
Cabinet

Report of the meetings held on 26th June, 17th July and 4th September 2008

Matters for Decision

21. FINANCIAL FORECAST

By way of a report by the Head of Financial Services (attached as Appendix A), the Cabinet has been acquainted with the present position in relation to the Council's financial forecast for the period up to 2018/19. This has also been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework).

The Council has continued to spend carefully and this, together with extra grants and budget income has resulted in last year's outturn being £1.2m less than budgeted. In discussing the need to identify and implement savings to achieve a balanced Medium Term Plan, the Cabinet has acknowledged the implications of current and future levels of inflation and the economic downturn in the housing industry. Members also have been reminded of the Government's approach to manage these changes through capping and future grant settlements. In the meantime, the Cabinet

RECOMMEND

that Council approve the financial strategy as set out in the report now submitted.

22. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services, reproduced as Appendix B, the Cabinet has considered the content of the Huntingdonshire Sustainable Community Strategy. Partners and stakeholders, including the business and voluntary sectors have been involved in the Strategy's development including the construction of delivery plans for each of the strategic themes (Item No. 24 below refers).

Having noted that the Strategy will be reviewed every three years, the Cabinet

RECOMMEND

that the Sustainable Community Strategy for Huntingdonshire be approved for publication.

23. CORPORATE PLAN – “GROWING SUCCESS”

In conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Panels and by way of a report by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services (a copy of which is attached as Appendix C) the Cabinet has considered the content of the updated Corporate Plan – “Growing Success”.

Having noted the priority areas identified in the plan, the Cabinet

RECOMMEND

that the contents of the revised Corporate Plan – “Growing Success” be approved for publication.

Matters for Information

24. HUNTINGDONSHIRE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND LOCAL ECONOMY – ACTION PLANNING

The Cabinet has approved the content of draft delivery plans for the Huntingdonshire Sustainable Community Strategy along with an action plan for the Local Economy Strategy. The strategy aims to improve the economic, social and environmental well being of the District and has been developed with the involvement of partners and stakeholders, including the business and voluntary sectors. Work has been undertaken to produce a delivery plan for each of the six strategic themes of:-

- ◆ growth and infrastructure;
- ◆ health and wellbeing;
- ◆ environment;
- ◆ children and young people;
- ◆ inclusive, safe and cohesive communities; and
- ◆ economic prosperity.

The plans aim to promote joint initiatives by partners and will be taken forward by the individual strategic partnerships linked to the themes.

25. CONSULTATION ON THE SUPPORTING PEOPLE REVIEW OF HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCIES

The Cabinet has been acquainted with the findings of a review of Home Improvement Agency (HIA) services undertaken on behalf of Cambridgeshire's Supporting People's Commissioning Body as part of a wider strategic review of services. HIAs in Cambridgeshire are funded by a Supporting People grant and by way of funding from the Primary Care Trust, Cambridgeshire County Council and the District Councils.

In approving a suggested response to the paper, Executive Councillors have expressed concern at the continuing and unacceptable time taken to complete occupational therapy assessments for vulnerable, older and disabled people in the District. Having concluded that an approach which seeks to maintain high levels of customer care, improve efficiency and lower costs through shared or combined services rather than market testing should be examined, the Cabinet has requested that Officers explore further the opportunities available to improve the effectiveness of HIAs through shared services or other options.

26. CAMBRIDGE SUB-REGION STRATEGIC HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT

The Cabinet has been acquainted with details of the Cambridge Sub-Region Strategic Housing Market Assessment and its implications for Huntingdonshire. The assessment outlines the evidence of need and demand for market and affordable housing based on seven local authority areas within the sub-region and replaces the need for local assessment.

27. PLANNING DESIGN BRIEFS

Having been acquainted with the responses received from consultation exercises on the design briefs for the redevelopment of an area of open space adjoining Mayfield Road, Huntingdon and the former Primrose Lane Hospital in Huntingdon, the Cabinet has agreed to adopt the documents for use as material consideration in planning decisions. In so doing, the Cabinet has requested that the retention of the Primrose Centre building be included as part of the development of the site but in the event that this proves not to be possible, consideration be given to its replacement with a scheme of high design quality.

28. A141 ABBOTS RIPTON ROAD

The Cabinet has approved a contribution of £75,000 towards a County Council accident safety scheme to improve the junction of the A141 and Kings Ripton Road in Huntingdon. Overall the scheme will cost in the region of £400,000 for which funding contributions have been sought from the District and Town Councils.

