

Report to: **Audit, Best Value and Community Services Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **28 February 2012**

By: **Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Community Services**

Title of report: **Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources 2011/12**

Purpose of report: **To review Scrutiny input into the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) process during 2011/12.**

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**RECOMMENDATION: The Committee is recommended to review its input into the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources process to establish whether there are lessons for improvement for the process in future.**

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## **1. Financial Appraisal**

1.1 There are no specific financial implications associated with this report.

## **2. Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) and scrutiny in East Sussex**

2.1 Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (ie. aligning the Council's budget setting process with service delivery plans) is now firmly established as an effective and transparent business planning process in East Sussex. The 2011/12 round began with the inclusion on the 26 July 2011 Cabinet of the State of the County 2011 report.

2.2 Scrutiny committees actively engaged in the process firstly to allow them to bring the experience they have gained through their work to bear, and secondly to help inform their future work programmes.

2.3 In September 2011 each scrutiny committee considered extracts from the *State of the County* report and made comments to Lead Members on the relevant policy steers and their contribution to the objectives of the whole Council (the County Council Promise) prior to consideration by County Council.

2.4 The scrutiny committees established scrutiny boards to act on their behalf and provide a detailed input into the RPPR process. These met in December 2011 to consider the draft Portfolio Plans and impact of proposed savings. In particular the scrutiny boards:

- Considered whether the amended Policy Steers reflected satisfactorily within the proposed key areas of budget spend for the coming year;
- Considered whether all possible efficiencies were identified; and
- Assessed the potential impact of these savings on services provided to East Sussex County Council customers.

2.5 This report aims to assist scrutiny to become more effective in future RPPR rounds and to enable consideration of the specific commentary relating to each committee.

2.6 Appendix 1 summarises the comments and recommendations made by the scrutiny committee and boards during the later stages outlined above. In addition to making specific recommendations, scrutiny sought and was given assurances, on a range of related matters.

### **3. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation**

3.1 The Committee is recommended to review its input into the 2011/12 Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources process and in particular to establish whether there are lessons for improvement for the future.

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Local Members: All

#### Background Documents

None

### **Overview and Scrutiny: Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) boards 2011/12**

This table is a summary of the outcomes, observations and findings of the Audit, Best Value & Community Services RPPR Board held in December 2011.

All the scrutiny boards considered draft Portfolio Plans and attempted to assess the impact of both any significant budget cuts facing the County Council over the coming years and those activities where savings are not necessarily being proposed but which account for significant use of resources. Scrutiny boards are largely supportive of the plans being put in place and the means being proposed to protect front line services as far as practicable. As a consequence of this work, they have identified new priorities for scrutiny work programmes in the coming year.

All the RPPR boards emphasised the continuing importance of presenting RPPR information in an open, clear and understandable way.

#### **Audit, Best Value & Community Services**

Board: Councillors Sparks (Chairman), Barnes, S Shing and B Tidy

Lead Members: Councillors Freebody & Glazier

Observer: Councillor Stogdon

#### **RPPR Board on 22 December 2011**

The proposed savings and impacts are endorsed subject to the following comments and observations:

#### **Portfolio Plan - Corporate Resources**

Policy Steer 1 & 2 - Ensure resources align with key priorities and that effective financial management is in place across the Council; and

Maintain and improve high standards for governance, internal control and risk management.

- The focus on performance and innovation as a means of generating income and driving down costs is to be applauded.

Policy Steer 3 - Ensure top class procurement practices to help deliver effective service outcomes across the Council.

- The Build East Sussex initiative and the insurance top-up scheme are to be welcomed for the effective balance they strike between reducing costs for the Council and ensuring local small and medium enterprises are supported.
- Members noted the proposed improvements resulting from the service review of procurement and sought assurance that the move to category management would not adversely affect the Council's work to support local SMEs. Officers confirmed that support for the local economy would remain a key theme in any new procurement arrangements.

Policy Steer 4 - Ensure the Council's property estate and operations are efficient and fit for purpose.

- There is a clear value in reducing maintenance costs and floor space through “agile working”. However there is also a need to understand the long term value of a site and costings over a 30 year period, not just annually.

Policy Steer 5 - Ensure the Council's carbon footprint and utility costs are as low as possible.

- The Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee recommendation that the street lighting pilot is rolled out countywide to reduce the Council's carbon footprint is welcomed.
- There is a clear and pressing need to reduce the Council's carbon footprint as much as possible ahead of the upcoming increase in the cost of carbon from £12-£30 a tonne under the Carbon Reduction Commitment Energy Efficiency Scheme.
- The Council should look to focus on the issue of scarcity of water and ensure that the recycling of water is being maximised.

Policy Steer 7 - To improve the health and well-being of our communities, reduce health inequalities and improve life expectancy in East Sussex.

- Life expectancy differs dramatically within districts; therefore it would be more accurate to measure comparative life expectancy by output area rather than by district when assessing targets for Public Health.
- There is a necessity to look at Public Health responsibilities from a strategic perspective. Working with partner organisations in health and education will help to ensure that there is an integrated public health system countywide, which in turn will help the Council to meet its own performance targets.
- Performance targets should be set as soon as is practical after the government finalises resource allocation for Public Health.

**Portfolio Plan - Community Services**

Policy Steer 2 - Embed the Library Service in communities to: reflect the expressed needs of the customer; encourage people to get the skills they need for employment; promote learning/literacy and improve access to services.

- The Council should look to engage with other organisations when developing service provision in towns. In particular, the Council should look to see if library buildings can be shared with other service providers such as GP surgeries.
- There are currently no plans to close libraries.
- There is sufficient reassurance that the service review of libraries will consider whether the Mobile Library Service is fit for purpose and that any changes to the service will reflect the needs of the customer.

## **Portfolio Plan - Strategic Management and Economic Development**

### **Policy Steer 1 - Raise the prosperity of East Sussex through a sharp focus on employment, skills and planned infrastructure.**

- Detailed criteria for the selection of the wind turbine feasibility project over other projects such as biomass boilers are not set out. However it is understood that there is a strong case for income generation from wind turbines and that the proposed planning feasibility project will look into this.
- The impact of the reduced profile of the Adult Learning and Skills Partnership Board in recent years should be made clearer [in future Portfolio Plans]. The role is now focused on oversight and influence rather than provision and this is likely to affect how targets for performance measures are set.
- Elected members have an important role to play as informed ambassadors of the Council. This role should be utilised by the Council for the super-fast broadband project. Members should be encouraged to attend parish and town council and community organisation meetings to inform the attendees about the proposals and timeline for the implementation of the project once it has been developed.

### **Policy Steer 5 - Ensure that residents, staff and key stakeholders are engaged in and informed about the key changes impacting on them.**

- The East Sussex County Council website is a key engagement tool for residents, staff and key stakeholders and this is ensured in part through its adherence to the Plain English Campaign. Although there is reassurance that the in-house monitoring will be effective, it is essential that we maintain the excellent standard of plain English on the website.