

Cheltenham Borough Council Economy and Business Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee 21 September 2009

Developing the council's new corporate strategy 2010 – 2015

Report of the Policy and Partnerships Manager

1. Why has this come to scrutiny?

- 1.1 This briefing note has been brought to EBI Overview and Scrutiny Committee to:
- Inform the Committee about the development of the council's new corporate strategy;
 - Update the Committee on consultation undertaken to date; and
 - Give the Committee the opportunity to reflect on priorities that it may consider important for inclusion in the new corporate strategy.

2. Background

- 2.1 Cheltenham Borough Council's Business Plan 2007-2010 was agreed in March 2007 and set out our three year aims and their supporting ambitions. The aims were informed by Cheltenham's Sustainable Community Strategy, which was itself informed by community consultation and the Gloucestershire Local Area Agreement (LAA).
- 2.2 Since then the council has agreed three annual business plans with milestones, targets and risks and a separate Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), which is for a 5 year period and updated annually.
- 2.3 The next plan will run from April 2010 and elected members and officers have signed up to proposal to produce a joint Corporate Strategy / Medium Term Financial Strategy which would be for 5 year rolling period. This new over-arching long term strategy would provide a framework for the annual budget and action plan which would be reviewed and updated annually.
- 2.4 **The Financial framework**
- 2.5 The single greatest challenge we will face over the next five years is the need to secure significant efficiencies across every aspect of the council's business.
- 2.6 Although the council agreed the 2009-10 budget through identifying additional income and savings worth over £1m, the MTFS predicts a cumulative funding gap exceeding £3m over the next five years. The bad news is that this gap is likely to widen and a revised MTFS statement will be brought to cabinet in September 2009.
- 2.7 By linking the MTFS with the corporate strategy, the council will be making an explicit statement that securing these necessary efficiencies is going to underpin our core business.

2.8 Feedback from the IDeA Peer Review

2.9 The IDeA peer review team felt that the council was trying to do too much and that we should use the opportunity of the next corporate strategy to reassure ourselves that we have the financial and staffing capacity to deliver our ambitions. They wrote:

“However, a number of people raised some concerns about whether the council is trying to do too much. The nine (plus one) priorities lead to 33 overall aims which amounts to a very ambitious agenda. Given a rising budget deficit and difficulties experienced through the impact of the recession, there is concern that the council is in danger of spreading itself too thinly, with a result that it is pursuing too many priorities at a time of major resource challenge. When the business plans are next revised, it will be important for the council to satisfy itself that it has adequate staffing and financial resources to achieve its 33 aims”

3. Progress to date

3.1 A timetable for the production of the new strategy has been produced and is attached as appendix A.

3.2 An elected members' seminar was held on 8 July to kick-start the corporate strategy process. Members welcomed the proposals to link the MTFs with the new corporate strategy and also welcomed the work of the council to secure longer-term efficiencies. Members suggested that the new strategy be as clear and transparent as possible, particularly in relation to costs and performance. This will support the scrutiny process.

3.3 Proposals for consultation were shared with elected members at the seminar and there was clear support for seeking views from community organisations about the relative importance of our community aims. Since the seminar, officers have attended a number of community meetings (see timetable for more information), a survey has been circulated to businesses who are signed up to the council's business pride initiative and a web-based survey is now available on the council's web-site. The consultation programme will be completed by Friday 18th September and results will be shared with elected members at a seminar in October.

4. Initial feedback from the consultation

As the consultation work is not yet complete, a summary of the consultation to date will be presented at the meeting. There are already some emerging messages:

- Community safety remains a high priority.
- The wording of our nine community aims needs to be streamlined / simplified to make it easier for communities to understand what we do and what difference we will make.
- Communities are very interested in how the council allocates resources across the nine community aims and wish to be more involved in the decision-making process.
- Interest from both businesses and the VCS in how the council can be more coordinated in how we market the town.

5. Priorities for Economy and Business Improvement O+S

- 5.1** The IDeA peer review process reminded us that we are trying to do too much given our financial framework. The new strategy will have to plot the course for the council so that it continues to meet community, political and government aspirations whilst delivering value for money services. It is crucial that elected members are fully involved agreeing priorities and also preparing themselves to make difficult decisions.
- 5.2** We plan to hold a second elected members' seminar in late-October where there will be an opportunity to reflect on the outcomes of the consultation and think about what this means for the corporate strategy.
- 5.3** Ahead of the members' seminar it will be useful to get a feel for priorities for EBI O+S in terms of areas that you feel are of particular importance and perhaps those areas that you feel are not so important.

Background Papers

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Accountability

Leader of the Council