

Decision Digest

Edition 147

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 1st to 31st July 2014.

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION POLICY

The Employment Panel has reviewed and endorsed the contents of a new Recruitment and Selection Policy for the organisation. The Policy has been developed to give managers greater flexibility to manage recruitment and selection in a way that meets their service needs and does not constrain managers with a one size fits all approach. The Policy will be supplemented by a Recruitment Toolkit which will provide a practical guide to support managers in recruitment activities.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Employment Panel has endorsed a suggested approach to development of a Workforce Development Strategy for the District Council and a detailed project plan for its preparation. The Strategy will set out how managing and developing the workforce can achieve corporate objectives and ambitions and help to drive forward the authority's strategic aims and business plan.

Work on the strategy should commence in September 2014 and the views of the Staff Council will be requested as part of the focus group arrangements. The Panel has asked for an update on progress to their November meeting.

WORKFORCE REPORT (QUARTER 4)

The Employment Panel has received the quarterly report on Human Resource matters impacting on the performance of the organisation during the period 1st January to 31st March 2014.

The Panel noted that the average days sickness per FTE had reduced again in the last quarter to 7.6 days per annum and that this was now lower than the CIPD Public Sector Average and the EELGA Authority Average. HR Advisors will continue to work closely with Managers to identify and tackle emerging issues particularly in services where there were high levels of absence.

LGSS PERFORMANCE

The Employment Panel has considered the performance of LGSS Human Resources, Payroll and Organisational Workforce Development Services across the key service measures agreed under the current contract during the period 1st January to 31st March 2014 and over the course of the year.

Members noted that the majority of service standards either had been delivered or exceeded in 2014, which is particularly pleasing given that the last quarter had been a challenging time for

human resources and payroll services given the pay review process.

To assist the Panel in monitoring performance levels and to create a balanced and impartial report, feedback from the LGSS Contract Manager and the views of District Council staff on each of these services areas also was provided.

In general terms, Members welcomed the introduction of a new feedback form to enable District Council officers to formally submit their issues with the service to the appropriate LGSS Managers and receive a direct response. Work is also underway to improve the quality of the quarterly performance reports. The Panel will continue to monitor the service issues raised by staff at their future meetings.

EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

At the request of the Corporate Governance Panel, the Employment Panel has reviewed the content of a proposed Employee Handbook for the District Council. The Handbook had been designed to replace and strengthen the existing Employees' Code of Conduct. It is the intention that the Handbook will continue to evolve and will be more readily accessible to staff in its new format. With its change in nature it is no longer necessary to include the document in the constitution. As a result the Corporate Governance Panel has recommended to Council that the handbook be removed.

POOL CAR REVIEW

The outcome of a review of the Council's policy of providing pool vehicles for use by District Council employees has been noted by the Employment Panel.

Running costs should be fully met from charges made to service users. At current usage levels, for the number of

vehicles provided, the Panel noted that it was financially worthwhile for the Council to continue to run the pool vehicle scheme.

USE OF CONSULTANTS, HIRED AND TEMPORARY STAFF

The Employment Panel has been provided with details of the Council's expenditure on consultants, hired and temporary staff during the period 2013/14, in comparison with the previous year.

The Panel has welcomed the preparation of a guide for managers on the use of consultancy, hired and temporary staff which will assist Managers to identify and use the correct type of additional support. The Panel has approved the guidance for issue to all Managers.

PENSIONS POLICY AND LOCAL DISCRETIONS

The Employment Panel has considered the content of a revised Pensions Policy and Local Discretions Policy for the Authority. It has been necessary to review the Policies following changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme in 2014 and it is proposed to review the Policy and the local discretions on an annual basis as part of the budget preparation process so that the most affordable policy is approved prior to the new financial year.

As the Local Government Pension Scheme required formal approval of the Council's Local Discretions Policy, the Panel has recommended that the draft Pension Policy and local discretions be approved by the Council.

SPORT AND ACTIVE LIFESTYLES TEAM ANNUAL REPORT 2013/14

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has received details

of the performance, work programmes and highlights of the Sport and Active Lifestyles Team (SALT) during 2013/14.

