



Report of	Meeting	Date
Joint LDF Officer Team	Central Lancashire LDF Joint Advisory Committee	29 January 2009

STAFFING AND FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS UPDATE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To update Members on the LDF staffing and financial arrangements associated with joint working including the prospects for additional resources.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. That the report is noted.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

3. The initial staffing and financial arrangements for joint LDF working have remained unchanged since April 2008. These have worked reasonably well although it has proved difficult to keep the Core Strategy process on schedule. The intention to increase the staff resource in the Joint Team by 1 October with the appointment of a full time Coordinator did not occur and remains outstanding. Resolving this situation is now an urgent priority and a proposal to do so is near to fruition.
4. There is a pressing requirement to speed up the production of LDF documents, not just the Core Strategy but complementary work on allocating development sites. Districts' Local Plans are becoming increasingly out of date and revised policies need to be in place to respond to new development proposals. The Growth Point, should it go ahead, will place higher expectations on speeding up delivery but can also give some extra financial resource to support LDF work.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

(If the recommendations are accepted)

5. To inform Members of the way arrangements have worked out to date and to appreciate the need to enhance staff resources for the future.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

6. To not keep Members informed.

BACKGROUND

7. A report on staffing and financial arrangements was presented to the 12 June 2008 meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee. At that time it was envisaged that a Memorandum of Intent would be finalised formalising the agreement between the four authorities. This would cover the initial arrangements for staffing and funding of the Joint Team and the creation of a more permanent establishment.
8. The Joint Team was formed at the start of April 2008 comprising one Officer from each of the three Districts plus matching Officer assistance from the County Council. One of the seconded District staff has acted up as the Team Coordinator – the Planning Policy Manager postholder at Chorley Council. Each authority's staff input has been 0.8 full time equivalents (FTEs). The County Council has hosted the team and provided administrative and IT support.
9. The intention was that by October 2008 this arrangement would be supplemented by a permanent full time Coordinator post jointly funded by the three District Councils. Due to procedural delays this post has not been created and the original staffing arrangements have remained in place. So in the meantime your Officers adopted an interim Memorandum of Intent covering the initial original arrangements but also recognising that the Joint Team would be supported by Officer assistance from the three District Councils in terms of help with related Local Development Framework tasks. It was also recognised that the three District Councils would share LDF costs including any additional cost incurred for covering the seconded staff.

REVIEW OF HOW THE ARRANGEMENTS HAVE WORKED AND THE PROPOSED WAY FORWARD

10. The initial aim of the Joint Team was to produce the Preferred Core Strategy by the end of September 2008. This was just achieved on schedule. Following that the team set up and ran the consultation and engagement process into the Core Strategy. Since April the Joint Team has had five changes in personnel. In future the aim should be to achieve longer term secondments. The Officer support and hosting by the County Council has worked well. The assistance from the District's LDF teams has mainly been in terms of the Sustainability Appraisal work.
11. In respect of financial matters the intention is to equalise the expenditure outlay through a financial balancing process by the end of the financial year. It is estimated that joint working is probably saving the District Councils between a third and half of what would have been the cost of producing individual Core Strategies.
12. Members will appreciate that LDF documents take a significant time to prepare. This is partly due to the prescribed procedures but there is some scope to speed up the process. It is particularly important to have up to date policies in place and have a plan led approach for dealing with development proposals. Landowners and developers are already pursuing planning applications to get permissions in place for when the economic situation improves and Councils need to ensure that these proposals can be appropriately determined.
13. To help ensure there is sufficient resource to expedite LDF production the staffing of the Joint Team is planned to be made up to the base level originally intended to apply from October 2008 - one full time Coordinator plus 0.8 FTEs from each of the four authorities. The intention is to offer the Coordinator post to Chorley's Planning Policy Manager postholder on a three year secondment basis and for the cost of this to be shared equally by the three District authorities.

14. In addition should the authorities decide to go ahead with the Growth Point there is revenue money available that could be used to increase the staffing resource available for LDF work. Members will appreciate the Growth Point aims to accelerate housing provision but again this must be done in a plan led way. Consistent with this would be putting in more resource to speed up the production of the LDF documents – not just the Core Strategy but also those allocating sites for development. Any additional staff resource funded in this way could either be employed in the Joint Team or the District Councils' 'home' LDF teams or be switched between them as circumstances dictate.

There are no background papers to this report.

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