

Luton & South Bedfordshire Joint Committee

29 February 2008

Agenda Item No. 5.1

AUTHOR	Joint Officer Team (Anne Brereton)
SUBJECT	Joint Committee Memorandum of Understanding and Business Plan
PURPOSES	To provide a brief update on progress with the actions agreed in the Memorandum of Understanding and Business Plan
RECOMMENDATIONS	To note the progress and endorse the actions taken.
REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS	So that the Committee can monitor progress on the agreed actions.

1.0 THE BUSINESS PLAN AND MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

- 1.1 Following on from the formal establishment of the Joint Committee, the three core councils have focussed on the management support arrangements and technical resources required to prepare the Local Development Framework for the growth area. A draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was considered by the three council's Executives and approved with minor amendments at the end of 2007.
- 1.2 The Memorandum includes the creation of a co-located Joint Technical Unit in an office base with meeting, exhibition and work space.
- 1.3 Although the original proposal for the Joint Technical Unit envisaged a core team of 19 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) posts the MoU set out a pragmatic way forward to start with a smaller core team of officers which could be expanded over time, with a full time manager reporting to the Senior Management Group of the three authorities. The team would also be supported by project management resources and specialist skills through the retained contract with Halcrow.
- 1.4 The Executives also committed to ongoing core funding for the running costs and work of the Joint team which would be supplemented by mainstream revenue budgets and other funding opportunities.

2.0 PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.1 A suitable office base has been located and negotiations are proceeding on the terms of the lease. ICT services and other minor adaptations are being costed and arranged.
- 2.2 Employee resources have been agreed and affected employees are being consulted. Bedfordshire County Council will be seconding 1 FTE and providing funding for 1FTE. South Bedfordshire will be seconding 3 FTEs and providing interim project management and administrative support. Luton intend to second 5 FTEs. The manager's post, project management and Halcrow consultancy contract are all funded from the pooled budget which is administered by South Bedfordshire. The recruitment process for the JTU manager has been put on hold until the co-location is achieved and decisions regarding Local Government Review are made. It is intended to bring in an interim management resource for a period of three to six months.
- 2.3 We aim to achieve the co-location around Easter, but this is dependent upon ICT connections and British Telecom services which could delay the move.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND GROWTH AREA FUNDING

- 3.1 A working budget has been agreed by the Executives for the co-location. Funding is dependent on the core support from the local authorities. As part of this year's budget process Luton Borough Council have reduced their core funding contribution by £50,000 and this will need to be built into the ongoing forecasts. Bedfordshire County Council have also confirmed their contribution for 07/08 of an additional £50,000. A full report on the budget will be presented to the June meeting.
- 3.2 The interim member delivery group (as forerunner to the Local Delivery Group) has recently met and agreed that a number of the essential technical studies required for the Local Development Framework can be funded from the latest award of GAF 3 grant (Growth Area Fund) from Central Government. This includes the Water Cycle, Resource Efficiency and Social and Community Infrastructure studies together with additional costs for transport modelling and master planning in Dunstable and High Town. A number of other delivery projects have been prioritised and will be reported to the partner Council's Executives.
- 3.3 The relevant financial officer agreed these implications on 27 February 2008.

4.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 This is a progress report and there are no legal implications arising. Legal implications have been considered as part of reports to each Executive.
- 4.2 The relevant solicitor agreed these implications on 27 February 2008.

5.0 **CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 The case for the co-location and pooling of resources has been made and accepted by the Joint Committee and three partner authorities. As work progresses on the Local Development Framework and we approach the key stages of the Core Strategy preferred options, the need for unified management and focus of a dedicated team becomes more apparent and necessary. Good progress is being made and officers will give priority to the co-location of the JTU at the earliest possible opportunity.