Matters discussed include the position with external funding; namely public health and Lottery Grant, the cost of physical inactivity in Huntingdonshire, the difficulties in attracting external funding, the future viability of the Healthy Walks programme and the option to transfer this service to local communities.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY SHARED SERVICE REVIEW AND DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT BUDGET

The outcome of a review of the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency (HIA) shared service was reported to both the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being). The service has completed its second year of operation. Members also received an update on the impact of the Better Care Fund and the ongoing demand for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs).

The HIA has achieved its three key objectives and is now in a position to extend its service to the other Cambridgeshire authorities. Concerns do exist over the risks associated with the development, in particular the County Council's position, as they may wish to withdraw revenue funding if not all authorities sign up to the proposals.

Other matters discussed include an update on the latest position with Occupational Therapy waiting times, the possible introduction of a "fast track" grant system for smaller adaptations and the need to test the market to identify whether smaller local firms are able to compete for HIA works.

A report on lessons learnt from the HIA service is being produced by the Housing Strategy Manager. This was welcomed

by the Panel as it will inform the Council of matters to be aware of as future shared service proposals emerge.

Subsequently, the Cabinet has supported the development of an outline business case for an expansion of the service to include other districts with Cambridgeshire and has agreed that the current three year service agreement be extended to allow this to be explored further.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH NHS FOUNDATION TRUST: PERSONALITY DISORDER COMMUNITY SERVICE / COMPLEX CASES SERVICE, INCLUDING LIFEWORKS CONSULTATION

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has agreed to submit a response to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust's Consultation on Personality Disorder Community Service / Complex Cases Service, including Lifeworks. The Panel is supportive of the proposals but has commented on the need to ensure that service providers are fully integrated with local partners and networks in order to support community discharge planning and to facilitate social inclusion. Clarification is also sought on the provision of existing personality disorder services and the specific proposals for Huntingdonshire.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE LONG TERM TRANSPORT STRATEGY & LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 3 REFRESH

Both the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) have endorsed the Cambridgeshire Long Term Transport Strategy and the refresh of Local Transport Plan 3 on the grounds that they are essential to the delivery of the growth agenda.

The Strategy represents a radical change in approach to achieving transport based solutions across the Cambridgeshire area, which the Panel has been advised has political support. Improvements to the A428 are assumed at this stage and the position will be confirmed when the Highways Agency releases its "Route Based Strategy" in March 2015. A new rail station at Alconbury Weald has been welcomed by the Panel.

The Panel has discussed the risks associated with the Strategy and its underlying links with the planning process.

The Cabinet was of the view that reference should be made to the required improvements to the A1, particularly at the Buckden roundabout and the need to improve accessibility to Cambridge. Mention also was made of the need to improve the two track section surrounding the Welwyn Viaduct given its impact on the local rail network. These views will be relayed to the County Council.

DRAFT HUNTINGDON & GODMANCHESTER MARKET TOWN TRANSPORT STRATEGY

Along with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being), the Cabinet has expressed support for the new Market Town Transport Strategy (MTTS) for Huntingdon and Godmanchester. The Strategy contains up to date detailed projects that will enable funding opportunities from a number of sources, including Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funding to be taken advantage of.

The Panel welcomes the key proposals outlined in the MTTS and acknowledges that difficult decisions will need to be taken because the challenges identified cannot be avoided. Solutions will have to be found whether or not they are the

preferred option. However the Cabinet has suggested that greater emphasis be placed on the need of the motorist given the rural nature of the district and to traffic calming measures.

A TREE STRATEGY FOR HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) has endorsed the contents of the draft document 'A Tree Strategy for Huntingdonshire'. The Panel's Tree Strategy Working Group has been involved in its development. The Strategy is intended for use as an electronic resource for interested stakeholders.

An issue has been identified relating to ownership of trees. An attempt will be made to map the Council's tree stock on a computerised tree management system. The Panel recommends that a mechanism is introduced to identify responsibility for trees, which are perceived to be in public ownership.

Other matters discussed include the importance of the Local Tree Warden Co ordinators, the need to maintain the level of resources required to deliver the Strategy and a suggestion to explore the commercial opportunities that the Strategy presents.

Subsequently, the Cabinet has approved the Strategy and has requested that the document be made available electronically and its content promoted with Parish Councils.

