



Report to Cabinet and Council

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Re: **Fit for Purpose – A Vision for The Future Operation of Gedling Borough Council**

1. In March 2006 I started the process of defining a vision of the Council for the future, taking into account external judgments of the Council, emerging national and local policy developments, and a wide range of external pressures on the Council, not the least of which was the Gershon efficiency agenda. The paper I produced has been the subject of discussion throughout the Council, by both Members and Officers. We have also had the benefit of assistance from Tribal Consultancy in developing this work. Initially recruited to help the Council work out its approach to shared services, the Consultants believed that the finalisation of the vision was an essential first step in this task.
2. These discussions have thrown up a number of issues. Some staff have expressed anxieties about the possible impact of any move towards shared services and departmental restructurings on themselves and their jobs. Some Members remain unconvinced that a “commissioning” rather than a “delivering” model is the right one for the Council. Despite this however, there has been no widespread resistance to or disagreement with the fundamental premise of the vision paper and its conclusions. On the contrary – uncomfortable though colleagues may have found some aspects of the paper, I detected widespread agreement with it, and certainly a recognition of the importance of this exercise and of the need for us to face up to the future realistically.
3. I have been heartened by the degree of engagement with this process at all levels in the organisation and I am grateful for the contributions I received. Whilst these may have confirmed to me the broad drift of the original paper, they have helped me to develop and refine some of the detail.

4. Following my earlier paper, a number of significant pieces of work have also been published by a range of organisations dealing essentially with the same question - what will be the role of local government in the future?

5. In April 2006 the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published a research report entitled "All our Futures" which was a considered attempt to identify the main challenges which are likely to face local government in 2015 and the most important functions which must be delivered at local level in order to achieve this. The report undertook an analysis of demographic, social, technological, economic and environmental trends in concluding that:
 - More extreme weather conditions and environmental pressures will lead to increasing threats to river and coastal areas and a greater need to influence individual behaviour with regard to environmental management
 - Relative growth in service and knowledge industries will lead to a reduced demand for low skilled jobs and the need to address low achievement by specific groups
 - More variation in households and household structures and an increase in lone households will be a major influence on planning and building
 - Life expectancy, ageing and disabled longevity will rise

6. On the basis of this analysis the report suggests that the role of local government in the future will be concerned "less with direct service delivery and more with regulation, influencing behaviour and supporting communities to respond to difference and care for vulnerable groups and individuals...community leadership is likely to be the single most important feature of local government". There is a need also to secure greater citizen engagement with the structures of local governance.

7. The report makes the point that local government will need to become "more strategic" and concludes that the following will be the ten core functions for local government in ten years' time:
 - Coping with stark differences within and between places
 - Caring for a significant proportion of the population
 - Controlling and regulating human and physical flows and circulation (e.g. traffic) and dealing with threats and managing emergencies and disasters

- Promoting economic growth and developing economic performance and capacity
- Persuading the public and influencing public behaviour
- Brokering and managing relationships between key players locally
- Planning and mobilising local resources
- Providing and clarifying complex sets of information
- Reconciling the diversity of individual and group expectations, needs, culture, identity and morality
- Representation of local areas and local communities

8. In May 2006 the Local Government Association published its own vision for local government, “Closer to People and Places”, which identified a very similar set of challenges and similarly concluded that influencing public behaviour, designing services around the needs of the customer, local community leadership and creating and delivering a distinctive vision for the local area would be key functions for local councils in the future.

9. More recently again, Sir Michael Lyons in the course of his work on local government finance and function has talked about the key role of local government in “shaping the places” where people live in their areas.

10. In addition, the Cabinet Office in Central Government has also issued a Discussion Paper entitled “Transformational Local Government” which seeks to explore the role which technology could play in helping local government to transform the delivery of local services. The authors of the paper offer up a vision of local services “about which people are able to say the following:

§ “I feel a sense of engagement in local decisions and ownership of outcomes.”

§ “I know who is responsible for which services and I can hold them to account.”

§ “I feel that local policies and services are tailored to my needs.”

§ “I can see that the public services are being responsive and creative in their approaches to local problems.”

