

A meeting of the **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING)** will be held in **CIVIC SUITE CVSO.1A, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON PE29 3TN** on **THURSDAY, 5 JANUARY 2012 at 7:00 PM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

**Contact
(01480)**

APOLOGIES

1. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 6)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 1st December 2011.

**Mrs C Bulman
388234**

2. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

To receive from Members declarations as to personal and/or prejudicial interests and the nature of those interests in relation to any Agenda Item. Please see Notes 1 and 2 below.

3. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 - FORWARD PLAN (Pages 7 - 12)

A copy of the current Forward Plan is attached. Members are invited to note the Plan and to comment as appropriate on any items contained therein.

**Mrs H Taylor
388008**

4. CABINET FEEDBACK - DRAFT BUDGET 2012/13 AND MTP (Pages 13 - 14)

To consider a report by the Cabinet outlining their deliberations on the draft Budget 2011/12 and MTP.

**Mrs H Taylor
388009**

5. VOLUNTARY SECTOR REVIEW (INDICATIVE FUNDING) (Pages 15 - 18)

To consider a report by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services on voluntary sector funding.

**D Smith
388377**

6. HOUSING BENEFIT CHANGES AND THE POTENTIAL IMPACT ON HUNTINGDONSHIRE (Pages 19 - 22)

To consider a report by the Heads of Customer and Housing Services.

**J Barber
388105
J Collen
388220**

7. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

To resolve:-

that public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

8. ONE LEISURE FINANCE (Pages 23 - 30)

To receive the report of the Working Group.

**Mrs C Bulman
388234
Mr A Roberts
388015**

9. RE-ADMITTANCE OF THE PUBLIC

To resolve:-

to readmit the public to the meeting.

10. BROADBAND DELIVERY PROJECT

To receive a presentation by Mrs S Bedlow, Economic Development Manager.

11. WORKPLAN STUDIES (Pages 31 - 34)

To consider with the aid of a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services the Panel's programme of studies.

**Mrs C Bulman
388234**

12. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) - PROGRESS (Pages 35 - 40)

To consider a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

**Mrs C Bulman
388234**

13. SCRUTINY (Pages 41 - 50)

To scrutinise decisions taken since the last meeting as set out in the Decision Digest and to raise any other matters for scrutiny that sit within the remit of the Panel.

Dated this 22 day of December
2011



Head of Paid Service

Notes

1. *A personal interest exists where a decision on a matter would affect to a greater extent than other people in the District –*
 - (a) *the well-being, financial position, employment or business of the Councillor, their family or any person with whom they had a close association;*
 - (b) *a body employing those persons, any firm in which they are a partner and any company of which they are directors;*
 - (c) *any corporate body in which those persons have a beneficial interest in a class of securities exceeding the nominal value of £25,000; or*
 - (d) *the Councillor's registerable financial and other interests.*
2. *A personal interest becomes a prejudicial interest where a member of the public (who has knowledge of the circumstances) would reasonably regard the Member's personal interest as being so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Councillor's judgement of the public interest.*

Please contact Mrs Claire Bulman, Democratic Services Officer, Tel 01480 388234 / email Claire.Bulman@huntingdonshire.gov.uk if you have a general query on any Agenda Item, wish to tender your apologies for absence from the meeting, or would like information on any decision taken by the Committee/Panel.

Specific enquiries with regard to items on the Agenda should be directed towards the Contact Officer.

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting as observers except during consideration of confidential or exempt items of business.

Agenda and enclosures can be viewed on the District Council's website –
www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk (under Councils and Democracy).

If you would like a translation of Agenda/Minutes/Reports
or would like a large text version or an audio version
please contact the Democratic Services Manager and
we will try to accommodate your needs.

Emergency Procedure

In the event of the fire alarm being sounded and on the instruction of the Meeting Administrator, all attendees are requested to vacate the building via the closest emergency exit.

Agenda Item 1

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) held in CIVIC SUITE 0.1A, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON PE29 3TN on Thursday, 1 December 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor T V Rogers – Chairman.

Councillors G J Bull, E R Butler, S Greenall, R Harrison, R B Howe, A J Mackender-Lawrence, P G Mitchell, M F Shellens and A H Williams.

Mr R Hall.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Mrs Roberts.

62. MINUTES

Subject to the insertion of the letter "M" at the end of the second line of paragraph 2 in Minute No.60, the Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 3rd November 2011, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

63. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor R Harrison declared a personal interest in Minute No.66 as an employee of the Highways Agency.

64. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 - FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered and noted the current Forward Plan of Key Decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). In so doing, the Chairman reported that he had received notice that an Executive decision would be taken on the 2012/13 Council Tax Base by the Chairman of the Corporate Governance Panel and the Council's Section 151 Officer on 5th December 2011.

With regard to the item on the 'Great Fen Supplementary Planning Document', Councillor P G Mitchell suggested that it would be useful to see the details of the Commercial Plan which was being developed for the Great Fen Project. It was agreed that the Chairman would liaise with the Chairman of the Environmental Well-Being Panel and that the report should be circulated to Members when it became available. Members were also advised that the report on the 'Location of the Call Centre had been delayed to February 2012.

65. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute

Book) containing details of studies that were being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Social and Environmental Well-Being. Having noted that a report on CCTV provision was expected to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) at its meeting in January 2012, Councillor P G Mitchell indicated that he would pursue his interest in the subject through that Panel. The Chairman then indicated that the Panel should take into consideration ongoing work on voluntary sector support during its deliberations on the Council's budget in the New Year.

66. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) - PROGRESS

(At 19.10pm, Councillor R B Howe took his seat at the meeting).

