

**Report to:** Communities Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 11<sup>th</sup> September 2014

**Lead Member/Officer:** Leader and Lead Member for Leisure, Youth, Tourism and Rural Development/Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition

**Report Author:** Corporate Director Economic & Community Ambition

**Title:** Town and Area Plans Review

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### **1. What is the report about?**

In February and March 2014, Cabinet approved the last batch of expanded Town and Area Plans. Concerns were raised about the delivery and funding of the Plans and Cabinet agreed that a review should be conducted. The review was completed in June 2014. This report reports the findings of the review and identifies the actions being proposed as a result.

### **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

To provide information to Communities Scrutiny on the findings of the Town and Area Plans Review and set out the actions being taken as a result.

### **3. What are the Recommendations?**

Communities Scrutiny Committee is invited to consider the findings of the review and comment on the actions proposed as a result.

### **4. Report details.**

Town Plans were originally proposed by the Council as a means of setting out local priorities and identifying actions for progressing them. During 2013/14, the Town Plans were expanded to encompass surrounding rural communities to give full coverage across the county. The expanded plans were approved by Cabinet between November 2013 and March 2014.

During the process of expanding the Plans, concerns were raised about the clarity of the policy objectives and consistency of the process for developing the Plans. Members were also keen, in times of increasing budget constraint, that priorities included within Plans were able to demonstrate viable, value for money and worthwhile projects for the benefit of local residents.

A review of the Town and Area Plans process was commissioned by Corporate Executive Team to address the concerns raised by Cabinet and other Members. The review was conducted by the Head of Internal Audit and the Programme Manager, Economic & Community Ambition. The review reported in June 2014.

The review concluded that while the concept of using Town and Area Plans to bring the Council 'closer to the community' was sound and allowed the Council to gain an understanding of priorities at local level, there was a lack of clarity around the overarching policy intentions of the Town and Area Plans and a lack of consistency in how they had been developed and were being delivered.

The review also identified a risk of confusion and duplication between Town and Area Plans and other Council plans and strategies.

Finally, the Review concluded that Town and Area Plans as currently written are not sufficiently strategic, do not provide clear information on anticipated benefits and are not clear how impact will be measured. As such the review concluded that it would be difficult to establish value for money.

A copy of the Review Findings is attached at Appendix 1.

The Review identified a number of actions that it suggested would provide a way forward to improve future arrangements. These have been summarised into 5 key areas for action focusing on:

- a) Development of a clear policy statement to underpin Town and Area Plans
- b) Development of an operational framework setting out clear and consistent guidance on the creation, implementation and governance of Town and Area Plans
- c) Awareness raising and training for all key stakeholders
- d) Reassessment of existing Town and Area Plans to demonstrate viability, impact, value for money and identifiable benefit for residents
- e) Implementation of clear performance management and progress monitoring mechanisms, aligned with the Council's overall performance management approach.

A copy of the Action Plan is attached at Appendix 2.

Progress has already been made with the first action. A draft Policy Statement is attached at Appendix 3 for information and comment by Communities Scrutiny. Work is underway to develop the Operational Framework and this is due for completion by December 2014. Further detail on progress can be provided at the meeting.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

Town and Area Plans are an enabler for the corporate objective of bringing the Council closer to the community. They are also an important mechanism for describing how the Council's overall corporate priorities are being addressed at local level with reference to the needs and aspirations of local communities. Vibrant Towns and Communities have been identified as a critical cornerstone to building a healthy local economy and Town and Area Plans are a means of identifying local actions to ensure this. Town and Area Plans also offer an opportunity to embed the principles of the emerging Wellbeing Plan for Denbighshire to support and facilitate individuals and communities to be independent and resilient.

**6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

A budget was set aside to implement the actions arising from Town and Area Plans. Concerns have been raised over the degree to which actions can be shown to be viable, value for money or of sufficient benefit to local residents. With reducing budgets, the Council will need to decide whether to continue with the same or reduced levels funding in the future.

**7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.**

An EqIA is not considered necessary at this stage. Incorporation of an equality impact assessment stage within individual Town and Area Plans themselves is recommended.

**8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

Town and Area Plans were developed by local elected Member through Member Area Groups, based on consultations with local communities. The Town and Area Plan Review engaged with a range of Council stakeholders, including a sample of existing Plan Champions. The Action Plan and draft Policy Statement are being discussed with Plan Champions on 9<sup>th</sup> September. Feedback will be provided at Communities Scrutiny on 11<sup>th</sup> September.

**9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

N/A

**10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

Previous reports have highlighted risks relating to unreasonably raising local expectations and failure to deliver. Discussions at Cabinet and elsewhere have highlighted risks relating to low value for money actions, inconsistent processes and lack of impact. The review has explored these risks and its recommendations and the resulting action plan are intended to address them. Communities Scrutiny Committee's comments on these would be welcomed.

**11. Power to make the Decision**

Article 6.3.2 of the Council's Constitution.

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