SHARED SERVICES BUILDING CONTROL

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) has supported the proposals for the Council to explore all four options for developing Building Control shared services. The Panel has been assured

that staff had been made aware of the proposals and that career and development opportunities will emerge. The Panel does not wish local knowledge and expertise to be lost. To prevent this from happening, it is likely that local teams will be established within the shared service.

There is a need to develop the business case for shared service as soon as possible as the Building Control Service is in direct competition with the private sector. The Panel encouraged the Cabinet to give priority to completing the investigations into Options C and D as a matter of urgency.

In considering the Panel's views the Cabinet has endorsed the development of the business case and authorised the Head of Development to work with interested local authorities to develop a proposal for a wider building control cluster. The cluster would operate within a regional network supported by South Norfolk District Council. Officers will be working with South Norfolk and other interested authorities to develop a proposal for an Eastern Region Approved Inspector Company.

SHARED SERVICES

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has endorsed a proposal to enter into a formal strategic shared services partnership with South Cambridgeshire District Council. As part of the proposal, the Council will also continue to work with Cambridge City Council and other appropriate partners where the opportunity exists to pursue a shared commitment to the delivery of other services.

Having welcomed the establishment of a shared services partnership, the Panel has sought clarification and asked questions on a range of matters, which were responded to by the Executive Leader and the Managing Director and

have informed the Cabinet deliberations on this matter. There will be an opportunity for further involvement as the partnership develops.

Members have been assured that the development of a shared services approach has no bearing on the sovereignty of services which will remain under the control of the District Council. Continuing with the current approach is no longer viable and is considered to be riskier than the proposed arrangements.

Subsequently, the Cabinet has agreed to form a shared services partnership with South Cambridgeshire District Council, whilst continuing to work with other councils including Cambridge City on services where there is a business case and a shared commitment to work together. Approval has also been given to the establishment of a joint informal steering group to oversee progress of the project. Legal, ICT and Building Control have been identified as potential services and a fund of £50,000 has been approved from the Transformation Budgets for project management costs.

LOVES FARM COMMUNITY BUILDING – COMMITMENT TO CONTRACT

An update on the latest position with the development of the joint community building and pre-school playgroup in Loves Farm, St Neots has been considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being).

In reviewing progress of the development of this facility, the Panel has discussed a range of issues including the ownership arrangements for the building, the procurement process, procedures by which a tender is awarded and the arrangements for completion of the external works.

Subsequently the Panel has endorsed terms for the continuation of the project.

Having regard to the views of the Panel the Cabinet has authorised the Head of Resources, after consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, to enter into a contract with the County Council for the construction phase of a scheme to provide a community building at Loves Farm. Although fully supportive of the scheme, concerns were raised that the final tender figure may be higher than budgeted. The Cabinet has confirmed that no additional funding would be made available.

BUDGET MONITORING 2014 (REVENUE AND CAPITAL)

Both the Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has reviewed the emerging variations to the approved 2014/15 revenue and capital budgets.

Having discussed an overspend of £0.050m on the Huntingdon Multi-Storey Car Park and noted that this was the subject of a separate review, the Panel has requested that the outcome should be presented to a future meeting.

RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has considered the outcome of the annual review of the Council's Risk Management Strategy. The Panel has discussed the way in which financial risks are monitored and controlled, the number of risks within each risk category and the nine risks which had been categorised as the most serious. The Panel has also discussed the Panel's corporate approach to risk.

Having been informed that the Corporate Governance Panel reviews the Authority's 'total risk' every six months, it was agreed that the Panel Chairman would speak to the Chairman of the

Corporate Governance Panel to determine whether there was a role for the Economic Well-Being Panel to further review this area without duplicating the work which has already been undertaken.

In recognition of the financial pressures facing the Authority, the need to be innovative, explore alternative methods of service delivery and also reduce the Council's reliance on Government Grant, the Panel is content to support the risk appetite levels within the Strategy.

2013/14 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT

In accordance with the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Best Practice and the Council's Treasury Management Strategy, the Cabinet has reviewed and noted the Council's treasury management performance for the year ending 31 March 2014.

