
Cabinet

**Report of the meetings held on 25th September,
16th October, 6th, 7th and 20th November 2008**

Matter for Decision

42. BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM PLAN 2009 - 2014

In conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) and by way of a report by the Head of Financial Services (reproduced as an Appendix) the Cabinet has reviewed the draft 2009/10 Budget, the Medium Term Financial Plan for the period up to 2012/14 and the longer term financial forecast to 2023/24. Final approval of the proposals will be dealt with by Council at its meeting on 18th February 2009.

In discussing the content of the reports, Members have emphasised the need to consider a range of potential savings, particularly given the uncertainty as to future levels of revenue support grant and the possible impact of a lower than expected increase in Government grant in 2009/10. For the purpose of clarification the District Council's contribution to the Cambridgeshire County Council's accident safety scheme on the A141/Kings Ripton Road junction will be financed from the Medium Term Bids for the Local Transport Plan (£30k), Huntingdonshire Transport Strategy (£5k) and Safe Cycle Routes (£20k) with the balance of £20k from the LPSA reward funding.

The Cabinet therefore

RECOMMEND

that the draft Budget and Medium Term Plan, appended to the report now submitted, be approved to assist in the production of the Budget for 2009/10, revised Medium Term Plan for 2013/14 and the Financial Strategy to 2023/24.

Matters for Information

43. CREATIVE ENTERPRISE CENTRE, ST. NEOTS

Having been informed of the outcome of a tender exercise for the management of the new creative enterprise centre in St Neots, the

Cabinet has approved a tender received from N W E S and has authorised the Head of Legal and Estates, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy, to agree the final terms.

The Enterprise Centre, developed in conjunction with Longsands College and the Department of Communities and Local Government, will provide accommodation for about 24 small creative businesses, together with other facilities for educational exhibition and conference purposes.

44. IMPROVING LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY CONSULTATION CHANGES TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY POWERS

Having regard to the views of both the Overview and Scrutiny Panels, the Cabinet has approved the content of a suggested response to a consultation paper issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government on improving local accountability which proposes a number of changes to the overview and scrutiny function. The consultation paper has been produced in response to a recent White Paper "Communities in Control" which aims to encourage greater community involvement in local decision making.

In considering the proposals, Executive Councillors have questioned the proposed introduction of a statutory requirement to make provision for a dedicated scrutiny resource to support the overview and scrutiny operation. Although not applicable to District Councils, the Cabinet has suggested that this should be at the discretion of individual authorities depending on local circumstances. With regard to the overall package of proposals to raise the profile of overview and scrutiny, the Cabinet recognised that several of the initiatives already have been either tried or implemented by the Council.

45. MARKET RULES

The Government has approved revised rules for Council-operated markets in Huntingdonshire. The rules had been revised to ensure that they are relevant and appropriate to current trading practices and have been the subject of consultations with existing market traders. The Cabinet has also authorised the Director of Environmental and Community Health Services, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services, to make any minor changes to the rule as may be necessary in the future.

46. REPRESENTATION ON ORGANISATIONS

In view of the recent problem in the banking sector, the Cabinet has appointed Councillors J A Gray, T V Rogers and L M Simpson as the Members with whom the Director of Commerce and Technology will consult to exercise delegated authority on treasury management matters.

47. FINANCIAL MONITORING – REVENUE BUDGET

The Cabinet has noted the expected revenue budget variations already identified in the current year. In discussing a summary of income collected and amounts written-off during April to September 2008, the Cabinet has expressed concern over the impact of the recent introduction of empty property rating on local business interest and commercial concerns. With this in mind, the Cabinet has requested that representations be made to the Local Government Association over the adverse effects of this measure with a request that the Association lobby the Government for its removal.

48. CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING – 2008/2009 BUDGET

The Cabinet has been acquainted with variations in the Capital Programme in the current year. Having discussed the main variations in the programme the Cabinet has approved the commencement of the Medium Term Plan schemes for the St. Ivo Leisure Centre – Football Improvements, Huntingdon West Development, St. Neots Green Corridor and the Sustainable Homes Retro-Fit Scheme. The latter is subject to the Executive Councillor for Finance and Environment being consulted on the scheme's timing in relation to the ongoing housing market.

49. CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH JOINT MUNICIPAL WASTE STRATEGY

The Cabinet has approved the content of a revised Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Joint Municipal Waste Strategy. The Strategy has retained the original principles of the first management strategy published in 2003 and has addressed the following key themes and associated objectives and actions:-

- ◆ underlining strategic principles for the waste strategy;
- ◆ joint working;
- ◆ climate change;
- ◆ protection of the environment;
- ◆ waste prevention and reuse;
- ◆ recycling and composting;
- ◆ management of residual waste;
- ◆ wider waste roles; and
- ◆ stakeholder engagement

The Cabinet has noted that the adoption of the new Strategy will have no additional financial implications for the Council. Whilst discussing recycling levels, the Cabinet has congratulated residents for their continuing efforts in recycling which has resulted in the strategy target for 2010/2011 of 55-60% already having been achieved.

50. ENHANCED CLEANSING SERVICES

Further to Item No. 38 of their Report to the meeting of the Council held on 24th September 2008, the Cabinet has considered further

reports by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) regarding the use of Alcohol Disorder Zones and the introduction of additional cleansing services in the town centres on Sunday mornings to deal with the effects of the Saturday night time economy.

