

Report to: **Cabinet**

Date: **19 April 2005**

By: **Director of Policy Management and Communications and Director of Transport and Environment**

Title of report: **Best Value Review of Sustainable Communities**

Purpose of report: **To provide an opportunity for Cabinet to comment on the report of the Scrutiny Committee for Audit and Best Value**

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The Cabinet is recommended:**

- 1. to note the report of the Scrutiny Committee for Audit and Best Value; and**
  - 2. to recommend the County Council to welcome the report and to approve the officers' response to the recommendations and their implementation.**
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### **1 Financial Appraisal**

1.1 This report has no direct financial implications for the County Council, but may influence future planning and target setting through our normal business planning processes.

### **2. Background**

2.1 A Best Value Review of Sustainable Communities was established to assist the Council's future business planning and its work in preparation for future inspections. It has also helped inform the Council's response to the draft South East Plan (see item elsewhere on the agenda).

2.2 The Project Board heard and received evidence from Transport and Environment managers, and representatives from Age Concern, the Environment Agency, Sussex Enterprise, the East Sussex Economic Partnership and Southern Water.

2.3 The Scrutiny Committee for Audit and Best Value endorsed the Board's report on 10 March 2005. The responses of the relevant Chief Officers are attached to this report at appendix 1.

### **3. Commentary**

3.1 The Review was carried out on a tight time schedule and focused on four specific areas:

- housing levels;
- water and wastewater sustainability;
- environment – recycling and waste; and
- transport issues – relating to access to services and employment, and to the ageing population and transport.

3.2 The Board was not able to cover all the areas it would have liked to in the time available. It is therefore recommended that the East Sussex Health Overview Scrutiny Committee investigate issues of sustainability in the provision of health care, in the context of the ageing population (Recommendation 1).

3.2 Some of the issues raised are specifically intended to inform the Council's response to the South East Plan. The action plan has cross references to the South East Plan and shows how particular issues within the report are addressed in the action plan.

#### **4. Conclusions and Reason for Recommendation**

4.1 The Best Value Review of Sustainable Communities has provided a welcome and constructive approach to sustainability in East Sussex, and will help inform the consultation on the South East Plan.

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**Appendix 1**  
**Best Value Review of Sustainable Communities Action Plan**

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Director's response and action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
<b>R1</b>	The East Sussex Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) is requested to investigate issues of sustainability, particularly around the provision of accident and emergency, GP and dental services, in the context of an ageing population in East Sussex, as part of its future programme.	This will be recommended to HOSC for consideration at the start of the 2005/06 programme.	June – December 2005
<b>R2</b>	The following definition should be used as a starting point for future consideration of sustainability issues in East Sussex: "Sustainable development is the simple idea of ensuring a better quality of life and successful communities for everyone, now and for generations to come. This means that East Sussex County Council together with our partners should: 1. encourage a thriving and improving local economy supported by education and training; 2. promote better transport facilities; 3. use natural resources wisely and encourage conservation; 4. protect and enhance the environment; 5. care for and protect people; and 6. promote affordable housing."	The proposed definition is in line with the County Council's priorities and the East Sussex Community Strategy 'Pride of Place'. The definition is quite complex and could helpfully be simplified. The definition will be used when the Community Strategy is reviewed by the East Sussex Strategic Partnership in June 2006.	June 2006
<b>R3</b>	Consideration should be given to extending current housing schemes for key workers to wider groups of employees so that harder-to-recruit skills fall within the remit for subsidised accommodation.	This recommendation is reflected in the proposed County Council response to the draft South East (SE) Plan which will be considered by Cabinet 19 April. The proposal was also included in the response to the draft Regional Housing Strategy 2006-9.	19 April 2005