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing progress on matters that had been previously discussed by the Panel. The Vice Chairman reported that the One Leisure Working Group would be meeting on 8th December 2011 to consider a draft report containing a series of recommendations. It was hoped the recommendations would be taken into account during the current budget setting process. There was some further work to be done on the future strategic direction of the service.

With regard to the proposed improvements to the A14 and the recent announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on this subject, the Scrutiny and Review Manager explained that an update would be circulated to all Members shortly. The Chairman reminded Members that a briefing on the Community Infrastructure Levy was scheduled to take place prior to the full Council meeting on 14th December 2011.

67. DRAFT BUDGET 2012/13 AND MTP

(Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Resources, was in attendance for this item. Councillors J D Ablewhite, Mrs M Banerjee, B S Chapman, N J Guyatt and D M Tysoe were also present).

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained the draft Budget for 2012/13 and Medium Term Plan (MTP) prior to its submission to the Cabinet and Council. Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Resources, explained that many of the Council's decisions continued to be influenced by external events and difficult financial decisions would be required for a number of years. He then presented an outline of the Council's current financial situation, which included the progress that had been made towards achieving the current and next year's savings targets, some of the significant variations within the Financial Plan including the introduction of the New Homes Bonus and details of the savings which still needed to be achieved over the MTP period. He reiterated that although the efficiency savings that had been achieved were higher than anticipated in the current year, the Cabinet was not complacent and was mindful of the need to achieve further savings in due course.

Having received a detailed presentation by the Head of Financial

Services on the content of the report and attention having been drawn to a revision to Section 5 of the report, the Panel proceeded to examine in detail each section of the report. Councillor M Banerjee referred to the risks associated with the sums anticipated from the New Homes Bonus and the level of return which was expected from the Huntingdon multi-storey car park. In response to the first point, the Executive Councillor explained that the Council's Planning Team had already undertaken work to establish the planning projections for future years and that a number of initiatives were being introduced to encourage first time buyers. Whilst the new Homes Bonus had been clearly identified as a risk, if the funding were not forthcoming, the Formula Grant would not be top-sliced. With regard to other risks identified in the report, Members queried whether the planning fees associated with the Enterprise Zone should also be highlighted as a risk for the Council. It was suggested that the level of fees that might be received should be assessed and identified within the financial plan either as a risk or an unknown factor.

With regard to the supplementary capital estimate for Huntingdon multi-storey car park, Members queried whether a sensitivity analysis had been undertaken on the projected levels of take up. They were informed that whilst information had been previously provided, the Executive Leader would need to be convinced of the accuracy of the information before the necessary legal agreements were completed. Having requested sight of the revised financial figures, the Panel was advised that the project had already been approved and the only change was that Trinity Place Car Park would now not be sold thereby leaving a £300K deficit. In view of the urgency for the necessary legal agreements to be completed so that the project could proceed on the agreed timescale, the Panel endorsed the proposed supplementary capital estimate. However, Members requested that an updated sensitivity analysis was circulated in advance of the Cabinet meeting and it was agreed that they would notify the Chairman and the Executive Councillor for Resources if there were any matters they wished the Cabinet to take into account when the final decision was made.

A number of comments were made that the format of the report could be clearer and should provide more detail on variations in revenue spending as the year progressed. It was suggested that it would be useful to receive management accounting information on a regular basis. With this in mind, it was agreed that a group of Members would meet with the Head of Financial Services to discuss these points and report back to the Panel.

Members discussed the growth in the Council's cost base over the course of the previous 10 years and the difficulties they had in establishing whether the measures, which had been taken to reduce it had been successful. In response, the Executive Councillor for Resources explained that the growth in the cost base had arisen to some degree as a consequence of the imposition on the Council of new responsibilities. The Managing Director (Resources) explained that the biggest change had been brought about by the depletion of the Council's capital reserves, which meant that the income from interest on investments was no longer being received.

Councillor S Greenall outlined his concerns at the Operations

Division's expenditure on hired staff and at the cost of housing homeless people in bed and breakfast accommodation in Woodwalton. Having noted that the Cabinet welcomed positive suggestions that would reduce expenditure, Councillor N J Guyatt undertook to provide a detailed written answer on the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. With regard to other revenue costs, it was also suggested that, given the rental costs associated with the Shopmobility Portakabin in Princes Street Car Park, it might be cheaper to purchase a similar facility. Members were reassured that by Executive Councillor that he was satisfied with the direction of the capital programme which had reduced significantly in recent years.

Given the identified risks and the unknown factors the Panel questioned whether the proposal to increase the Council's minimum level of general reserves from £3M to £4M was adequate. Reference was made to the fact that the New Homes Bonus represented 25% of the Council's predicted income in 2015/16 and this could pose a significant risk. Having noted that the Auditor had previously suggested the Council should reduce its reserves, Members were generally of the opinion that it would be desirable for the Council in the current economic climate to hold greater reserves. Whilst this would place a burden on the savings programme in the short term, the Panel agreed that the a minimum level of reserves should be set at £4M and that this should be reviewed in two years and, if it was reasonable, should be increased to £5M. It was also agreed that this should be tested and considered in the forecast report each year and built into the draft budget if necessary.

With regard to the proposed spending variations as outlined in Annexes A1 to A2 to the report, Members congratulated the Cabinet and Officers on the significant progress that had been made in identifying efficiencies and savings to date and for the next two financial years. They also drew attention to the savings which had been identified in the Council's salary bill in comparison to the cost of the voluntary redundancy scheme. The former were being accrued at the rate of £200K per month while the latter had required a one off cost of £1.6M. Other questions were asked about proposals to reduce the refuse collection service by one round in 2012/13 and whether there was sufficient need for a monitoring officer for planning enforcement. In recognition of the position of the economy and the extent of the unknown factors, the Panel were of the opinion that further investigations should be undertaken to determine the feasibility of achieving some savings earlier than planned.