§ “I perceive local public services as accessible, easy to use, comprehensible, (I know what they can and cannot do) and joined up when they need to be.”

§ “I feel that local public services are doing things in the most efficient way.”

§ “As a business, I understand the legislation that affects me and the support available to me locally.””

11. The paper adds that this implies “radical changes to the way in which public services are delivered and in the way local government and its partners are currently organised”.
12. Finally, in October 2006 the government published the long awaited Local Government White Paper, which contained a number of proposals designed to increase the influence of local communities over local authorities. Councils will be required in the future to take more effective and co-ordinated steps to inform and consult citizens and communities about local services and to involve them more in the design and delivery of those services. There will be a greater need for Councils to have systems and processes in place to give them reliable “intelligence” about people’s needs and views. The role of ward members and scrutiny committees is to be enhanced - both through encouraging them to pick up and act upon the new “Community Call for Action” and also in enabling scrutiny committees to require the co-operation of a range of public bodies in the conduct of scrutiny reviews of their activities.
13. The paper confirms that the move towards joint and collaborative working between councils, the sharing of services and competition in the provision of local authority services will continue. Specifically with regard to two tier local government areas, the government makes it plain that it expects councils to achieve “unified service delivery models” through this and by being prepared to consider new joint governance arrangements - the White Paper points out that “where two tier government remains, we expect to see this “virtual unitary” approach”. In order to give further encouragement to this process, “ambitious efficiency gains will ... be required as part of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review”.
14. The paper also emphasises the need for Councils to become more strategic in their approach. Councils are to be required to “adopt a strategic approach to service delivery” and to adopt a “commissioning” rather than a “delivery” role. The primacy of the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Strategic Partnership in shaping services and guiding the council’s plans is confirmed. The Government is concerned that the links between Sustainable Community Strategies, the Local

Development Frameworks and Housing Strategies “remain generally weak”.

Councils are to be encouraged to integrate the LDF and the Housing and Homelessness Strategies within the Community Strategy, both in order to rationalise plan making and to ensure that spatial planning and housing objectives for the area are fully aligned with the priorities outlined in the Community Strategy.

15. All of the above, I believe, confirms the conclusions with regard to the future vision, role and approach of the Council, which I offered in my paper.
16. I attach accordingly as an appendix to this report a suggested vision for the Council, which also offers a description of the culture which will need to be in place within the Council to support the delivery of the vision, a “pen portrait” of the Council of the future and a list of principal functions which I suggest should inform the future departmental structure of the Council. I hope that this will be a vision and a direction for the Council to which everybody will be able to “sign up”.
17. This vision is, in effect, an operational strategy for the Council which, if adopted, will form the basis for the structure and internal workings of the Council and its approach to service procurement. This will need to be complemented by reviews of the priorities, roles and functioning of members themselves, member structures and supporting processes. This has already commenced with a review of the Scrutiny structure. Following the White Paper and the conclusion of the Neighbourhood Policing trial currently under way in six of the Borough’s wards, the Council will need to take steps to develop the role of the ward member in order that ward members are better placed to act as the community “champions” which the White Paper envisages. Similarly, after the elections in May 2007 the Leader of the Council will need to reconsider Cabinet priorities for action and also the Cabinet portfolios.
18. In considering this vision, I think it is also worth reminding ourselves of the Council’s motto, which it can be all too easy to overlook in these days of mission statements, value statements and “golden threads”, but which is as relevant in this context as it was in 1974. “Omnibus Optimum” remains the fundamental *raison d’être* of the Council and the underlying rationale for any focus on what could be seen as somewhat fashionable issues of customer, equality, community, community cohesion and sustainability, as well as the drive for the more traditional

efficiency, effectiveness, quality and best value in the delivery of services. It is, in truth, the original “golden thread” running through all that we do and it serves as an essential point of reference for every aspect of the vision for and culture of the Council.

19. If Members agree with and adopt the vision of the Council for the future set out in this paper then I would propose reporting to future meetings of the Cabinet and Personnel and Resources Committee as appropriate on its detailed implementation. Members will appreciate that this must be put in the context of possible forthcoming decisions and actions on housing stock transfer, leisure centre management, the future of the building control service and also shared services, although I would expect any such decisions and actions to become part of the overall process of rebuilding the Council to reflect the vision.