In considering the Panel's recommendations, the Cabinet still consider that the Panel has failed to explain sufficiently the scope for any re-distribution of cleansing schedules in the Operations Division, the precise extent of the streets to be cleaned and whether financial contributions might be forthcoming from the Town Councils towards an enhanced service. Nevertheless in expressing its support for an improvement to the appearance of town centres, the Cabinet has agreed to accept in principle the introduction of cleansing services on Sundays in the market towns across the District. In so doing, the Cabinet has requested that financial contributions towards the cost of implementing additional cleansing be sought from the relevant town councils and that the Head of Operations investigate the feasibility of re-scheduling cleansing rotas within existing resources and report thereon to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

In considering the circumstances in which Alcohol Disorder Zones (ADZs) could be introduced in the District, Executive Councillors have been reminded that ADZs were introduced by the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 in response to problems in city and town centres as a result of excessive alcohol consumption. Having noted that ADZ's are intended as a short-term, last resort measure to address high levels of alcohol related nuisance and disorder, circumstances which are not applicable in the District, the Cabinet has recognised that their use is inappropriate to deal with the problem of litter.

51. SUPPORTING LOCAL RETAILERS

The Cabinet has endorsed the action taken by Management Team to introduce a car park voucher scheme aimed at supporting local retailers by increasing the number of people who choose to shop in Huntingdon, St. Neots and St. Ives during the present economic climate. A voucher will be printed in the next edition of Districtwide which can be used to park free of charge for up to four hours in any long-stay car park on Saturdays in December or January.

52. APPOINTMENT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR, CENTRAL SERVICES

(The following item was considered as a confidential item under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.)

Having been acquainted with the requirements of paragraph 4(e) of the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Cabinet confirmed that there was no material or well-founded objection to the Panel's proposals with regard to the offer of an appointment to fill the vacancy of Corporate Director, Central Services.

53. HOUSING STRATEGY FOR THE CAMBRIDGE SUB-REGION

The Cabinet has approved the content of a Housing Strategy for the Cambridge Sub-Region which has been prepared by the seven local authorities making up that area. The Strategy enables bids for funding for housing purposes to be made at regional level and satisfies the Audit Commission's criteria for delivering an excellent service. In discussing the Action Plan appended to the Strategy, the Cabinet has expressed caution over the achievement of the Plan's objectives given the current climate in the housing market.

54. THE HUNTINGDONSHIRE GYPSY AND TRAVELLER SITES DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT: INITIAL ISSUES AND OPTIONS: PRINCIPLES AND PROCESSES CONSULTATION

Having regard to the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) (Item No. 23 of their Report refers), the Cabinet has approved for public consultation the contents of the Huntingdonshire Gypsy and Traveller Sites Development Plan Document: Initial Issues Consultation Document; Principles and Processes. The paper is the first of a series of documents which will result in a plan identifying sites to provide accommodation for the gypsy and traveller community in Huntingdonshire. By providing adequate provision for gypsies/travellers on sites which are well designed with appropriate facilities, it is anticipated that unauthorised encampments and developments and the impact on local communities will be reduced. The Cabinet has noted that Members of the Council and of town and parish councils will be invited to an explanatory workshop on the consultation process and that the final plan will be subject to an examination by an independent planning inspector prior to its final adoption by Council in 2010.

55. DECENT HOMES FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Further to Item No. 54 of their Report to the Council held on the 5th December 2007, the Cabinet has been advised that the Council has been awarded a capital grant of £162,400 from EERA's Housing and Sustainable Communities Panel to help improve "non decent homes" in the private sector. In discussing how the grant should be used, Members have been reminded that a previous award was reserved for thermal efficiency improvements. However, despite targeted publicity the take up of this grant has been lower than anticipated. Nevertheless, Members were advised that the demand for grants was expected to increase due to rises in fuel costs and the expansion of the scope of the grant criteria. In considering the possible rephrasing of the previous year's grant, the Cabinet has agreed to use the 2008/09 award of £162,400 in the current year for decent homes for vulnerable people – to rectify Category 1 hazards and thermal efficiency improvements and that the 2006/07 and 07/08 award be rephrased for the same purpose with £75,000 of it being used in the current year to assist in funding the Sustainable Homes Retro-Fit Scheme. At the same time, the Cabinet has requested that a review

of the programme be undertaken once the basis and likelihood of the allocation of grant in future years is known.

56. GREAT FEN PROJECT GOVERNANCE

The Cabinet has approved arrangements for the District Council to enter into a Collaboration Agreement in respect of the Great Fen Project for a renewable five year fixed term. In so doing, Executive Members were advised that the Agreement will strengthen the existing Memorandum Agreement by defining the relationship between the partners, setting out the project's aims and objectives and summarising certain managerial/financial matters. Having considered the reservations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) regarding certain aspects of the Project (Item No. 22 of their Report refers) and in particular the need for improved transparency and accountability, the Cabinet has requested that the final draft agreement be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel prior to its consideration by Cabinet.

57. FREE SWIMMING FOR OVER 60s AND UNDER 17s

The Cabinet has endorsed the action taken by Management Team to introduce free swimming for the over 60s with effect from 1st April 2009. The action has arisen in response to communications from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) requesting a decision on whether the authority will be participating in the Government's incentives for local authorities to offer free swimming for over 60s and under 17s. Whilst discussing the benefits and risks associated with each incentive, along with the funding allocation being offered by the DCMS, Executive Members have accepted that free swimming for the over 60s could be both cost effective and manageable given the numbers likely to take up the offer. However, it was felt that free swimming for under 17s could have a significant impact upon admissions and the reimbursement offered was not commensurate with the cost involved in providing the extra staff required for the anticipated demand. The decision has received the support of the District's five Leisure Centres Management Committees.

I C Bates
Chairman