On the Council's income, it was reported that a significant number of other local authorities were unlikely to accept the Freeze Grant and that acceptance of the second tranche of funding would require the Council to find further savings in excess of £200K by 2015/16, Members were, therefore, of the opinion that the Council should not accept the proposed Council Tax Freeze Grant. The Panel also was informed that the Government was shortly expected to announce the Council's grant for 2012/13 and the level of Council Tax increase that would trigger a referendum. This would put the Council in a more informed position on which to make a decision on next year's Council Tax than has been the case in previous years. In the circumstances the Cabinet was invited to identify those services that might be retained for a range of increases in Council Tax within the referendum

limit.

Attention having been drawn to the assumptions within the draft Budget and Financial Plan, Members queried whether Annex C to the report should include pay award assumptions as this created expectations amongst employees and the public. In response, the Executive Councillor explained that he would consider the necessity to include this type of information within future reports. It was then noted that because of the significant costs involved the Council used an advisor to assist in the renegotiation of their energy contracts. An update on the current situation regarding pension costs was also provided.

In considering the 'Risks and Unknowns' section of the report, Members reiterated the need to assess the implications of planning fees from the Enterprise Zone. They questioned the projected levels of homelessness and of demand for Disabled Facilities Grants. With this in mind, Members stated that the Cabinet should verify that the figures on which the respective budgets have been prepared were reliable. Following an observation about the absence of any provision for demographic growth within the forecasts, Members were advised that whilst this information had previously been included in budget reports this was no longer done because there was a risk that it would require the Council to secure additional funding. With regards to developments concerning shared services, Members were informed that investigations were continuing in this respect and that any such initiatives would incur initial set-up costs.

Finally, consideration was given to Managers' Controllable Budgets. In so doing, a number of questions were raised regarding the installation of photovoltaic panels at Eastfield House and the figures which were included for Community Facilities Grants. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- a) that the conclusions and recommendations with the report be endorsed; and
- b) that the Cabinet be recommended to –
 - a) undertake further investigations to determine the feasibility of achieving some savings earlier than planned;
 - b) not accept the proposed Council Tax Freeze Grant;
 - c) identify those services that might be retained for a range of increases in Council Tax within the referendum limit before the Council Tax is set for 2012/13;
 - d) review the level of reserves in two years and increase this to £5M if it is reasonable to do so;
 - e) assess the implications of planning fees from the Enterprise Zone and either include it in the financial plan or identify it as a risk / unknown, and

- f) verify the figures on which the respective budgets for homelessness and Disabled Facilities Grants have been prepared are reliable.

68. SCRUTINY

The Panel considered and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book).

Chairman

FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

Prepared by Councillor J D Ablewhite
Date of Publication: 15 December 2011
For Period: 1st January to 30th April 2012

Membership of the Cabinet is as follows:-

Councillor J D Ablewhite	- Executive Leader of the Council, with responsibility for Strategic Economic Development	3 Pettis Road St. Ives Huntingdon PE27 6SR Tel: 01480 466941 E-mail: Jason.Ablewhite@huntingdonshire.gov.uk
Councillor N J Guyatt	- Deputy Executive Leader of the Council with responsibility for Strategic Planning and Housing	6 Church Lane Stibbington Cambs PE8 6LP Tel: 01780 782827 E-mail: Nick.Guyatt@huntingdonshire.gov.uk
Councillor B S Chapman	- Executive Councillor for Organisational Development	6 Kipling Place St. Neots Huntingdon PE19 7RG Tel: 01480 212540 E-mail: Barry.Chapman@huntingdonshire.gov.uk
Councillor J A Gray	- Executive Councillor for Resources	Shufflewick Cottage Station Row Tilbrook PE28 OJY Tel: 01480 861941 E-mail: Jonathan.Gray@huntingdonshire.gov.uk
Councillor D M Tysoe	- Executive Councillor for Environment	Grove Cottage Maltings Lane Ellington Huntingdon PE28 OAA Tel: 01480 388310 E-mail: Darren.Tysoe@huntingdonshire.gov.uk
Councillor T D Sanderson	- Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities	29 Burmoor Close Stukeley Meadows Huntingdon PE29 6GE Tel: 01480 412135 E-mail: Tom.Sanderson@huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Any person who wishes to make representations to the decision maker about a decision which is to be made may do so by contacting Mrs Helen Taylor, Senior Democratic Services Officer on 01480 388008 or E-mail: Helen.Taylor@huntsdc.gov.uk not less than 14 days prior to the date when the decision is to be made.

The documents available may be obtained by contacting the relevant officer shown in this plan who will be responsible for preparing the final report to be submitted to the decision maker on the matter in relation to which the decision is to be made. Similarly any enquiries as to the subject or matter to be tabled for decision or on the availability of supporting information or documentation should be directed to the relevant officer.

