

CABINET

17 May 2012

FINAL REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONING ISG: IMPLEMENTATION

REPORT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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RECENT REFERENCES:

[CAB2325](#) – Final report of the Commissioning Informal Scrutiny Group – Recommendations for Cabinet (11 April 2012)

[OS34](#) – Findings of the Informal Scrutiny Group on Commissioning and the Voluntary and Community Sector (19 March 2012)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

At their April meeting Cabinet considered the final report of the Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG) which looked at Commissioning and the Voluntary and Community Sector (CAB 2325). Members expressed some concern about the additional work that may arise from those recommendations. They requested that the Chief Executive report back to the next Cabinet meeting with further details regarding the implementation and prioritisation of the ISG's proposals. Further consideration of the report was deferred until then.

This report, which needs to be considered alongside CAB2325, advises Cabinet on the implementation and prioritisation of those recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Cabinet consider the recommendations of CAB2325 in the light of the advice contained in this report.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 At their last meeting Cabinet considered the recommendations of the Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG) on Commissioning and the Voluntary and Community Sector. (CAB 2325). Members expressed some concern about the additional work that may arise from those recommendations. They requested that the Chief Executive report back to the next Cabinet meeting with further details regarding the implementation and prioritisation of the ISG's proposals.
- 1.2 This report outlines the relevance of each recommendation to the Council's business planning and delivery, comments on the value it may add to how we work and offers advice on its implementation and the priority Members might wish to afford it.

2 Commissioning

- 2.1 For some time now the City Council has been developing its approach to 'commissioning': using our resources to invite third parties to propose new and more cost effective ways of delivering the outcomes the community sees as priorities. This has been a part of our wider programme of change and has, for example, complemented our organisational development programme as we change individual and team roles and responsibilities, and provided an opportunity to work more closely with the voluntary and community sector.
- 2.2 With growing financial pressures and community expectations, the Council will need to continue to explore new ways of doing things more efficiently and cost effectively. We have also committed to developing further our relationship with the voluntary and community sector. The recommendations of the ISG need to be seen in the context of this broader imperative to change and improve.
- 2.3 The ISG considered how the Council's approach to commissioning had developed to date, with particular reference to the voluntary and community sector. Details are in CAB 2325 (which covers OS34, the ISG's full report). They made eight recommendations set out below as (a) to (h), in bold type. Comment on the implementation and prioritisation follows each of the ISG recommendations:

ISG Recommendation a) - the Assistant Directors should proceed with a wider review of the needs of the not-for-profit sector (including social enterprises) begun at the consultation meeting on 23 February, and work with local authority colleagues and the council for voluntary service (cvs) organisations to identify the most appropriate 'package' of support.

Comment – this work is already in hand, and will inform a future review of the Council's relationship with the voluntary and community sector (VCS), planned for mid-2012. This can therefore be agreed as an immediate task.

ISG Recommendation b) - at the same time, officers should work with Winchester Area Community Action (WACA) to provide additional training for the sector in identifying bidding partners, constructing strong bids, making good presentations and using the South East Business Portal (where opportunities are advertised).

Comment – this may be appropriate once the review of the Council's relationship with the VCS, alluded to above, is complete. It is therefore proposed that the relevant Portfolio Holder consider this recommendation and its implementation in the autumn of 2012.

ISG Recommendation c) - the Assistant Directors should roll out training for the Council's Heads of Team on commissioning best practice to enable not-for-profit organisations to bid for a wide range of opportunities.

Comment – there have already been briefing sessions for senior managers on commissioning best practice. This can be reinforced with further briefings, supplemented by written advice, at Senior Management Team meetings in the coming months.

ISG Recommendation d) - the Head of Corporate Communications should work with the Assistant Directors to increase the consistency, clarity and visibility of the information on the Council's website setting out the commissioning approach; actively communicate it to the sector, and enhance it, for example with tips and guidance, examples of best practice, useful contacts, answers to frequently asked questions.

Comment – the City Council's website is currently being reviewed, and this provides an opportunity to develop suitable pages on commissioning. This is a task the Assistant Directors can lead on, supported by the Communications Team. Resources at present are stretched, and it is proposed this is a task which should be addressed in the autumn.

ISG Recommendation e) - the Chief Executive should consider a more systematic approach to determining which services, projects and programmes should be subject to new forms of delivery to enhance effectiveness and value for money, rather than the current more pragmatic approach (eg based on end of existing contract, departure of a staff member).

Comment – the planned review of the Council's relationship with the VCS will, *inter alia*, provide a view on those services which may best be commissioned through this sector. Others are considered as part of our organisational development programme, which also offers a more systematic approach. There will continue to be a place for the more ad-hoc reviews generated by changes in circumstance such as staff departure.

ISG Recommendation f) - the Assistant Directors should work with the Head of Finance to strengthen the alignment between 'Expected Outcomes' in Change Plans and the commissioning approach; there should be an additional column in Change Plans providing information about how the work will be done and/or paid for.

Comment – work has taken place in recent years to better integrate the Council's service and financial planning, and good progress has been made. The Budget Book for 2012/13 includes a Table showing commissioning projects and an indication of the source of budget/funding. One of the next steps is to ensure that, for the 2013/14 budget round, there is a clear statement on resource implications against each action in Change Plans – whether drawing on existing resources or requiring a new allocation in the budget. This recommendation can, therefore, be agreed in principle.

ISG Recommendation g) - the Corporate Director (Governance) should give consideration to the role of Members representing the Council on the management committees and boards of not-for-profit organisations, in terms of disseminating information about commissions, and feeding reports about the organisations back to officers and other Members.

Comment – Members representing the Council on external bodies are already encouraged to provide feedback to other Members or officers as appropriate, and this informal approach works well. Assistant Directors will consider how best those sitting on the management committees and boards of VCS bodies can pass on advice as part of the review of the Council's relationship with the VCS planned for mid-2012.

ISG Recommendation h) - officers responsible for drafting service level agreements should encourage funded organisations to

involve and promote their initiatives to Ward Members to increase understanding of their work.

Comment – in practice smaller local bodies are usually effective at communicating with Ward Members, but there is less consistency with larger organisations working over a number of wards, particularly when they then lead more local projects or programmes. It is suggested that Assistant Directors be asked to lead in ensuring that in future SLAs and other funding agreements set out what is expected by way of communication with local members.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

3 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CHANGE PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

- 3.1 Implementation of the ISG recommendations as set out above should help the Council achieve its aim of working more effectively with the voluntary and community sector, and so encouraging a diversity of ideas and provision.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 4.1 Taking forward the ISG's recommendations as set out above requires staff time. That is either already allocated to projects in hand or can be absorbed as part of undertaking normal duties. No additional resources are required at this stage.
- 4.2 The total Commissioning budget (including grants to the Voluntary Sector) for 2012/13 is circa. £900k.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 5.1 Potential risks to the Council and its services will arise as we seek to change our relationship with the VCS. These risks and their mitigation will need to be considered as part of the planned review of the Council's relationship with that sector. Other risks will be considered as we review alternative approaches to service delivery (ISG recommendation (e)).
- 5.2 The real risk to the Council lies in not exploring alternative approaches to service delivery, including through the VCS. A failure to plan for the future will leave us unable to balance budgets whilst protecting services to the public.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

APPENDICES: None.