

CORPORATE PLAN WORKING GROUP

NOTES OF MEETING HELD 26TH AUGUST 2010

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Corporate Plan Working Group met on 26th August 2010 when Councillors J D Ablewhite, S J Criswell, P M D Godfrey, D Harty and R J West were present.
- 1.2 An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor G S E Thorpe.
- 1.3 Miss H Ali and H Thackray were in attendance.

2. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

(a) Social Well-Being

- 2.1 The Working Group has drawn attention to the “number of admissions/participants in activities provided or promoted by the Council” at its Leisure Centres, which has not achieved the first quarter target. In response, the Policy and Strategic Services Manager reported that the target figure had increased by 9% when compared to the previous quarter. Whilst the report indicated that there were no specific areas of concern, the Working Group expressed their view that there should be some concern, in light of the fact that significant capital investments had been made at each of the Leisure Centres.
- 2.2 Arising from discussions, Members sought clarification on whether exercise classes for older people had relocated out of the St Ivo facility. Members further questioned whether this was due to more competitive rates being offered by the recently opened Corn Exchange in St Ives.
- 2.3 In noting the success of the launch of the One Leisure card campaign in attracting 90,000 card holders, some concern was expressed that only 32,600 of these card holders were regarded as “live” users. Members sought clarification on the meaning of the term “live” users and queried whether any targeted marketing would be undertaken to increase this figure. The view was expressed that this would help to achieve the quarterly target for the key measure relating to “number of admissions/participants in activities provided or promoted by the Council”.
- 2.4 With regard to the retrospective loss of LPSA reward funding for projects undertaken by the Environmental and Community Health Services Division, the Working Group were advised that alternative funding sources were currently being sought. Members have questioned whether any progress has been made in this respect.
- 2.5 Members have placed on record their concern that the target for the key measure relating to the “number of households living in temporary accommodation” had

not been achieved. In so doing, it was reported that this was attributable largely to the impact of the ongoing financial recession.

- 2.6 Some concern was expressed by Members at the potential withdrawal of the rent deposit loans and bonds and the subsequent impact of this increasing the number of homelessness cases and demand upon temporary accommodation. The Working Group has questioned whether there was any scope to increase these loans and bonds with a view to reducing the level of homelessness currently being experienced. Discussion then ensued on the number of empty homes within the District, in particular RAF Upwood. Members questioned whether anything was being done by the Council to utilise these vacant homes as another source of accommodation. Whilst it was acknowledged that some of the vacant properties were privately owned, the Working Group queried whether an agreement, in terms of the use of the property, could be reached.
- 2.7 With regard to the objective "To enable the provision of affordable housing", clarification has been sought from the Head of Planning Services on the definition of "alternative types of affordable housing provision".

(b) Economic Well-Being

- 2.8 With regard to the key measure relating to "internal promotions as percentage of all vacancies filled", the Working Group has sought clarification on the actual number of fixed term posts advertised over the reporting period.
- 2.9 The Working Group has expressed their view that the amber indicator recorded for the key measure relating to the "percentage of new employees still in post after 12 months" should in fact be regarded as a green indicator, given that there was only a minimal difference of 3.3% between the target and actual figure.
- 2.10 With regard to the Leisure Centres, Members noted that profit margins on bars and catering were reported as being above or on target. In so doing, Members queried the means by which this had been achieved in light of the fact that it was reported in the previous monitoring report that hospitality income appeared to have dropped by £65,000 across all Centres.
- 2.11 Clarification has been sought from the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships on the work of the Local Enterprise Partnership and the partners involved.

(c) Environmental Well-Being

- 2.12 With regard to the key measure relating to the "number of energy efficiency and renewable energy measures carried out as a result of HDC schemes and promotions" Members placed on record their disappointment that this target had not been achieved. Whilst it was reported that this was largely attributable to the unavoidable delay in appointing contractors, Members requested for a more comprehensive explanation on the causes of delay to be provided by the Head of Environmental Management. In particular, Members questioned whether the delay was attributable to a change in specification for the appointment of contractors to the Co2yHomes insulation scheme. The Policy and Strategic

Services Manager reported that to date, 20 insulations had been completed and that it was anticipated that the target would be met over the remainder of the financial year.

- 2.13 With regard to the key measure relating to the “percentage of Physical Infrastructure Development activities on track” the Working Group requested for this measure to be defined more clearly.
- 2.14 In noting that the Head of Information Management Division would be commencing a procurement process for virtualised servers, Members questioned whether this would be undertaken in partnership with neighbouring authorities. The view was expressed that this approach might prove to be more cost effective for the Council.
- 2.15 Some concern has been expressed by Members at the resourcing implications for the Head of Planning Services upon the anticipated number of planning applications received in connection with potential large scale retail developments in Huntingdon town centre. Concern was expressed over the increase in workload for Officers and in particular the indication that “appropriate specialist inputs” might be required. In terms of the latter, clarification was sought on whether the fees for the “specialist inputs” would be met by the Council or the applicant.

3. THE COUNCIL’S USE OF CONSULTANTS

- 3.1 The Working Group has requested for an update on the Council’s use of external consultants. In so doing, Members were advised that a recommendation requesting the Cabinet to investigate whether there were any opportunities for jointly employing expert staff with a view to achieving savings for the Council had been submitted to the Cabinet at their April meeting. The recommendation was noted by the Executive. The Working Group reiterated that they intend to undertake further work on this subject with a view to satisfying themselves that the use of consultants is subject to appropriate controls, management and justification.
- 3.2 In noting that there was a meeting of the Joint Chairmen scheduled to be held prior to the September Council meeting, Members requested for an update on the Council’s use of external consultants to be provided at the meeting.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

- 4.1 With the aid of a report tabled at the meeting, the Working Group gave consideration to number of proposed recommendations to the Cabinet from Councillor S J Criswell relating to the Council’s budgetary planning and performance management procedures.

(a) Budget Planning

- 4.2 Bearing in mind recent developments concerning the Council’s Redundancy Policy and the implications of it upon the Council’s strategic and future development, concern was expressed by the Working Group at the current lack

of vision of the authority. Members commented that a clear vision of Council services was needed in advance of any proposed re-organisation and urged the Cabinet to bear this in mind when taking decisions on these matters. In that light, the Working Group concurred with the recommendations proposed as follows:-

- (a) In the search for the necessary financial savings, that Cabinet invites contributions from opposition groups, all other Members, employees and the public.
- (b) Having taken full account of the views expressed, the Cabinet reviews the Council's priorities, aims and objectives in the Corporate Plan "Growing Success" and that the Overview and Scrutiny Panels be involved as part of the review process.
- (c) As a result of recommendation (b) above, that Cabinet develops a clear vision of what services should be preserved, delivered differently or withdrawn.
- (d) That the Cabinet then decides which employees are required to deliver services and then considers the areas within which redundancies, whether voluntary or compulsory, would be appropriate.

(b) Performance Management

- 4.3 In respect of the proposals for the Council's performance management process, the Working Group concurred with the suggestion that given the recent Government announcement to abolish the Comprehensive Area Assessment, the Cabinet should be recommended to review all internal and external performance indicators to ensure that they are appropriate to the service delivered by or in partnership with the Council and that they are important to the residents and businesses of Huntingdonshire. Members have concurred that the Working Group should be involved as part of the review process.

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