

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO THE
CABINET

15th October 2014

1. PLANNING PEER REVIEW

Submitted by: Executive Director – Regeneration & Development

Portfolio: Planning and Assets

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform Members of the outcome of the recent Planning Peer Review process and to agree the Council's approach in responding to it.

Recommendations

- a) That Members note the contents of the Peer Review Team's report and the recommendations therein.
- b) That Members agree with the proposal to prepare an Action Plan to address the said report's recommendations.
- c) That the Action Plan, referred to above, be reported to Cabinet for approval at the earliest opportunity.
- d) That officers write to the Peer Review Team thanking them for their report and confirming the Council's intended approach.

Reasons

1. To ensure that Members can be appraised of the Peer Review Team's findings and to agree how the Council should respond to it.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council commissioned the national Planning Advisory Service to review its Planning Service with the aim of addressing perceived concerns about facets of the service to ensure that this important service is both effective and efficient.

- 1.2 The review process was undertaken in accordance with a nationally-agreed approach. This involved an assessment around a number of key themes.
- 1.3 The review team spent three days on site during which they interviewed a wide range of Members, officers and other stakeholders.
- 1.4 The Council has now received a final report/letter from the Peer Review Team, a copy of which has been circulated to all Members. For ease of reference the recommendations have been extracted and shown at Appendix 1.

2. **Issues**

- 2.1 The main issue for consideration is to agree how Cabinet wishes to manage and respond to the report.
- 2.2 At the time of writing officers had agreed with the Portfolio Holder that an Action Plan should be prepared for approval at the earliest available meeting of Cabinet.
- 2.3 In order to optimise the robustness of the Action Plan all stakeholders (including all Members of the Council) have been sent a copy of the letter and invited to comment upon the recommendations (encouraged to do so in a manner that will inform the preparation of the Action Plan). Additionally arrangements have been made to engage Members of the Planning Committee, along with officers, in the drafting of the Action Plan (taking account of the latter feedback).
- 2.4 The formal views of the Planning Committee will be reported to Cabinet to assist in the decision-making process.

3. **Options Considered**

- 3.1 Do nothing – simply receive the report and make no substantive changes.
- 3.2 Respond positively and promptly to the Review Team's recommendations

4. **Preferred Option/Proposal**

- 4.1 It is recommended that an Action Plan is prepared addressing all of the Review Team's recommendations and that this be brought to a future meeting of Cabinet (at the earliest opportunity).

5. **Legal/Statutory Implications**

- 5.1 There are none directly arising from this report or the process undertaken. This is a purely voluntary process that the Council has chosen to pursue in order to ensure that its Planning Service is effective and efficient.

6. **Financial/Resources Implications**

- 6.1 The Council contributed £5,000 to engage in this process. In addition there has been a relatively significant amount of officer and Member time involved in the process to date which has been found from within existing capacity by prioritising the tasks.
- 6.2 At this stage it is not known whether any of the proposals in the Action Plan will place any further or new demands upon the Council's resources.

7. **Background Papers**

- 7.1 Peer Review Team final report dated August 2014.

8. **Appendices**

- 8.1 Extract of Peer Review Team's report showing their recommendations:

Appendix 1 - Summary of Peer Review Team's Recommendations

1. Set a clear political narrative for the long term future of the borough stressing the need and importance of homes, jobs, infrastructure and locally generated income/grant. Develop a 'golden thread' linking this to key corporate policy documents including the local plan.
2. Develop a coherent strategy for investment and growth which recognises the key role that planning performs. Examine opportunities for the release or reuse of land assets with partners to stimulate growth and economic development.
3. Develop an interim planning policy statement as part of local plan preparation process.
4. Re-examine resource allocations, especially in planning policy and enforcement to ensure that these match priorities and needs. Switch or increase resources to match priorities including pump priming, partnering and planning performance agreements (PPAs).
5. Develop systematic links between financial planning and local plan development / monitoring to help focus on costs and income in relation to non-national domestic rate, council tax and new homes bonus.
6. Establish an informal pre planning briefing for members of the planning committee including a review of strategic planning group.
7. Set up effective mandatory councillor training programme that is bespoke to meeting local needs. Develop wider training programme for councillors and officers to be delivered jointly where ever possible focusing on improving understanding of respective roles and the need for effective engagement.
8. Review the guidance and protocols in relation to section 106 to seek to front load the system and reach decisions more quickly on major applications.
9. Re – examine the scheme of delegation to allow the planning committee to focus on major applications.
10. Review the decision to suspend work on community infrastructure levy.
11. Undertake systematic review of the effectiveness of the service's methods of communication and access focussing on councillors, parish councils and service users.