

## BEST VALUE REVIEW OF PLANNING AND TRANSPORT POLICY

Report to MRG – 27 January 2003

Authors: Jon Tiley and John Sykes

### Hypotheses testing plans: Hypotheses 1 and 2 (Regional Planning/Centre of Excellence and Strategic Transport Policy)

#### Hypothesis testing action plan

##### Statement of Hypothesis 1

**If following the proposed changes in planning legislation, the County Council reorganised its Forward Planning services to adopt to new challenges, whilst maintaining the same level of resources, what would the service look like?**

##### **Major Benefits would include:-**

- Maintenance of valued expertise on strategic planning issues at County level – to help represent the County as a whole
- Resource available to influence and participate in major debates on regional planning issues such as aviation, regional growth, Regional Spatial Strategies
- Opportunity to address more effectively some of the major quality of life issues in the County Council's BVPP such as quality of design and sustainable development
- Opportunities through partnership working to deliver a better service, through joint funding of common areas of work such as monitoring and information
- Opportunities to attract monies for innovation at European and regional level
- Targeted approach of using resources available from bodies such as EEDA to implement innovative approaches in the County
- Opportunity to build on County role as a leader in the field of sustainability

## **Background to hypothesis**

The Planning and Compensation Bill is the obvious driver for a more fundamental service review of the strategic planning functions of the County Council. The central statutory plan making duty of the County Council in terms of the Structure Plan will be removed by that legislation. At present it is not known whether the legislation will include new duties in relation to the preparation of Regional Spatial Strategies or Local Development Frameworks.

In attempting to identify the future role and activities that could be undertaken by this resource in the County Council, it is clear that there are a number of opportunities. In particular, the strategic planning skills and expertise which currently exist at the County are very valuable assets which the new Regional Planning Body will require in some form to progress regional and sub regional plans.

It is also clear that the new planning responsibilities at the District level will be extremely onerous, at a time when there are skills shortages and resource difficulties. In short, many District Councils would welcome exploring ways of sharing the burden of the planning function through joint working.

There are also areas of planning work which are growing in importance, where there are resource and skills issues. One example is in the new importance given to design quality in new development, which is also one of the County Council's own key concerns. This review of functions provides the opportunity to explore whether the County Council could act as a leader to facilitate the provision of design advice and training throughout the County, in partnership with both Districts and regional and national bodies.

## **Factors to be taken into account when testing hypothesis**

There are a number of specific challenges that will need to be taken into account in investigating this hypothesis :-

- Difficulty of establishing a new role without some statutory backing
- Possible resistance by some Districts to joint working
- Potential conflicts of interest regarding regional agency arrangements and representing views of the County at regional level.
- Balancing priorities with external partners in order to attract additional funding e.g. EEDA
- Availability of the right skills to deliver work on design and implementation
- The danger that uncertainty caused by the legislation changes and the new role for the Counties, will erode our current skill base

Perhaps the most important group that will need to be given a special status in the review is the District Planning Authorities. The changes in the planning system obviously will impact as much on them as it will the County. Without a statutory basis for a role on local planning, any new arrangements with Districts will have to be agreed and therefore must represent a win – win situation for County and the Districts.

Similarly, the relationship with key regional bodies will be critical. The basis upon which the County may act as an agent for the regional planning body will be quite critical. Similarly, there will be opportunities to work in partnership with agencies such as EEDA, which have objectives which overlap with the County's own, but which also may have key aspirations which conflict with the County Council.

### **Approach and actions**

As the new legislation is a key driver, having a clear understanding of how that legislation is progressing through Parliament will be critical.

Unlike the majority of best value reviews, this is not one where straightforward organisational raids will be appropriate. Every other strategic planning authority in the country will be aware of the changes to come and will know that their organisation, range of functions and mode of operation will; have to change over the next 18 months. Therefore the key is to identify either useful conclusions about the changed circumstances which other Authorities have reached, or models of operation from other services or non-local authority sources.

Questionnaires about current structure and resourcing will therefore be of little use. Research to find examples of effective partnership working, especially where it involves different tiers of Government, will be critical. This will be supported by discussions with other strategic authorities about how they see the future and how they are considering reacting to the changed circumstances.

As set out above, a particularly important group to engage will be the District Councils. Their planning functions are also changing. Many are uncertain about how they will cope. There is a need to engage the Districts in some in depth exploration of the potential for future joint working arrangements on a voluntary basis.

Other key parties will be bodies such as EEDA, in terms of the ability to carry out functions which meet their corporate objectives, as a way to lever in additional funds; bodies such as the Commission for the Built Environment, in terms of exploring the Centre of Excellence in design concept; the Regional Planning Body in terms of how they want to progress such issues as Agency arrangements which are referred to in the Planning Bill.

It is considered that consultation or discussion with a wider public would not be beneficial, given the complex nature of the issues to be considered.