20. The establishment of any new structure is accordingly likely to happen in stages as these issues are dealt with, so that in the mean time the statement of functions at the end of the appendix will provide the guiding rationale for and ultimate goal of structural decisions, rather than being the immediate basis for a wholesale restructuring of the Council.

Recommendation

To adopt the vision as the future operational strategy for the Council and to await further reports with regard to its implementation.

The Vision

The fundamental role and purpose of the Council in the future will be to define and then deliver the vision of the Borough and its future as set out in the Community Strategy. To do this it will:

- Be a strategic planning and commissioning organisation procuring service delivery in whatever way will reflect the best interests of the Borough and the customer and also deliver best value.
- Have a positive approach to community engagement and communications in order effectively to develop community aspirations.
- Have a clear customer focus and willingness to design services around the needs of the customer, rather than the presumed needs of the organisation.
- Be willing to work in partnership with other organisations - whether in the public or private sector - in order to secure the delivery of services which are of the right quality and at the right price.

It will be an organisation which is:

- Principled
- Pragmatic
- Forward looking
- Innovative
- Community and customer focussed
- Value driven.

The Culture of the Council and its Ways of Working

As well as having a clear view of its role and its purpose as above, the Council will also have to work and operate efficiently and effectively as an organisation in order to achieve the vision. The Council's culture will promote:

- An awareness of the advantages and availability of new technology and a willingness to use this to the full in order to achieve efficiency and effectiveness, as well as the ability to understand how new technology can be used to transform the way in which the Council works and the drive to act on that understanding.
- A flexibility of approach and a willingness constantly to adapt and develop services and processes - a willingness to look for improvement opportunities rather than wait for some kind of breakdown. No matter how well we might think we are doing, we need to say to ourselves, "We can do better than that".
- Vigorous and imaginative managerial and political leadership.
- A pragmatic, rather than dogmatic, approach to service delivery;
- A belief in the importance of equality of opportunity and fairness, of the need for our services to be accessible to all and the importance of being responsive to the needs of all our customers and all communities in the Borough
- With regard to all services, whether procured externally or provided and run directly, a focus on sustainability, quality, reliability, efficiency and value – on ensuring the Council's tradition of "high quality at reasonable cost" is maintained.
- A willingness to learn and be self-critical and an openness to external influence.
- A focus on outcomes - the overall achievement - rather than inputs and outputs.
- A belief nevertheless in the traditional imperatives of good governance, propriety and sound stewardship of public resources, all designed to ensure that the maximum possible proportion of the Council's resources is devoted to securing the delivery of the vision and front line services, minimising inefficiency and overheads.

- A recognition in the process of achieving the above of the importance of the Council being a good employer and using its position as a procurer of services to ensure that its own contractors are themselves also good employers, something which is essential if employees are to be persuaded that a move away from a presumption in favour of direct in-house service provision should not be seen as a threat.
- Corporate overheads which are proportionate and which are necessary to support democratic functions and the work of the Council.
- A culture of mutual co-operation and support, of working together to achieve common corporate goals rather than separate departmental ones. A culture of corporatism rather than departmentalism.

The Operation of the Council

The Council in the future will accordingly be:

- More strategic
- More technological and automated
- Delivering fewer services directly by itself
- Working more with other partners to design and deliver services.
- Smaller

The Council's people management strategy and workforce development plan will need to ensure that the Council has a workforce which is fit for this purpose both in terms of competencies and cultural approach.

The Council's Functions

The Council's principal functions in the future will be:

- Community leadership and the management of democratic and community matters, including any new neighbourhood governance procedures, the political and Member processes of the Council, and propriety, standards and electoral issues.

- Managing the customer interface, including visitors to the One Stop Shop, Internet customers and telephone enquiries.
- Strategic policy, communications and performance.
- Service commissioning and procurement, including direct service delivery and operations.
- Regulatory, enforcement and public protection services.
- Central support services and oversight and management of the Council's business processes.

The Council will need a structure which reflects the above, which is capable of evolving as the vision is implemented and which will also enable it to accommodate the changing demands placed on it as the emphasis on community and customer focus increases.