REPRESENTATIONS ON ORGANISATIONS

The Cabinet has appointed representatives to serve on a variety of organisations for the ensuing year. The Corporate Team Manager, after consultation with the Deputy Executive Leader, has been authorised to make any changes to the schedule that may arise throughout the year.

REVIEW OF RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Cabinet has expressed its satisfaction with the conclusion of the annual review of the Risk Management Strategy and has been assured that the authority has robust risk management policies in place which are performing efficiently and support the Council's annual governance and statutory reporting processes.

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCE SCHEME – VARIATION TO SUPPORT GUIDELINES

Following the Cabinet's decision regarding the future of Members IT, the Corporate Governance Panel has endorsed an amendment to paragraph 10 of the Members Allowances Scheme and minor changes to the Members' IT and Telephone Support Guidelines to reflect the move to electronic delivery of agenda for Council meetings. The changes were subsequently approved by the Council.

IMPLEMENTATION OF AGREED AUDIT ACTIONS

The Corporate Governance Panel has received reassurances from the Managing Director that a culture of compliance was being promoted throughout the authority. Members were informed that the implementation of agreed audit recommendations will be routinely overseen by Management Team.

INTERNAL AUDIT & RISK MANAGER'S JOB DESCRIPTION

Under the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, the Panel was provided with a copy of the job description and grade of the post of the Internal Audit & Risk Manager.

RIPA INSPECTION

The outcome of an inspection by the Office of Surveillance Commissioner was reported to the Corporate Governance Panel. The inspection was undertaken in June and endorses the favourable conclusions of the 2011 report that the Council's use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act is of a satisfactory level.

FRAUD WORKING GROUP

Councillors M G Baker, E R Butler, K J Churchill, G J Harlock and P G Mitchell have been appointed by the Corporate Governance Panel to the Fraud Working Group.

PREPARING THE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

In reviewing the action taken to reassess the Code of Corporate Governance, the Corporate Governance Panel has concluded that the following issues be recorded in the Plan as significant:

- to develop the themes and aims in the Corporate Plan through service plans and performance measures;
- to review partnership working including benefits/outcomes and the contribution partnerships make to the Corporate Plan;
- to publicise the vision statement and strategic themes and outcomes; and
- continued compliance with the Code of Procurement.

INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE – INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

The content of an Internal Audit and Assurance Plan has been approved by the Corporate Governance Panel. The Plan sets out key features of the internal audit plan process for the period 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015.

REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE LICENSING AND PROTECTION PANEL/COMMITTEE.

The Corporate Governance Panel has noted the outcome of a review of the effectiveness of the Licensing Panel/Committee which had been undertaken at the request of the Panel by three

members of the Licensing Committee. The Panel has agreed to look at the effectiveness of the S106 Agreement Advisory Group as their next task.

TRAINING OF PANEL MEMBERS

Suggestions for training for Members of the Corporate Governance Panel based on the anticipated work programme over the ensuing year have been noted. A formal training day is to be held in September for all Members involved in the Audit Process across Cambridgeshire.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT SERVICE – STAFF MATTERS

An update on the current position with regard to the appointment of new staff and the impact of these and the existing extended delegation on the delivery of the Development Management Service has been presented to the Development Management Panel. The Panel noted that three Team Leaders had now been appointed, that two temporary posts of Assistant Development Management Officer would be advertised and that it had been decided to hold vacant for the time being the post of Planning Service Manager (Development Management) formerly held by the Head of Development. Arrangements had been put in place over the period of the vacancies which had involved a temporary variation to the Panels' scheme of delegation. This had enabled Development Management Officers to determine certain types of applications within prescribed criteria. Some 130 applications had been determined during this time without any subsequent concerns. As this arrangement had proved successful and as it is the intention to review the Panel's scheme of delegation at the end of the year, the Panel agreed to extend the temporary scheme for a further period to 31st December 2014.

DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

The Panel determined eight applications and deferred one other for further information at its July meeting. Amongst these were two outline applications for major mixed development at RAF Brampton and on the site of Phase 2 of the Loves Farm Eastern Extension development in St Neots. Both applications are subject to a detailed Section 106 Agreement, the principles of which have been endorsed by the Panel for further negotiation by the Head of Development.