



Report to Cabinet

Subject Cabinet Portfolios – Responsibilities for the Planning Service and Customer Relationship Management

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As we draw closer to the annual meeting of the Council and the need to confirm appointments to the Cabinet portfolios, there are two particular issues which I would suggest would benefit from specific inclusion in two of the portfolios.

Members will be aware that the Audit Commission has recently completed its inspection of the planning service and has issued a draft report which has been the subject of discussion with senior officers and Members. Whilst the final report is still awaited and will be the subject of a report to a future meeting of the Cabinet, I would suggest that it would be opportune to act on one particular observation from the inspectors now.

In the draft report, the inspectors observed that “although accountabilities and responsibilities for planning are clearly outlined in the constitution, there is a lack of clear leadership, challenge and drive for service improvement from the Cabinet for the full range of planning services.” In discussion with the inspectors, they clarified this observation by pointing out that they had detected some confusion within the Council as to whether responsibility for the planning service and planning performance generally (as opposed to responsibility for making decisions on individual planning applications) rested with the Executive or with the Planning Committee. They believed that this lack of clarity was unhelpful and could lead to a lack of Cabinet level “ownership” of planning performance and issues impacting upon that performance. Whether or not such confusion is actually present within the Council, the fact that the inspectors perceived that there was a lack of clarity in our arrangements at Member level with regard to the management and performance of such an important service is significant.

It is the case that the Development and Economic Regeneration portfolio at the moment only expressly includes within its remit planning policy. I would suggest, in the light of the observations by the inspectors, that it would be appropriate to include within the remit for that portfolio “all executive responsibilities with regard to the delivery and improvement of the planning and building control service”.

The other issue relates to customer relationship management. Customer relationship is coming to be seen as a major function of the Council in its own right, involving very significant resources across the Council and with significant implications for service delivery and service efficiency. It is also, obviously, at the heart of the Council's relationship with the residents in the Borough.

The Council has already started to bring about significant change in the way in which it deals with this function for visitors to the Civic Centre by the creation of the One Stop Shop. This has led to consideration of the possibility of acquiring customer relationship management equipment and IT software in order to develop the function into the more effective "One Stop" management of customers communicating with the Council electronically and by telephone.

Further consideration of the matter with the assistance of the Improvement and Development Agency, however, has illustrated that this is not just a matter of IT software acquisition and implementation – it is a more fundamental cross service corporate issue about the way in which the Council does business with its customers which can have far reaching implications for all services.

Up to now, this matter has been led at Cabinet level by the portfolio holder for E-Government and Member Services, largely on the basis that it was seen initially to be an essentially IEG matter, although that portfolio does also include responsibility for the One Stop Shop.

In the circumstances, it is suggested that it would be beneficial to reflect the strategic significance and priority of this issue at Cabinet level by allocating an express, specific responsibility for customer relationship management to one of the portfolios, which would also clarify responsibility for taking forward the development of the customer relationship agenda. It is, accordingly, recommended that the remit of the E-Government and Member Service Portfolio be amended by the addition of the words "Customer Relationship Management and" before "One Stop Shop".

Recommendations:

1. That the remit of the Development and Economic Regeneration Portfolio be amended to include responsibility for the delivery and improvement of planning and building control services.
2. That the remit of the E-Government and Member Services Portfolio be amended to include customer relationship management.