Colin Meadowcroft
Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Notes:- (i) Additions/significant changes from the previous Forward are annotated ***
(ii) For information about how representations about the above decisions may be made please see the Council's Petitions Procedure at <http://www.huntsdc.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/3F6CFE28-C5F0-4BA0-9BF2-76EBAE06C89D/0/Petitionsleaflet.pdf> or telephone 01480 388006

Subject/Matter for Decision	Decision/ recommendation to be made by	Date decision to be taken	Documents Available	How relevant Officer can be contacted	Consultation	Relevant Executive Councillor	Relevant Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Advanced Waste Partnership*** ∞	Cabinet	19 Jan 2012	None.	Eric Kendall, Head of Operations Tel No. 01480 388635 or email Eric.Kendall@huntindonshire.gov.uk		D Tysoe	Environmental Well-Being
CIL Charging Schedule	Cabinet	19 Jan 2012	Local Investment Framework Viability Reports	Steve Ingram, Head of Planning Services Tel No. 01480 388400 or email Steve.Ingram@huntingdonshire.gov.uk		N J Guyatt	Environmental Well-Being
Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy	Cabinet	19 Jan 2012	Cambs County Council-Led Project	Paul Bland, Planning Service Manager (Policy) Tel No. 01480 388340 or email Paul.Bland@huntsdc.gov.uk	Endorse as Council Policy (subject to County Council progress).	N J Guyatt	Environmental Well-Being
Cambridgeshire Future Transport - Transport for Cambridgeshire	Cabinet	19 Jan 2012	None.	Paul Bland, Planning Service Manager (Policy) Tel No. 01480 388430 or email Paul.Bland@huntingdonshire.gov.uk	Update on emerging options and recommendations.	N J Guyatt	Environmental Well-Being

Subject/Matter for Decision	Decision/ recommendation to be made by	Date decision to be taken	Documents Available	How relevant Officer can be contacted	Consultation	Relevant Executive Councillor	Relevant Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Voluntary Sector Support	Cabinet	19 Jan 2012	None.	Dan Smith, Community Health Manager Tel No 01480 388377 or email Dan.Smith@huntingdonshire.gov.uk		T D Sanderson	Social Well-Being
Thermal Imaging of Private Homes In Huntingdonshire through the Heatseekers Scheme***	Cabinet	19 Jan 2012	None.	Chris Jablonski, Environment Team Leader Tel No. 01480 388368 or email Chris.Jablonski@huntingdonshire.gov.uk	Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being).	D Tysoe	Environmental Well-Being
Roll Forward of Core Strategy - Local Plan Project Plan***	Cabinet	16 Feb 2012	None.	Paul Bland, Planning Service Manager (Policy) Tel No. 01480 388430 or email Paul.Bland@huntingdonshire.gov.uk		N J Guyatt	Environmental Well-Being
Budget and MTP	Cabinet	16 Feb 2012	Draft MTP, Previous Year's budget report, Various Annexes	Steve Couper, Head of Financial Services Tel No. 01480 388103 or email Steve.Couper@huntingdonshire.gov.uk	Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being). 2nd February 2012.	J A Gray	Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being)
Waste Collection Policies	Cabinet	16 Feb 2012	None.	Eric Kendall, Head of Operations Tel No. 01480 388635 or email Eric.Kendall@huntingdonshire.gov.uk		D Tysoe	Environmental Well-Being
Location of the Call Centre	Cabinet	16 Feb 2012	Previous Cabinet Papers	Julia Barber, Head of Customer Services Tel No 01480 388105 or email Julia.Barber@huntingdonshire.gov.uk		J A Gray	Economic Well-Being

Subject/Matter for Decision	Decision/ recommendation to be made by	Date decision to be taken	Documents Available	How relevant Officer can be contacted	Consultation	Relevant Executive Councillor	Relevant Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators	Cabinet	16 Feb 2012	Previous year's Strategy	Steve Couper, Head of Financial Services Tel No. 01480 388103 or email Steve.Couper@huntingdonshire.gov.uk	Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being). 2nd February 2012.	J A Gray	Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being)
Cambs Renewable Infrastructure Framework***	Cabinet	22 Mar 2012	CCC - Cambs Renewable Infrastructure Framework Strategy	Paul Bland, Planning Service Manager (Policy) Tel No. 01480 388430 or email Paul.Bland@huntingdonshire.gov.uk	Endorse as Council Policy	N Guyatt D Tysoe	Environmental Well-Being
Funding for CCTV***	Cabinet	22 Mar 2012	None.	Eric Kendall, Head of Operations Tel No. 01480 388635 or email Eric.Kendall@huntingdonshire.gov.uk		D Tysoe	Environmental Well-Being
Cambs Community Energy Fund***	Cabinet	22 Mar 2012	CCC - Community Energy Fund Strategy	Paul Bland, Planning Service Manager (Policy) Tel No. 01480 388430 or email Paul.Bland@huntingdonshire.gov.uk	Endorse as Council Policy	N J Guyatt D Tysoe	Environmental Well-Being
Huntingdon West Master Plan	Cabinet	22 Mar 2012	Huntingdon West Action Plan	Paul Bland, Planning Service Manager (Policy) Tel No 01480 388430 or email Paul.Bland@huntingdonshire.gov.uk		N J Guyatt	Environmental Well-Being
Cambridgeshire Future Transport - 'Transport for Cambridgeshire'***	Cabinet	19 Apr 2012	Cambs Future Transport Programme	Paul Bland, Planning Service Manager (Policy) Tel No. 01480 388430 or email Paul.Bland@huntingdonshire.gov.uk	Update on emerging options and recommendations.	N Guyatt	Environmental Well-Being

Subject/Matter for Decision	Decision/ recommendation to be made by	Date decision to be taken	Documents Available	How relevant Officer can be contacted	Consultation	Relevant Executive Councillor	Relevant Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)**	Cabinet	19 Apr 2012	Examination in Public Report	Paul Bland, Planning Service Manager (Policy) Tel No. 01480 388430 - or email Paul.Bland@huntingdonshire.gov.uk	Outcome of Examination and recommend adoption to Council		
Planning for Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs)	Cabinet	19 Apr 2012	CCC SuDs Options Paper	Paul Bland, Planning Service Manager (Policy) Tel No 01480 388430 or email Paul.Bland@huntingdonshire.gov.uk	Consider options.	N J Guyatt	Environmental Well-Being

This page is intentionally left blank

**DRAFT BUDGET 2012/13 AND MTP - FEEDBACK
(Report of the Cabinet)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its meeting on 8th December 2011, the Cabinet considered a report by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) on the draft budget 2012/2013 and the Medium Term Plan.

