

# ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

## REPORT TO AND DECISION OF CABINET ON 9 MARCH 2020

**SUBJECT:** Review of Planning Services

**REPORT AUTHOR:** Nigel Lynn, Chief Executive

**DATE:** 6 February 2020

**EXTN:** 37600

**PORTFOLIO AREA:** Corporate Support

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The report sets out the detail of the procurement of an external consultant to undertake an independent review of the Planning Service.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Cabinet is requested to:

- a) Note the Delegated Authority by the Chief Executive for the procurement of external consultancy services for the sum of approximately £40,000 (plus expenses) in order to conduct an independent review of the Planning Service.

### **1. BACKGROUND:**

- 1.1 The Planning Service is a high profile, political and statutory function of the Council. It is at the forefront of shaping the social, economic and environmental development and prosperity of the district. It is important that the Council ensures that the Planning Service is fit for the future to meet both statutory requirements and to support strategic priorities and objectives.
- 1.2 The Council adopted its Local Plan in 2018 after many years of debate.
- 1.3 Development Control has recently had a hiatus of issues, partly around lack of acceptance of the Local Plan Strategic sites. Furthermore, the Planning section struggles to secure sufficiently experienced planning officers.
- 1.4 The review will provide a greater level of understanding of improvements needed (having regard to the level of resources available) and give priorities to enable the Council to more quickly focus on scrutinising certain aspects of service improvements. Improving efficiency in our service delivery to our customers is the guiding priority of our request for assistance.
- 1.5 A comprehensive review will seek to confirm whether our planning procedures are fully effective, legitimate and up-to-date, and can have a positive impact on service delivery. The review will focus on the following aspects of the service:

- **performance:** covering quality, consistency and speed of decision-making
- **procedures:** with a view to improving efficiency and effectiveness
- **management, staff structures and resources:** this is essential to ensure that the authority gets the most effective results from any procedural changes.

1.6 The review will also cover:

- the organisation of planning services
- consultation processes
- delegated and committee reports
- monitoring systems
- management and staff resources
- Committee procedures and Councillor performance

1.7 Priority areas for improvements will also be considered, in relation to:

- Quality of decision making by officers
- Quality of decision making by Members
- A priority approach to improvement

1.8 One of the key strategic priorities for Arun District Council over the next few years is the delivery of our recently adopted Local Plan to enable good, sustainable, development to help drive economic prosperity for the area. This review is therefore timely to ensure the Planning Service can rise to the challenges this will bring.

1.9 A review of Development Control and the Planning Committee by Trevor Roberts Associates was completed in 2011, followed by a review of the Development Control Committee in 2012. The Council held a Cabinet Working Party on Planning in 2016 and an LGA Peer Review in 2018.

1.10 It is accepted that the Planning service has been subject to regular challenge, due to changing demands placed by the Government's planning standards and modernisation agenda. Furthermore, the Government has identified the planning process as being key to facilitating sustainable economic growth, which often is in conflict with people living in that area where growth has been planned.

1.11 The Chief Executive wishes to employ a consultant who will provide a fundamental review of the Planning Service. Interviews/workshops will be conducted with key members, customers (housebuilders/key land owners) and officers will be key to gleaning information for the report as will working alongside officers and attending various meetings and watching webcasts of previous Development Control meetings.

1.12 The review will incorporate the findings from the work previously undertaken.

1.13 The scope of the review will not cover Planning Policy, Enforcement or Appeals initially, unless there is time available.

1.14 The review will ensure that the Planning Service is confidently:

- aligned to successfully deliver the Council's vision for the District (the Local Plan) by making good quality decisions.
- relevant to the needs of the community which ensures infrastructure requirements delivered alongside the Local Plan.
- facilitates economic growth and high quality sustainable development
- has strong relationships with applicants, developers and residents with good customer care.
- has streamlined, effective and consistent policies and processes that underpin the Council's strategic priorities and objectives.
- proactive and professional, able to respond quickly to ongoing change.
- has an efficient and effective management structure supported by effective information systems and meaningful and timely information.
- effectively uses modern digital tools (such as social media and the web).
- The consultants final report will include an improvement plan.

1.15 The specification for the work was initially agreed with the Leader, Deputy Leader, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning and the Chair of Development Control. Three companies were approached with the Council's specification with a request for them to submit Curriculum Vitae's to the Chief Executive of suitable consultants. Out of those three companies, two companies responded. Two suitable consultants were submitted by Odgers Interim. Councillor Martin Lury and the Chief Executive interviewed the two consultants on 31 January 2020 and one consultant was selected as the preferred consultant to undertake the Planning Review.

1.16 The costs associated with the employment of consultancy support for this review is set at a Day Rate of £925.00 plus VAT for a period of, initially, 40 days, plus expenses. The cost of the contract will be met from within existing budgets. The review is due to start as soon as possible.

## **2. PROPOSAL(S):**

2.1 The Chief Executive has delegated authority to engage the Consultant's services, as the Responsible Officer at paragraph 5.2 of Part 6, Section 6 (Contract Standing Orders) of the Council's Constitution as the contract is below £50,000. However, the Chief Executive formally requests Cabinet to note the contract award so all Councillors and the public are informed of the review and how the outcomes will be fed back and actioned by the Council.

## **3. OPTIONS:**

3.1 The Chief Executive has delegated authority to make this decision within the Council's Constitution, so Members are only asked to note the decision made, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Planning.

<b>4. CONSULTATION:</b>		
Has consultation been undertaken with:	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Relevant Town/Parish Council		√
Relevant District Ward Councillors		√
Other groups/persons (please specify) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Leader of the Council (Councillor Dr James Walsh)</li> <li>The Deputy Leader of the Council (Councillor Francis Oppler)</li> <li>The Chair of Development Control (Councillor Jamie Bennett)</li> <li>The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning (Councillor Martin Lury)</li> <li>The Cabinet Member who is a Member of Development Control (Councillor Mrs Gill Yeates).</li> </ul>	√	
<b>5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Financial	√	
Legal		√
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment		√
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		√
Sustainability		√
Asset Management/Property/Land		√
Technology		√
Other (please explain)		
<b>6. IMPLICATIONS:</b>		
6.1 The report and improvement plan will have implications, possibly for officers and Members to consider in the future.		
<b>7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:</b>		
7.1 It is important that the Council ensures that the Planning Service is fit for the future to meet both statutory requirements and to support strategic priorities and objectives.		
<b>8. EFFECTIVE DATE OF THE DECISION:</b> 9 March 2020		
<b>9. BACKGROUND PAPERS:</b> None		