

Audit and Governance Committee

24 March 2020

Policy Convergence and Rationalisation

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr S Flower, Leader of the Council

Local Councillor(s): **All**

Executive Director: Aidan Dunn, Executive Director, Corporate Development

Report Author: Aidan Badder
Title: Policy and Performance Officer
Tel: 01305 221222
Email: aidan.badder@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Recommendation:

That the Committee note progress on the rationalisation of policy following the audit undertaken by the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) in August 2019.

Reason for Recommendation:

To ensure Dorset Council has a robust and appropriate policy framework in place.

1. Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the rationalisation and convergence of Dorset Council's policy framework following the audit undertaken by SWAP in August 2019.

Following a brief hiatus as a result of Tranche 2 restructuring, a policy officer came into post on 30 January 2020, and work is now progressing well on five of

SWAP's six recommendations (detailed at appendix 1). Officers are keen to work with the lead member and the new Overview Committees, once established, to ensure that the Council's strategic policy development is Councillor-led.

2. Financial Implications

Officer and Councillor resources will be required to carry out the work. There is a need for Councillors to provide political direction for policy development, and for officers to carry out the immediate and associated activities (such as equality impact assessments).

3. Climate implications

None identified though there will be requirements to carry out Climate Impact Assessments (CIAs) in individual policies.

4. Other Implications

Each policy will have implications for its specific area which will be detailed in their covering reports.

5. Risk Assessment

Risk assessments are likely to be required for each policy that is reviewed and will be detailed in the covering reports.

6. Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIAs)

EqIAs are likely to be required for each policy that is reviewed. Significant work will be required to ensure that EqIAs are undertaken at the start of policy reviews, to ensure the potential equality impacts of factored into the formulation and decision-making process for each one.

7. Appendices

Progress update on SWAP's recommendations

8. Background Papers

None

9. Background

9.1 The Consequential Order identifies nine policies that must be reviewed by 1 April 2021. One of these policies was agreed by the Shadow Council in February 2019 (the Council Tax Reduction Scheme) so eight remain. They are:

- Housing Allocations Policy (Adult Services)
- Housing Assistance Policy (Adult Services)
- Homelessness Strategy (Adult Services)
- Strategy for Children and Young People (Children's Services)
- Accessibility Strategy and Plan under the Equality Act (Children's Services)
- Discretionary Relief Policy (Corporate Development)
- Gambling and Licensing Authority Policy (Place)
- Statement of Licensing Policy under the Licensing Act (Place)

9.2 In addition to these, there are approximately thirty policies in the council's current library that are compilations of policies from the former councils (the tree policy, for example) or policies that relate to a specific geography (Weymouth & Portland Sports Facilities Strategy for example). While these aren't required by law to be reviewed by a certain date, the ambiguity caused by different policies applying to different geographies could expose the council to risk and need addressing as a priority, along with the eight Consequential Order policies.

9.3 Finally, there are approximately 160 other policies in the library that should be reviewed and either adopted or decommissioned. Again, there isn't a legal requirement to do this by a particular date, but many are being updated as a result of service need (eg parking) or have become redundant, and should be reviewed as a matter of good practice so that the library is up to date.

9.4 A Policies Workstream was set up as part of the Shaping Dorset Council programme. It defined a policy (as distinct from a guidance note or procedure) as something that had to be agreed by Councillors, specifically:

A Policy is a statement of specific principles, often based on political priorities. They document organisational decisions, including the identification of different priorities and approaches, and choosing between them on the basis of the impact they will have. They are informed by current legislation, national guidance, local assessments of need, resources and understanding of validated research and best practice.

Because they involve political choices, they are usually approved by a councillor forum or by means of some other formal councillor input.

The exception to this is policies that impact on all staff in the authority, and which may lead to, or influence, disciplinary action, but which are only approved by senior managers. This includes most of our Human Resources policies.

- 9.5 The workstream sought to collate and classify all the policies that the new council was adopting or inheriting from the outgoing councils. A standard policy template was implemented, and a publicly available policy library created for the new council's suite of policies at <https://moderngov.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=13245>
- 9.6 Approximately 200 policies were identified through this process, although these are only policies that fall within the definition above (ie are approved by councillors), and new ones have also been developed in recent months.
- 9.7 Following the completion of Tranche 2, responsibility for co-ordinating the management and monitoring of review, adoption and approval of policies now sits with the Business Intelligence and Corporate Communications Service (BICC). A policy officer joined the team on 30 January to take the work forward. A summary of progress is shown at appendix 1 below.

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

Appendix 1:

SWAP Audit Policy Recommendations (August 2019) and progress

SWAP Recommendation	Progress update
<p>That the Corporate Director for Legal and Democratic ensures that all Policy Owners assigned responsibility for reviewing and adopting the remaining eight policies legally required to be in place by 31st March 2021 have a robust plan in place to ensure implementation by the set deadline.</p>	<p>In progress. The policy officer is working with each policy lead to develop a timeline for each of the eight policies. Four of the eight policies are now on the forward plan for Cabinet. The other four are being worked on and will be confirmed in the next few weeks.</p> <p>The policy officer will be attending each DMT throughout March to confirm timelines.</p>
<p>That the Corporate Director for Legal and Democratic formally assigns responsibility for co-ordinating the management and monitoring of review, adoption and approval of all policies (legally required or otherwise). The role should include frequent reporting to a strategic board where performance is deemed unsatisfactory so that action can be taken promptly to address any issues identified. Appropriate measures should be put in place to prevent 'bottlenecks' at the review and approval stage of policies by Full Council or Cabinet.</p>	<p>Done. Responsibility for co-ordinating the management and monitoring of policies now sits with the Business Insight and Corporate Communications Services.</p> <p>An end to end review of the policy journey has been drafted.</p>

<p>That the Corporate Director for Legal and Democratic liaises with relevant Corporate Directors to ensure all policies detailed within the 'master list' have an assigned Policy Owner. Once Policy Owners have been assigned, the Corporate Directors should ensure the following forms part of the Policy Owner's induction process:</p> <p>Policy Owners should familiarise themselves with the agreed standard policy template and checklist and are aware of their responsibility to ensure policies are refreshed and adopted in line with this agreed format; and</p> <p>Policy Owners set a reasonable deadline (where one has not been prescribed by legislation) for review and adoption and an adequate plan is put in place to ensure implementation by this date.</p>	<p>In progress.</p> <p>The Corporate Director for Legal and Democratic Services has liaised with the relevant Corporate Directors and service leads, and this is being followed up by the policy officer.</p>
<p>That the Corporate Director for Legal and Democratic assigns responsibility for ensuring policies are consistent with agreed format, well written and comply with legislative requirements prior to a policy being approved and made available to staff and the public via the Policy Library. This should also include a review of any policies that have already been</p>	<p>This is ongoing work. Officers are keen to work with the new Overview Committees to ensure policies are Councillor-led and consistent.</p>

<p>adopted and any revision going forward complies with the above.</p>	
<p>That the Corporate Director for Legal and Democratic liaises with the Communications Team with a view to reissuing the guidance around drafting a policy once appropriate Policy Owners have been assigned.</p>	<p>The policy work has been communicated to Senior Leadership Team on 3 February and Service Managers on 24 February. The policy officer is working closely with policy leads, and a corporate communication will be issued in the next 2 months.</p>
<p>That the Corporate Director for Legal and Democratic investigates and assesses whether other documentation which was not considered as part of the work undertaken by the Policies Workstream ought to be reviewed as part of a separate body of work.</p>	<p>This will be progressed in due course. Since the policy officer came into post on 30 January, the priority has been to focus on the eight Consequential Order policies.</p>