2. DELIBERATIONS

- 2.1 In recommending the draft Budget and Medium Term Plan to Council as a basis for the development of the budget for 2012/2013 and the revised Medium Term Plan 2015/2016, the Cabinet has considered the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) thereon.
- 2.2 The latest government grant figures have been presented to the Cabinet, Members have been advised that the Formula Grant is as predicted and the New Homes Bonus is higher than the projected figure within the budget.
- 2.3 In considering the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being), Members concurred with the Panel that the Council should not accept the proposed Council Tax Freeze Grant.
- 2.4 With regard to setting the Council Tax base for 2012/13, the Cabinet has confirmed that tax payers should not be presented with a tax increase that will require a referendum to be held.
- 2.5 In discussing the Panel's views on the Council's general reserves provision, the Cabinet noted that the minimum level of reserves is reviewed annually and discussed the benefits and risks of increasing the level to £5m.
- 2.6 With regard to the inclusion of Low End Assumptions built into the MTP, Members have emphasised the need to consider these carefully including the implications of planning fees from the Enterprise Zone.
- 2.7 In discussing the increased demand for Disabled Facilities Grants, Members reiterated their commitment to maintaining the current level of service for these grants. The Cabinet accepted that options will continue to be investigated with a view to working in partnership with other public organisations to reduce this cost.
- 2.8 During their discussions, the Cabinet has made reference to the ongoing discussions being held over the future of the Council's CCTV service and with the Voluntary Sector Organisations over commissioning agreements.
- 2.9 Whilst congratulating officers on the significant progress that has been made in both the efficiency and savings measures identified for the next two years,

Executive Councillors have stressed the need to remain vigilant given the current economic climate.

- 2.10 The Cabinet has also approved a supplementary capital estimate of £300k to enable the Huntingdon multi-storey car park scheme to proceed. The Cabinet has thanked the Panel for their input.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel are invited to note the contents of this report.

Contact Officer: Helen Taylor, Senior Democratic Services Officer - Tel: 01480 388008.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Report of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) – 1st December 2011

Minutes and Report of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 8th December 2011.

COMT	12 December 2011
Overview & Scrutiny (Social Wellbeing)	3 January 2012
Overview & Scrutiny (Economic Wellbeing)	5 January 2012
Cabinet	19 January 2012

VOLUNTARY SECTOR REVIEW (INDICATIVE FUNDING)
(Report by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is a request to Members to both offer an indicative gross budget for voluntary sector support for 2013-14 and agree the method(s) for distributing funds to the voluntary sector.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 An extensive review of voluntary sector funding and its impacts has been undertaken during 2011 and a special Member-working group was set up by the Overview and Scrutiny (Social Wellbeing) Panel. The outputs of both the officer and Member-led reviews have been seriously considered in the preparation of this report.

- 2.2 The following general priority areas, for funding voluntary organisations, have emerged:-

- Service providers that are able to provide evidence of financial sustainability; evidence may include signs of actively searching for external and/or match funding opportunities;
- Services that provide advice on debt, benefits and unemployment were particularly valued during the review;
- Activities and services that facilitate a level of independence for those people otherwise dependent on the service and support of carers and others, were also identified as worthy of consideration for financial contribution within the review;
- Services and activities that could increase the chances of young people obtaining and/or maintaining paid employment, were an emerging area that were considered important; and
- Services that support the growth of the voluntary and community sector in Huntingdonshire and provide support mechanisms by which that growth could be achieved, including sourcing funding for other voluntary bodies, were considered important in developing and supporting the sector more widely than just by direct financial contributions to a few organisations.

3. POTENTIAL MODELS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS

3.1 During the review it became clear that some Members were keen to see minimal bureaucratic barriers facing those organisations seeking funding; while being mindful of both the limited financial resources that could be made available and the need to ensure the appropriate use of public funds. To this end it became clear that one solution may not fit all circumstances; different levels of assessment or 'control' should probably be applied according to financial, and or reputational, risk arising for the Council.

3.2 Various delivery methods for providing financial support to the voluntary sector were considered:-

- a) Grants – A gift of a grant restricts the opportunity for comparison between organisations' bids (only like for like are able to be compared) and does not permit ongoing monitoring of activity after grant has been awarded. There is no possibility of demonstrating good value and some grant-funded activities may be open to community challenge under a new 'Localism Act'.
- b) Commissioning- a competitive process where any 'bid' must be evaluated almost objectively against criteria and real competition is a possibility. There is a risk this process may disrupt continuity of practice and cause local disruption in cases where established groups/organisations are unsuccessful in their bid for funding.

3.2 Following discussions with Members from the working group a mixed grant system was considered potentially beneficial. The choice of method to be related directly to the potential sums required in any one year:

Grants - a grant could be for 1 to 3-years; but could include an option for the organisation to renew a 1-year bid on two further occasions in successive years. Grants do not allow for performance monitoring but the financial risk to HDC can be limited both by amount and by the duration of the grant. It is intended that a 3-year grant will likely be offered on a tapering basis to actively encourage the search for alternative, sustainable, funding. It is also intended there will be only one bidding window each year.