29. HEAVY GOODS VEHICLE WORKING GROUP

The Cabinet has considered the findings of a review by a Working Group of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) into the issue of heavy goods vehicles parking throughout the District. In so doing, Executive Councillors have been advised of the general shortage of suitable parking on the trunk road network for vehicles which has been exacerbated by the rationalisation of the lay-bys along the A14. In examining various options for providing such provision, the Cabinet has

- ◆ invited the County Council to establish a county-wide forum, involving the County Council, District Councils, local Members of Parliament, Cambridgeshire Constabulary and HGV operators to lobby Government to investigate the problem urgently and take steps to resolve it;
- ◆ agreed to seek the support for the forum via the Cambridgeshire Together: Local Area Agreement Board; and
- ◆ agreed that the District Council, as Local Planning Authority, should seek to influence the development of suitable HGV parking opportunities adjacent to the trunk roads in the District.

30. REVENUE OUTTURN 2007/08

The Cabinet has noted the outturn of revenue expenditure in 2007/08 along with variations between the original and revised budget provision for that year. A summary of debts received and the amount written-off during April to June 2008 has also been reported.

In considering expenditure, the Cabinet has congratulated Officers on the total net saving of £2.5m compared with the original budget. Whilst noting the action to be taken to enhance the budget monitoring process in the future, Executive Councillors have raised concerns over the increasing level of fuel and utility costs and the impact of the economic down turn on land charges income. Particular reference was made to the potential implications of this situation on future levels of council tax and the budget for 2009/2010 should the Government fail to acknowledge the impact of increases in costs and loss of income in their award of Revenue Support Grant.

31. MONITORING OF THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2007/08

Consideration has been given by the Cabinet to a report detailing the outturn of capital expenditure for 2007/08 and the implications for 2008/09. In discussing a number of variations in the 2008/09 programme, Executive Councillors have been advised that the level of Government grant for disabled facilities could be lower in 2009 than previous years, due to a shortage of occupational therapists employed by the PCT locally, which may result in fewer assessments being undertaken. Remedial action is being investigated and the Chief Executive has held discussions with his counterpart at the Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust regarding the possibility of using therapists based in neighbouring districts to undertake assessments in Huntingdonshire.

Having been advised that the revenue section of the Community Facilities grant aid budget for 2008/09 was over-committed and the capital part under-subscribed, the Cabinet has agreed to increase the revenue element by £43,000.

32. CAR PARKING ORDERS

In Item No. 75 of its Report to the meeting of the Council held on 16th April 2008, the Cabinet reported that it had approved the implementation of the Car Parking Strategy and consequential

amendments to car parking charges. As a consequence new orders under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 have been prepared and advertised in the local press.

The first order proposes the introduction of a new three year pricing policy to manage paid and controlled car parks in the town centres, with the aim of keeping demand at the 2007 base line. The second order relates to the free car parks to ensure they are used for the purpose for which they were provided. As a result of the public advertisement a number of representations have been received to the first order. Having been advised that the matters raised in the representations had been addressed during the previous deliberations on the strategy, the Cabinet has agreed not to hold a local inquiry and to approve the Orders as advertised.

33. RAISING SPONSORSHIP AND ADVERTISING REVENUES FROM THE COUNCIL'S WEBSITE

Having considered the benefits of selling sponsorship and advertising space on the Council's website, the Cabinet has authorised the Director of Commerce and Technology, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for IT and Customer Service, to appoint an agency to manage web advertising on behalf of the Council. In so doing, Members have requested that a review of the advertising initiative be undertaken in January 2009 and a further report submitted to the Cabinet at its meeting scheduled for 19th February 2009.

34. PARISH CHARTER FOR HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The Cabinet has considered the findings of a study by a Panel of the Overview and Scrutiny (Service Support) regarding the adoption of a Parish Charter in respect of the Council's relationship with Town and Parish Councils in the District (Item No. 13 of their Report refers).

In considering the results of a questionnaire distributed to all town and parish councils on a draft Charter, Members noted that only 43% of the towns and parishes responded and of those only 77% were in favour of a Parish Charter, with even less (47%) being interested in delegated services. Under the circumstances, the Cabinet has agreed that no further action be taken to develop a Parish Charter with the town and parish councils in Huntingdonshire at the present time. An explanation has been sent to the towns and parishes to inform them of the reasons for the decision.

At the same time, Members have discussed a recent Ministerial announcement suggesting devolution of service responsibility from the centre to county and district councils who would then be expected to further devolve responsibility to parish councils. As the scrutiny investigation has suggested that there appears to be little enthusiasm on the part of parish councils for additional powers and duties, the Head of Administration has been requested to draw the attention of the Local Government Association to the results of the consultation exercise locally.

35. NEW ACCOMMODATION DELIVERY – MID-PROGRAMME REVIEW

The Cabinet has noted the progress made on the delivery of the new accommodation project and the programme of work for the current year. In so doing, the Cabinet has approved a virement from the headquarters, repairs and renewals fund of £170,000 and has authorised the Chief Executive, after consultation with the Deputy Leader, to enter into a contract(s) for the supply of furniture for the new building.

Having discussed issues associated with the proposed development of the area of land fronting St. Mary's Street, the Cabinet has requested that development options be investigated and the findings, along with the financial implications, submitted to a future meeting.

36. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS TO ST IVES TOWN CENTRE

The Cabinet has been acquainted with the progress of phase 2 of an environmental improvements scheme for the Market Hill and Bridge Street areas of St Ives.

Phase 1 of the scheme was completed in 2001, involving the removal of parking from the Bridge Street/Crown Street area and the creation of loading bays and disabled parking. The development of phase 2, involving the Market Hill area, has been the subject of extensive scrutiny by an Advisory Group comprising local County, District and Town Councillors along with Scrutiny Members and representatives from local consultative groups such as the Town Centre Partnership, Access Group and the Civic Society.

Having considered three design options for phase 2 and revised Traffic Orders for Bridge Street, the Cabinet has

- ◆ approved the proposals in principle for the purpose of public consultation;
- ◆ agreed to submit the proposals to the Huntingdonshire Traffic Area Joint Committee for approval;
- ◆ requested that the results of the consultation exercise be reported back to a future meeting; and
- ◆ requested that significant financial contributions towards the cost of the work be sought from Cambridgeshire County Council and St Ives Town Council.

37. CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

The Cabinet has approved the contents of the Customer Service Strategy Action Plan. The Plan outlines the actions proposed to achieve the following objectives:-

- ◆ to provide high quality customer service;

- ◆ to make it as easy as possible for customers to access services and get appropriate information; and
- ◆ to be good at communicating with and listening to people and organisations.

These will link to the objectives of the Council's Corporate Plan – "Growing Success", the Corporate Equality Policy, the Consultation and Engagement Strategy and the Communications and Marketing Strategy.

38. ENHANCED CLEANSING SERVICES PROPOSAL FOR MARKET TOWNS

Following a presentation by Councillor J D Ablewhite, Scrutiny Panel Member, the Cabinet has considered the findings of a study by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) regarding the introduction of additional cleansing services in the District's town centres on Sundays to deal with the litter left as a result of the Saturday night time economy.

In discussing those areas identified as requiring additional cleansing on Sundays, Executive Councillors have queried various operational matters associated with the proposal and its effect on the existing cleaning regime and have requested the Overview and Scrutiny Panel to investigate further these issues. Particular reference was made to the extensiveness of the areas identified and the need to target specific streets. The Cabinet recognised also that additional cleansing was likely to cause some early morning noise which could be a cause of disturbance to some residents.

Having considered the overall cost of introducing an additional cleansing service and given the financial constraints faced by the Council, the Cabinet has requested that the possibility of financial contributions towards the cost of implementing the service be investigated with local town councils.

Attention also having been drawn to a new Government measure of Alcohol Disorder Zones, designed to require establishments creating additional expenditure for public authorities to bear the cost of any additional measures, the Cabinet has requested that their use be investigated further.

39. ADOPTION OF LOCAL STANDARDS FOR THE PROVISION OF CORE SPORTS FACILITIES IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The Cabinet has agreed to adopt local standards for the provision of core sports facilities in Huntingdonshire. The availability of developing and adopting local sports facilities standards has been identified through recent research and it is intended that the adoption of such standards will assist in maintaining an appropriate range of sports facilities in the District to meet future need. As part of the process, seven key drivers have been identified as follows:-

- ◆ the need to plan strategically and ensure sustainability of future provision;
- ◆ the need to inform the Local Development Framework (LDF), and Supplementary Planning Documents and set out expectations for Section 106 contributions from developers towards future sports facility provision;
- ◆ the priorities and objectives for the Sustainable Community Strategy;
- ◆ the need to identify what provision is needed in St Neots, given the significant population increases planned for this area;
- ◆ the requirement to identify the needs of those living in rural areas, where accessibility to sports facilities is more limited;
- ◆ the need to increase participation in sport at local level (LAA target); and
- ◆ the emerging opportunities for partnerships – Building Schools for the Future (BSF), National Governing Bodies (NGBs), Sports Clubs etc.

Eventually it is intended to develop a leisure facility strategy which will embrace the local standards.

40. REVIEW OF COUNCIL STRUCTURE: APPOINTMENT OF WORKING GROUP

The Cabinet has appointed Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, K J Churchill, W T Clough, S J Criswell, T D Sanderson, Ms M Thomas, G S E Thorpe and R G Tuplin to a Structural Working Group established to review the existing Council structure in light of experience and recent legislative change. The first meeting of the Working Group is scheduled to take place on 24th September 2008 and the Cabinet has been advised that the review was expected to be concluded with the intention to implement any changes in the new Municipal Year.

41. LAND AT MAYFIELD ROAD, HUNTINGDON

(The following item was considered as a confidential item under paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.)

The Cabinet has approved the disposal of Council owned land at Mayfield Road, Huntingdon to Wherry Housing Association for the purpose of providing affordable housing.

I C Bates
Chairman