

Report to: **Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **18 March 2012**

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

Title of report: **Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources 2012/13**

Purpose of report: **To review Scrutiny input into the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) process during 2012/13.**

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

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 established as an effective and transparent business planning process in East Sussex. The 2012/13 round began with the inclusion on the 24 July 2012 Cabinet of the State of the County 2012 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 2012 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 2012/January 2013 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 of RPPR to become more effective in future 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 2012/13 Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources process and in particular to establish whether there are lessons for improvement for the future.

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Background Documents

None

Overview and Scrutiny: Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) boards 2012/13

This table is a summary of the outcomes, observations and findings of the Economy, Transport and Environment Services RPPR Board held in December 2012.

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.

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

Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee RPPR Board – 10 December 2012

Board: Councillors: Stogdon (Chairman), Daniel and Freeman Lead Members: Councillors Lock and Maynard.

Observer: Councillor Sparks

Scrutiny board observations and recommendations

Key messages to Cabinet:

- 1) Consider creating a single reserve to smooth the financial effect of variations in demand for ETE services that are subject to vagaries of the weather such as winter maintenance, grass cutting and flooding (rather than create separate reserves for each).
- 2) Consider re-allocating some of the proposed £490,000 mitigation for grass cutting and weed spraying (following a planned scrutiny review in 2013) towards other priorities; in particular: Planning (to minimise risks from the proposed merger), Trading Standards (to protect some services affecting the most vulnerable) and gully emptying (to support the extensive survey work needed to support the asset management plan).
- 3) The proposed savings and impacts are endorsed subject to the following detailed comments and observations:

a) Transport Development Control – proposed increase in threshold for which we provide a transport response (£64,000 saving in 2013/14)

- Noted the intended use of standard planning responses for small developments and further mechanisms to protect against multiple planning applications for developments that individually fall below the threshold.
- Assurance is requested that any reduction in planning s106/CIL income and missed opportunities to specify appropriate ‘Grampian’ conditions would not offset the benefit of this saving.

Scrutiny board observations and recommendations

b) Road safety – proposed reductions in road safety education, contribution to SSRP and road safety engineering (£675,000 saving over three years)

- In future, driver 'diversion courses' will cover more transgressions such as mobile phone use and non seat belt use; this programme is self funding and unaffected by the proposed reductions.
- Proposed road safety engineering schemes will in future need to 'compete' with other transport schemes within the transport budget.
- A range of road safety activities will need to be provided in a different way such as cycle and pedestrian training and school crossing patrols.
- The new Assistant Director for ETE, Geoff Mee, is the ESCC officer 'champion' for road safety.

c) Grass cutting and weed spraying – proposed saving by ceasing routine work and focusing on junctions or where required on safety grounds; proposed 100% mitigation (£490,000 saving with proposed £490,000 mitigation in 2014/15 ie. net zero change if the mitigation is agreed)

- These are low priority functions compared to others within ETE and therefore a proportion of the £490,000 mitigation should be used elsewhere.
- In 2013/14 ETE Scrutiny Committee will review the effectiveness of grass cutting/weed spraying operations in the County and, in particular, consider the extent to which savings can be made by rethinking the whole approach and eliminating duplication between the three tiers of local government.

d) Gully emptying – proposed saving by adopting a 'risk-based approach' (£300,000 saving in 2014/15)

- Gully emptying and associated work to identify and address problems with the underlying infrastructure are a high priority and this budget should not be reduced.

e) Village maintenance teams – proposed saving by using Highway Stewards as a conduit to parish and town councils (£300,000 saving in 2013/14)

- Overall, the highways stewards system is working well. Some stewards may be over stretched and, if resources become available, additional support for them would be beneficial.

f) Planning – proposed saving by merging planning development control with strategic planning functions and refocusing priorities (£138,000 saving in 2013/14)

- The current structure appears to work well and making the envisaged saving carries several risks that should be addressed in the review of the service to be undertaken by the Assistant Director:

Scrutiny board observations and recommendations

- Whether the service would be able to cope with a sudden increase in demand, for example if the economy picks up.
- Whether planning enforcement would become less effective due to reduced resources or by transferring this function to Trading Standards as proposed
- Whether substantially changing the operation of a service that has been manifestly successful over the years would reduce our future ability to make good decisions and successfully defend against legal challenges etc.

g) Trading Standards – saving through service modernisation and greater risk-based intervention (£252,000 saving in 2013/14)

Trading Standards is a 'jewel in the crown' amongst County Council services. The proposed cut represents a 20% staff reduction which will mean ceasing programmes, such as 'no cold calling zones', which support the most vulnerable members of society; need to use a risk based prioritisation.