3.3 As part of a mixed system of awards it is also proposed that consideration be given to establishing a:

Community Chest – This would be fund for voluntary and community organisations and town/parish councils; who require a small injection of revenue. The fund could manage requests, throughout the year, for awards of up to £5k to help very local community projects.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The relevant MTP line has stated, most recently (September 2011) that reductions in Community Grants are predicted to be:

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Community Grants reductions	-51	-294	-294	-294

The prediction has included a qualification: "£51k expected to be achieved 12/13; 2013 onwards subject to Member decision Feb 2012 (Study in hand)". The reduction of £51k in the next financial year can be delivered. The second reduction of £243k in 2013-14 would represent a significant reduction in funding available to the voluntary sector from this source.

- 4.2 Officer research indicates that the current recipients of funding believe that a 50% cut in the funding available from HDC, to any one of the organisations currently benefiting from support, could be catastrophic for them. It was also identified that at this level there are risks arising of some additional costs arising to HDC which would negate some of the overall savings potential.

Most of the current recipients of funding offered coping strategies for a reduction of HDC funding up to 20%.

- 4.3 In 2011-12 the budget for Voluntary sector contributions was £ 379,120
In 2012-13 the budget [including a £51k reduction] would be £ 328,120
If the 2013-14 budget were to be of the order of £ 273,000
This would allow:

Commissioning and Grant fund	£ 246,000
Community Chest fund	£ 27,000

Potential savings **£ 55,120**

When taking into consideration the savings already identified in the 2012/13 budget and the proposed saving for 2013/14 they total £106,120 this equates to <28% saving on the original 2011/12 voluntary sector budget.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Huntingdonshire District Council has assumed a reduction in funds to be made available to the voluntary sector as part of their own Medium-term Financial Planning. An extensive review of voluntary sector funding and its impacts has been undertaken during 2011; looking at both financial and wider social impacts.

- 5.2 The final Council budget for 2013-14 is not due to be set by Council until February 2013. However, the relevant service level agreements come to a natural end in March 2013. Each agreement includes a requirement that negotiations associated with termination/follow-on agreements should start no later than 1 October 2012, and be concluded by 31 December 2012. An indication of the maximum voluntary sector budget Members may wish to see provided from 2013-14 would facilitate both negotiations and forward planning.

- 5.3 Research suggests a 50% cut in the funding available from HDC, to any one of the organisations currently benefiting from support, could be catastrophic for them. At this level additional financial risks arise to HDC which could negate some of the overall savings potential. Most of the current recipients of funding offered coping strategies for a reduction of HDC funding up to 20%. If Members wished to have regard to these findings a level of reduction less than 50% would be desirable for the potential recipients.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are requested to:

- 6.1 Suggest an indicative voluntary sector budget for 2013/14 of £273,000
- 6.2 Agree to adoption of a mix of methods of allocating funds, the method to involve a level of bureaucracy proportionate to the level of funding required.
- 6.3 Agree to the establishment of a modest 'Community Chest' to create an 'accessible' source of funds to help very local community projects.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Huntingdonshire District Council, Community Development's Voluntary-sector Performance report 2010/11.

Huntingdonshire District Council's Voluntary-sector (officer) review: interview summaries.

The financial accounts and business plans 2010/11 or 2011/12 (as submitted by organisations participating in the 2011 review).

Huntingdonshire District Council's Equality Impact Assessment 2 (Sep 2011): "Cuts in voluntary sector funding phased in after 2012/13"

- 19 September 2011: Voluntary Sector Review report to COMT
- 4 October 2011: Voluntary Sector Review report to Overview & Scrutiny (Social Wellbeing) Panel
- 20 October 2011: Voluntary Sector Review report to Cabinet
- 1 November 2011: Report of Voluntary Sector Working Group to Overview & Scrutiny (Social Wellbeing) Panel
- 6 December 2011: Report of Voluntary Sector Working Group to Overview & Scrutiny Social Wellbeing Panel

Contact Officer: Dan Smith – Healthy Communities Manager
☎ 01480 388377

5 JANUARY 2012

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING)

HOUSING BENEFIT CHANGES AND THE POTENTIAL IMPACT ON HUNTINGDONSHIRE

(Report by the Heads of Customer and Housing Services)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Government's Welfare Reform programme includes significant changes to the Housing Benefit system. The Panel has requested an update on these changes, shown in the table at appendix A, and the potential impact they may have on some of the residents of Huntingdonshire. It focuses purely on the Housing Benefit changes, paid as a 'Local Housing Allowance' to those households that are assessed as being eligible for help with paying their rent. It does not consider the wider welfare benefit reforms concerning the introduction of Universal Credit, contained within the Welfare Reform Bill and currently going through Parliament.

2. IMPACT & TIMESCALES

- 2.1 The council pays approximately £9 million per annum to 1,900 Housing Benefit claimants renting in the private sector. The changes will result in a reduction of £370k per annum being paid in Housing Benefit. Households facing a reduction in their Housing Benefit entitlement will be awarded between £3 and £70 less per week, depending upon their particular circumstances.
- 2.2 The various changes are being introduced between April 2011 and April 2013. The changes will be implemented immediately for new claims made after the date of their introduction whilst existing claimants will have a period of protection to allow them to try and adjust to the changes, or make alternative housing arrangements. The impact will begin to be felt by existing claimants from January 2012 and so this is when some households may begin to fall into rent arrears and face the threat of eviction and possible homelessness if they are unable to afford to maintain their current home, or find cheaper housing.
- 2.3 The government believes private rents have been inflated over recent years by the Local Housing Allowance dictating minimum rents, whereas this should have been at the 50th percentile. One of the aims of the government's policy, apart from reducing the national Housing Benefit bill, is therefore to reduce minimum rents by setting the Local Housing Allowance at the 30th percentile. At present there are no early indications that landlords have started to reduce their rents and it will be important to monitor whether they do as the restrictions start to take effect on existing tenants from January 2012.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The changes in the Housing Benefit system:

- i) have the potential to make some households' current homes unaffordable, as their levels of entitlement reduce as their period of protection ends, forcing them to look for alternative, cheaper housing; and
- ii) have the potential to reduce the number of private sector properties available to Housing Benefit claimants, as a result of the lower Local Housing Allowances levels.

