is a key outcome in the Council's Corporate Strategy and a range of strategies and plans are already in place to reduce levels of pollution. These include: the Surrey Rural Strategy; Surrey Biodiversity Plan; and the Surrey Transport Plan – Climate Change Strategy.

Given the wide ranging activity already being undertaken it was felt that adding a priority on "preventing pollutants getting in to the biological chain" to the Fairness and Respect Strategy would not add any value to this agenda.

Recommendation d): The Council is undertaking a series of actions to ensure residents, of all ages, are provided with employment and training opportunities. Key actions include: increasing the number of young people in education, employment and training; shifting more of the Council's spending to local business to support the local economy and create jobs; and providing a wide range of apprenticeship placements.

In support of the Council's wider employment agenda, analysis undertaken as part of the development of the Fairness and Respect identified that working-age residents aged 19-25 had seen the largest increase in unemployment since the 2008/09 recession. This analysis suggested that additional support needed to be provided to this group of residents in order to reduce their higher rates of unemployment.

Kay Hammond
Cabinet Member for Community Safety
27 March 2012

Involvement & Transparency Strategy:

4. Following discussion of this topic by the Committee, the following comments and recommendations were submitted to the Cabinet:
 - The Committee has considered a report setting out the proposed approach to public involvement and transparency. It was noted that the public consultation on the Strategy had been open for a period of three months, but that only six responses had been received, and there was some concern that the proposed approach was not adequately informed by the views of the public. However, it was also acknowledged that the low response rate may be a result of the fact

that the topic was not controversial or that those consulted were broadly happy with the proposals.

- The Committee made the following comments in relation to the draft Strategy and improving public involvement:
 - ‘Have Your Say’ sessions at the Local Committee level may improve the public response to consultations.
 - Where possible, response requests should be personalised and targeted, explaining in what capacity the recipients are being asked to respond and why.
 - The central role of Members in consulting with the public should be given greater emphasis.
 - The importance of ensuring that information was available in accessible formats was reiterated.
 - Officers should seek to ensure the cost-effectiveness of any consultation undertaken.
 - Reference should be made to the Surrey Compact, as this was a key element of the Council’s relationship with the voluntary sector.
 - The Council should ensure that the Consultation Institute’s seven best practice principles for public engagement were fully reflected in the Strategy.

The Select Committee therefore recommends to Cabinet:

That the Committee’s comments, as set out above, be incorporated into the revised Involvement & Transparency Strategy.

Mr Mel Few
Chairman of the Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Response from the Cabinet

5. The Leader and I want to personally thank members of the Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their helpful input to the development of our commitment to public involvement.

I strongly support the comments of the Committee. The feedback has been taken into account and has helped to shape the ‘commitment’ presented to the Cabinet on 27 March 2012 for approval.

Our commitment to public involvement is an important part of our One Team approach and recognises the important role local Members and Local Committees play in consulting and representing the views of the public.

Our 'commitment' also places great importance to ensuring that we involve people and share information in an accessible way by making information for residents easy to find and recognising that people like to have their say and get involved in different ways.

Recognising the importance of providing good value, the approach we will take for individual involvement and consultation exercises will be proportionate to the importance, complexity and value to the public of the specific issue.

Our 'commitment' makes specific reference to the Council's commitment to working with the voluntary, community and faith sectors through the Surrey Compact principles and code of practice, and the Consultation Institute's 'best practice principles' which have been used to help develop guidance for Council staff. This guidance includes advice on how to select the appropriate method to maximise participation and response rates in any involvement activity.

Peter Martin
Deputy Leader
27 March 2012

Recommendation:

The Committee is asked to consider the responses and agree any next steps as appropriate.

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