

Agenda item 9

Cabinet Issues

1. The EssexWorks Corporate Plan 2012/17, Revenue and Capital Budgets 2012/13 and Medium Term Resources Strategy

The Cabinet considered a report by the Leader of the Council and the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation Programme which presented information to enable it to make relevant recommendations to the Council on the new Corporate Plan for 2012/13 to 2016/17, on the revenue budget and Council Tax precept for 2012/13 and the capital programme to 2016/17, and also to consider the medium term resource strategy for the period 2014/15 in the light of the best information available regarding funding.

Cabinet's deliberations are reflected in the recommendations to Council in the separate agenda item on the Budget and Corporate Plan.

2. Approval of revised business case for Information Services Modernisation Programme

The Cabinet has agreed a revised investment plan for IS modernisation, involving an additional £2.06 million of revenue funding over the five year period of the project, to be drawn from the Transformation Reserve. It has also approved a revised efficiency programme resulting from the extra investment and given its support to the Council's ICT Strategy for 2011 – 2015.

A business case for Information Services Modernisation was originally agreed in 2010. This has now been reviewed, leading to a revised ICT strategy which is set to ensure that the Council's technology will contribute to the success of the transformation programme whilst resolving a number of existing technical shortcomings experienced by staff and the public today through outdated ICT. The strategy will embrace the newer ICT delivery models as they mature, keeping pace with those developments and capitalising on performance and efficiency when they are ready.

The IS Modernisation business case has also been realigned to delivery of the revised strategy and will now ensure the investment plan will unlock over £23 million in cashable efficiency gains over five years while also bringing the Council's core infrastructure up to date and at the forefront of high performance service provision, becoming a key enabler for mobile and flexible working with the resulting benefits that brings for Essex.

3. Children's Services Safeguarding Inspection – Update

The Cabinet received an update following the Ofsted inspection of safeguarding services for children in Essex between 26 and 30 September 2011. Members were pleased to note that the inspection, which covered the performance and improvement of both Essex County Council and the wider partnership within Essex, had resulted in an improved overall rating of adequate.

The Ofsted report offered the following summary of improvement within Essex:

“Significant improvements to services have clearly taken place since the last inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services in June 2010. These include having effective arrangements in place to manage, assess and analyse allegations against members of the children's workforce, the implementation of performance management and quality assurance systems and improvements in safeguarding services by health partners. In addition the council has taken effective action to make improvements to staffing...”

The report also made reference to strengths in the leadership and senior management for children's services and recognises the clear and decisive action which has already been taken. The report confirmed that although there are areas for improvement, no children or young people were found to be at risk of significant harm. Inspectors also expressed confidence that the planning in place will support further improvement and address the areas of practice that need further attention.

The Capacity for Improvement narrative highlighted that elected members, senior officers, partners and frontline staff all share the same vision for prioritising safeguarding services and service improvement.

As a result of the improvements identified by Ofsted, demonstrating that Essex had the capacity, capability and momentum to ensure continued improvement in Children's Services, on 22 December 2011 the Minister for Children and Young Families had lifted his direction for Essex to be subject to Government intervention.

In order to ensure improvement activity in Essex continues to be driven forward, the Essex Unified Improvement Board has been convened to deliver the recommendations arising from the Ofsted inspection and also to deliver transformational change within Schools, Children and Families. The Board is now in the process of developing a Unified Improvement Plan, which will be reported to the Cabinet in due course.

Finally, the Cabinet noted the immediate priorities for improvement which had been identified as a result of the Ofsted inspection, together with the focus and priorities for 2011/12 and 2012/13.

4. Approval of the final business case and contract award of the Highways Strategic Transformation Programme

The Cabinet has approved the Final Business Case of the Highways Strategic Transformation Programme and agreed to award a contract with the private sector partner Ringway Jacobs Limited. This will result in the formation of a Strategic Partnership to deliver the majority of Highways and Transportation services with effect from 1 April 2012, with the long-term aspiration to move into a private-public Joint Venture. The Cabinet has also delegated authority to the HST Programme Director to finalise the contract (in consultation with other officers as necessary) and approved the logo and name 'Essex Highways' for the Strategic Partnership.

5. Adult Social Care Local Account 2010/11

Local Accounts are a key component of the new performance framework for adult social care, replacing the self-assessment that contributed to the previous performance assessment process undertaken by the Care Quality Commission. Although the production of a Local Account is not yet a statutory requirement (although it is expected to become so), the Association of Directors of Social Services has requested that Council's produce their first such document, describing their performance in delivering adult social care services for the year 2010/11. Councils were given the freedom to decide the content and format of their Local Accounts.

The following are the key elements of the first Local Account for Essex:

- A summary of some of the key challenges faced by adult social care services now and in the future
- Explanation as to how the Council is working with key partners to ensure the continuation of quality services for the most vulnerable residents
- Highlights of what the Council has delivered over 2010/11
- Details of the key priorities for the future, falling into five key themes:
 - Prevention Services to maintain and restore independence
 - Personalisation (services tailored to people's individual needs)
 - Partnership with service users and other organisations
 - Protection for vulnerable adults (continuing the work of Safeguarding Essex)
 - People (providing training for all staff including non-Council employees)

The Cabinet was pleased to approve the first Local Account for Essex, recognising it as an important document which enables the Council to engage with Essex residents, service users and partners about the service it delivers and its performance. It also articulates the key challenges for the Council and how these challenges are being met and the priorities for the future that will shape delivery of services.

Peter Martin
Leader of the Council