3.2 The knock-on effect of this may be to increase the number of households faced with homelessness because of the unaffordability of their current home and/or their inability to find a new home within the Housing Benefit levels that apply to their particular circumstances.

3.3 With no other alternatives available to them a proportion of these households will turn to the council for help. The council has been successful in preventing homelessness in recent years by helping households into private rented tenancies, given the shortage of social rented housing. This option will not be as widely available given the Housing Benefit changes and so will have duties to some of these households under the safety net of the homelessness legislation. The council will incur costs where it has to place some of these households into temporary accommodation because of their homelessness.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 The Panel is asked to:

- i) comment on the effect of the changes to the Housing Benefit system; and
- ii) receive a further report drawing together the wider housing policy implications on the council as a result of these and the other welfare reforms contained within the Welfare Reform Bill.

Contact Officer: Julia Barber
☎ 01480 388105
Steve Plant
☎ 01480 388240

Appendix A

Date change implemented	Summary of change	HB potential impact	Housing potential impact
April 2011	Local Housing Allowance limited to 30% instead of 50% (average rent amounts)	Annual loss of £230k to HB claimants. 703 households will lose between £3 and £70 per week loss in their HB entitlement.	1 Existing tenants forced to vacate – potentially homeless as no longer affordable. 2 Landlords more reluctant to take on tenants claiming HB, reducing effectiveness of homelessness prevention work
April 2011	Increase in Non-dependent deductions	671 claims potentially affected. HB and CTB will reduce and relatives living in the same household will be expected to make up the shortfall.	If shortfall is not made up households may fall into arrears. Parents may ask their grown up children (over 18) to leave the family home. Most will not be priority need, but may require advice on housing options
April 2011	Government to increase Discretionary Housing Payment funds to councils every year	Increase in DHP grant to £41,422 in 2011/12 (from £30,211). 2012/13 grant is £56,646. However annual loss to claimants predicted to be £370k, so not able to offset impact.	Very few tenants likely to benefit from the extra funds, so impact likely to be as for line 1 above.
January 2012	Shared Accommodation Rate to be applied to single people under 35 (extended from those under 25)	Annual loss of £136k to HB claimants. 72 people will be affected by around £36 per week.	Possible increase in homelessness if tenants cannot make up the shortfall in the rent. Limited options for single people under 35 as relatively small number of Houses in Multiple Occupation in the district.
April 2013	HB entitlement reduced for social rented tenants below pensionable age who are under-occupying their homes	HB will be reduced by a percentage based on whether the claimant is over accommodated by one or two bedrooms. The details of this change are currently being debated as part of the Welfare Reform Bill process and will involve rent restrictions for social rented sector for the first time.	This may result in the government's policy on number of rooms etc being at odds with Housing policy. Housing Lettings Policy will be reviewed to ensure we do not let properties to families that will not be able to afford them due to HB restrictions.
April 2013	Local Housing Allowance rates will be uprated in line with CPI	Currently LHA rates are based on actual rents passing in the private sector. This change would effectively remove the rent officer's functions in establishing LHA rates.	If LHA rates don't keep pace with rent levels, over time this will reduce the proportion of private sector properties available to HB claimants. Impact as line 1 of table.

This page is intentionally left blank

Agenda Item 8

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANELS

(SOCIAL WELL-BEING)
(ECONOMIC WELL-BEING)
(ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING)

3RD JANUARY 2012
5TH JANUARY 2012
10TH JANUARY 2012

WORK PLAN STUDIES (Report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

2. STUDIES

- 2.1 The Council has a duty to improve the social, environmental and economic well-being of the District. This gives the Overview and Scrutiny Panels a wide remit to examine any issues that affect the District by conducting in-depth studies.
- 2.2 Studies are allocated according to the Overview and Scrutiny remits. Details of ongoing studies being undertaken by the two other Panels are set out in the attached Appendix.
- 2.3 Members are reminded that if they have a specific interest in any study area which is not being considered by their Panel there are opportunities for involvement in all the studies being undertaken.

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 The Panel is requested to note the progress of the studies selected.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Minutes and Reports from previous meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

**Contact Officers: Miss H Ali, Democratic Services Officer
01480 388006**

**Mrs J Walker, Trainee Democratic Services Officer
01480 387049**

**Mrs C Bulman, Democratic Services Officer
01480 388234**

ONGOING STUDIES

STUDY	OBJECTIVES	PANEL	STATUS	TYPE
Gypsy & Traveller Welfare	To examine existing gypsy and traveller sites in the District with a view to informing any future Planning Policy on sites.	Social Well-Being	Report requested for submission to a future meeting. Following consultation with the Chairman, agreed that the study would proceed once Government guidance has been issued on future provision requirements.	To be determined.
Cambridgeshire Local Investment Plan	To review the implications of the Investment Plan upon local housing, to include the potential shortfalls in the delivery of affordable housing within the District, identify what housing is due to come forward and to include reference to the underlying links between housing and planning.	Social Well-Being	Report to be considered at Panel's January 2012 meeting.	Whole Panel Study.
CCTV Provision within the District	To review the impact of the Council's proposal to cease the CCTV service with effect from April 2012.	Social Well-Being	Further report expected in March/April 2012.	Whole Panel Study.
Voluntary Sector	To seek alternative ways of supporting the Voluntary Sector from 2013/14 onwards and to assess the social value of the services that they provide within the	Social Well-Being	Working Group's conclusions endorsed by the Panel in December 2011. Further report to be considered by Panel in January 2012.	Working Group