		The need for a wider definition has not been identified as an issue in the current community strategy, but will be considered as part of the review of the priorities in 'Pride of Place' in June 2006. A wider definition of the 'key' workers able to access subsidised housing would increase our ability to recruit staff with locally needed skills.	June 2006.
<b>R4</b>	Further investigations should be undertaken into whether development contributions can be obtained, economically and effectively, from smaller developments that are currently below the threshold limit for making any contribution.	<p>The Council's Development Contributions Coordinator will be asked to discuss this with the District Councils, with a view to the District Councils seeking contributions on smaller sites. The ability to achieve this will depend on their staffing resources and requirement to meet targets for deciding planning applications.</p> <p>The recommendation will also inform the Council's response to a future consultation, which is expected late 2005/early 2006, on a national proposal (arising out of the Barker Review on Housing Supply) for a Planning Gain Supplement.</p>	Ongoing
<b>R5</b>	<p>a) Given the overall evidence, particularly concerning problems of infrastructure, the Board is unable to support housing development above the rate of 25,500 new homes per year for the South East at present.</p> <p>b) Housing development should, as far as practicable in East Sussex:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) include a significant proportion of affordable dwellings;</li> <li>ii) comprise one or two bedroom dwellings; and</li> <li>iii) comprise larger scale developments.</li> </ul>	<p>a) This recommendation is reflected in the proposed County Council response to the draft SE Plan which will be considered by Cabinet 19 April.</p> <p>b) The District Councils are responsible for developing more detailed policies (through new-style Local Development Frameworks) to implement the SE Plan. These policies will cover location and type of housing development.</p> <p>i) The need for a significant proportion of affordable housing is being highlighted through the SE Plan,</p>	<p>19 April 2005</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>April 2005</p>

		<p>including the sub-regional Sussex Coast strategy.</p> <p>ii) It is not always desirable or possible to dictate dwelling size. Whilst, through our response to the SE Plan, we will support the building of some smaller dwellings to cater for changing household size, there will still be a need for larger dwellings to address other needs.</p> <p>iii) Whilst larger scale developments can assist in achieving development contributions to significant supporting infrastructure (roads, schools etc), this has to be balanced against other objectives, including making best use of previously developed land and reducing the need to use greenfield sites. When greenfield sites are used there tends to be greater scope for large scale developments. A large number of developments in East Sussex will, however, be on previously developed land and therefore they will not necessarily be large scale developments.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
<b>R6</b>	<p>East Sussex County Council needs to ensure that it works effectively with the water companies, Environment Agency, OFWAT and the district and borough councils, by developing new mechanisms for joint working if necessary, to:</p> <p>a) agree the need, location and timing for new strategic water resources (particularly reservoirs); and</p> <p>b) ensure adequate wastewater handling and processing facilities.</p>	<p>The draft SE Plan contains a policy encouraging such joint working. It also identifies possible reservoir schemes, including enlargement of Bewl Water by 2014/15 and possible enlargement of the Darwell Reservoir. The County Council will continue to work with partners responsible for authorising schemes, as and when necessary, to plan for new, strategic water facilities. These organisations are also being consulted directly on potential infrastructure requirements associated with the developing strategy for the Sussex Coast.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

		The County Council, as Waste Planning Authority, is responsible for giving planning permission for waste water processing facilities. A wastewater works is proposed at Peacehaven, to allow Southern Water to meet the requirements of the European Union Urban Waste Water Directive in the catchment area from Hove to Peacehaven.	
<b>R7</b>	The merit of creating a single waste collection and disposal authority should be explored further with a view to removing the disincentives to recycling.	A single waste authority has been investigated and a report was presented to the East Sussex Local Government Association (ESLGA) Waste Management Members Group and discussed at its meetings on 17 June 2003 and 29 January 2004. A number of joint working activities and partnership arrangements are being undertaken by the County Council, Brighton & Hove City Council and the Boroughs and Districts. The issue of a joint waste authority will be put on a future agenda of the ESLGA Waste Management Members Group, for further discussion.	Ongoing
<b>R8</b>	Investigate further possibilities for increasing the amount of green waste collected for composting in East Sussex, building upon the successes achieved by Wealden District Council, with a view to reducing the demands on landfill and producing a marketable compost product.	The collection of green garden waste for composting is likely to increase the total amount of waste that has to be managed. Experience shows that green waste levels increase where there are dedicated collection services. This has a number of effects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• more collected waste will actually reduce the overall recycling performance and lead to higher waste costs; and</li> <li>• the Government's Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS), which came into force on 1 April 2005, required the County Council, as</li> </ul>	Ongoing