## **Who will be involved**

The Forward Planning Unit, together with key staff from IMU and ECDU are directly affected by this hypothesis, and will be involved with the Review.

The key staff members involved in carrying out research and developing the hypothesis will be Jon Tiley, John Rumble, Rachael Campbell and Anna Black.

Having been briefed by the Director, Jon Tiley will track the progress of the Planning Bill and identify its implications for the Review

Given the need to both engage the staff in the Forward Planning Unit and to generate a definition of the “future” that the Review is attempting to plan for, internal sessions to map the objectives for the Review will take place involving the whole Unit.

The key staff members will be involved in the visits to other Authorities, which will take place over the early stages, as diaries permit. Anna Black and Rachel Campbell will follow up discussions with external bodies such as CABE and EEDA

Rachel Campbell and Anna Black will undertake research on other models, together with input from the BVR Challenger Joe Doak, who is able to draw on his contacts in the academic world. Research will also be undertaken regarding the internal Consultancy role of the forward Planning Unit.

Jon Tiley will set up a specific meeting with District Planning Authorities.

## **Timeplan**

Due to the programme to place the Structure Plan Alterations on deposit by the end of February, together with the departure of a key staff member, the next six weeks of the Review will concentrate on the Unit sessions, and any external meetings that can be arranged within the constraints of diaries.

At the beginning of March, the programme for research will be picked up, together with a more intensive programme of meetings with key organisations. This would allow the hypothesis to be worked up and tested over the period to the end of April, with a view to preparing for the second external workshop in Mid May

It is anticipated that the meeting with District Councils would take place towards the end of March, once some preliminary research has been undertaken.

## **Statement of Hypothesis 2**

**If we had a consolidated approach to strategic transport policy for developing, advising, promoting, monitoring and reviewing all transport policy we would provide a seamless service to all of our clients.**

Other benefits would be to:

- Provide a single point of contact for all internal and external clients
- Provide a more comprehensive feedback into the effectiveness of all our strategic transport policies
- Co-ordinate all relevant expertise
- Improve retention of key staff
- Clarify the procedure and responsibility for monitoring of transport policy
- Deliver a more proactive framework for all regional transport issues and consultations
- Create even greater synergy with the current member processes

## **Background to hypothesis**

Currently the Transport Planning and Policy Unit (TPP) co-ordinates the development and review of transport policies across the County Council through the local transport plan (LTP)

Using the TravelWise initiative, the Unit also undertakes promotion of many of the key policies. Monitoring and reviewing of the policies is also co-ordinated through the Unit, although this is dispersed across many other units within the Environment Department.

In developing the idea of establishing a consolidated approach for Transport Policy, work has been undertaken to identify the current scope and responsibilities for transport policy across the department - particularly in the areas of Passenger Transport, Road Safety and Hertfordshire Highways. This has indicated that future models could quite easily be generated that not only suit the capabilities and resources of the service, but may only need subtle changes in protocols.

## **Factors to be taken into account when testing hypothesis**

Consideration need to be given to the following issues when testing the hypothesis:

- The importance of maintaining links with operational expertise
- The changing working relationships with the new Hertfordshire Highways alliance
- Problems associated with developing transport policy in isolation to changes “on the ground”
- Identifying real cost benefits to the concept
- Increasing demands from wider stakeholder groups than is currently the case
- Any internal concerns/support to any potential changes

## **Approach and actions**

It is envisaged that development of the hypothesis will be completed in three stages

### **Stage One:**

Two parallel information gathering exercises will be undertaken – one concentrating on in-house information and one using information received via other local authorities. This information will be focussed around the five key area of the hypothesis i.e. how development, promotion, advising, monitoring and reviewing of transport policy is currently undertaken. Possible cost savings will also be identified in each case. From this exercise several possible “models” will be clearly selected for use in Stage Two of the work.

### **Stage Two:**

Models identified in Stage One will be tested and debated with key Units within the Department through externally “facilitated” groups. From this exercise up to three models will be refined and included in a District Council workshop for final agreement before being taken forward into the final stage of the process.

### **Stage Three:**

Models will be presented through the stakeholder workshops for final comment. The proposed model will then be identified for inclusion in the final BV report.

## Who will be involved

### Stage One :

At least three other local Authorities ( to be decided in consultation with other BV Hypotheses)  
LTP staff within the TPP Unit

### Stage Two:

Internal Heads of Units for possible affected areas – PTU, Road Safety, Herts Highways  
Finance Unit  
External facilitators

### Stage Three:

Stakeholder workshop invitees ( TBA)

## Timeplan

Timescale for milestones and completion

**Stage One:** January – March 2003

**Stage Two:** April- May 2003

**Stage Three:** May-June 2003

Please note that **Stage One** will include visits to at least three other Local Authorities and **Stage Two** no more than three facilitated sessions