		<p>Waste Disposal Authority (WDA), to reduce biodegradable waste from the waste stream. Failure to stay within tight limits will result in fines of up to £150 for each tonne above our allowance.</p> <p>The County Council is encouraging home composting, general waste reduction and the removal of the biodegradable waste that is currently in the waste stream for composting, thereby reducing the amount of waste that goes into the system.</p> <p>The County Council pays recycling credits payments to the Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs) for materials extracted for recycling, this includes green garden waste.</p> <p>Further work with the Boroughs &amp; Districts is being undertaken to investigate ways in which the County Council can help increase recycling without compromising its position on LATS.</p>	
<b>R9</b>	<p>The Government should be urged to be more proactive in supporting local authorities' aim to promote and sustain viable waste disposal and recycling programmes. Action should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) promoting research into commercially recycling plastics to create marketable or biodegradable products;</li> <li>b) promoting effective legislation to reduce the amount of unnecessary packaging;</li> <li>c) requiring higher standards for waste recycling or biodegradability; and</li> <li>d) promoting research to increase capacity for providing energy from waste in a more publicly acceptable way,</li> </ul>	<p>The County Council will continue its work in this area including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ lobbying Government on waste issues wherever possible and responding to Government consultations as appropriate urging greater sustainability and Government to be more proactive in supporting local authority recycling activities;</li> <li>▪ lobbying Government through other organisations, such as the Local Government Association (LGA), County Surveyors' Society and National Association of Waste</li> </ul>	Ongoing

	<p>recognising the likely increased demand over the next 20 years.</p>	<p>Disposal Officers;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ working with the Government's Waste &amp; Resources Action Programme (WRAP), to successfully receive funding; and</li> <li>▪ participating in the WRAP national awareness campaign.</li> </ul> <p>WRAP's programmes of work concentrate on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creating stable and efficient recycling markets;</li> <li>• specific work in six material streams (aggregates, glass, organics, paper, plastics &amp; wood);</li> <li>• reducing waste at home;</li> <li>• setting up an advisory service to make councils' recycling schemes more effective; and</li> <li>• engaging the public by raising awareness of the need to reduce waste and recycle more.</li> </ul> <p>In addition joint working between the Waste Management Group and the Waste Planning Group has been undertaken to respond to Government consultations on planning guidelines and regimes.</p>	
<p><b>R10</b></p>	<p>The Council should research and develop all possible funding sources, through partnerships with the Government and in Europe, to address the strategic transport infrastructure shortfalls (road and rail) in East Sussex.</p>	<p>The Council recognises the importance of this activity. Possible national and international funding sources, including development contributions, are under constant review to assist the providers (Highways Agency, Network Rail and train operators) deliver improved road and rail infrastructure. The Council also reviews funding sources for its own transport responsibilities and is currently investigating funding sources for the Bexhill – Hastings Link Road.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

		The Council's response to the SE Plan highlights the need to provide the appropriate infrastructure and for this to be funded.	April 2005
<b>R11</b>	There is a significant need for greater integration between bus and train services in both <u>urban and rural</u> areas, for example, by promoting greater use of 'through' ticketing and greater integration of bus and train timetables. The work needs to be supported by effective publicity campaigns.	Where the opportunity occurs, the Passenger Transport Team (PTT) promote and publicise integration between bus and rail operations and ticketing. This is done within the constraints imposed by the Office of Fair Trading and operators commercial interests.	Ongoing
<b>R12</b>	Further clarity is needed of the effectiveness of the delivery of the Council's objective to provide a co-ordinated county-wide passenger transport service that meets the <u>urban and rural</u> travel requirements of schools, social services and the public.	PTT is currently implementing a new single office management system to improve all aspects of its delivery. This will involve close working with the client departments to ensure an efficient flow of quality information to improve service delivery. It is also planned to submit to Social Services options to meet their future transport needs.	Ongoing