	District.			
Tree Strategy	To form a strategy in conjunction with the Tree Officers for the retention and planting of trees.	Environmental Well-Being	Working Group met on 27 July 2011. Draft Tree Strategy circulated to officers for comment. Councillor Davies reported to September meeting. It is hoped that the Strategy will be available for the Working Group to view in February 2012.	Working Group.
Land Use for Agricultural Purpose in the context of planning policies and its contribution to the local economy.	To review the lack of promotion and protection of land for this purpose.	Environmental Well-Being	Scoping report to be submitted to a future meeting.	To be determined.
Rural Transport	To review the provision of transportation in rural areas.	Environmental Well-Being	Transport for Cambridgeshire report received in July 2011. Comments conveyed to Cabinet. Final report expected in April 2012.	To be determined.
Review of Neighbourhood Forums in Huntingdonshire	To undertake a review of the Neighbourhood Forums in Huntingdonshire.	Social Well-Being	Update on meeting of the Working Group to be delivered to Panel in January. Further meeting of Working Group to be held in the New Year with the Police Huntingdonshire Area Commander.	Working Group

Housing Benefit Changes and the potential impact on Huntingdonshire.	To consider the emerging issue of homelessness arising as a result of changes to the Housing Benefit system.	Social Well-Being	Background report considered by Panel at their December meeting. Report to be considered at the January meeting of the Economic Well-Being Panel.	To be determined.
Maintenance of Water Courses	To receive a presentation on the maintenance arrangements in place for Water Courses within the District.	Environmental Well-Being	The County Council's Flood and Water Manager will attend the February meeting to advise of the County's growing responsibilities. SUDs report due in April 2012.	To be determined.
Waste Collection and Recycling Policies	To investigate the Council's waste collection and recycling policies.	Environmental Well-Being	Waste Collection Policies being prepared by Eric Kendall to be presented to the Working Group for comment prior to submission to the Panel. A meeting is scheduled for 4 th January to discuss communication and public satisfaction.	Working Group

FUTURE STUDIES

Design Principles for Future Developments.	To be determined.	Environmental Well-Being	Working Group to be established in January 2012. Councillors Banerjee, Curtis, Godfrey, Harlock appointed.	To be determined.
--	-------------------	--------------------------	--	-------------------

Panel Date	Decision	Action	Response	Date For Future Action
	<u>Customer Services</u>			
13/05/09	Quarterly performance reports to be circulated informally to the Panel twice per year and formally twice per year.	Latest report considered in July 2011.	Next report due February 2012.	02/02/12
10/02/11	Head of Customer Services to submit a report after a 12 month period reviewing the impact of the changes to Customer Services.	Report to be considered in June 2012.	Report due in June 2012.	06/12
07/07/11	Asked Executive Councillor for Resources and Customer Services to give further consideration to the actions which could be taken in the absence of any additional funding being made available from the Department of Work & Pensions in April 2012.		The District Council will receive £84k for 2012/13. This is a reduction compared to this year (£91k). This is expected to be used for extra assessment officers and for extra customer services staff. We will take people on temporary contracts.	
08/09/11	Asked the Head of Customer Services to submit a further report on the location of the Call Centre to a future meeting.	Report to be submitted to a future meeting.	Report due in February 2012.	02/02/12
	<u>Corporate Plan Working Group</u>			
18/05/11	Councillors D M Tysoe and S Greenall have been appointed to the Corporate Plan Working Group.	Quarterly performance reports to be submitted to all Overview and Scrutiny Panels.	Performance Management / Monitoring is currently under review.	05/12
06/10/11	Councillor T V Rogers appointed to replace Councillor D M Tysoe.			

Panel Date	Decision	Action	Response	Date For Future Action
02/11/11	<p><u>Scrutiny of Partnerships</u></p> <p>Following a review of the Strategic Partnership, the Overview & Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice Chairman agreed that responsibilities should be divided as follows:-</p> <p>Social Well Being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Community Safety ❖ Children & Young People ❖ Health & Well-Being <p>Environmental Well Being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Growth & Infrastructure <p>Economic Well Being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Local Enterprise Partnership 		<p>The Panel has already received two presentations on the Local Enterprise Partnership. A presentation on the Local Enterprise Zone was given to the Panel's November meeting.</p>	
13/01/11	<p><u>Leisure Centres</u></p> <p>Presentation received at January 2011 Panel meeting. Agreed to establish a working group with representatives of the Social Well-Being Panel.</p>	<p>Councillors J J Dutton, S Greenall, Mrs D Reynolds, Mr R Coxhead and Mr R Hall appointed to working group.</p>	<p>Interim report submitted to Cabinet meeting on 23rd June 2011. Executive Councillor for Organisational Development to review the Council's IT costs, including the basis upon which the IT network service is re-charged to users.</p>	
10/02/11	<p>Agreed to extend remit to review whether an increase in income might be made by charging non-residents of the District a higher rate to use the Council's Leisure Centres.</p>		<p>Meetings held on 3rd March, 28th April, 23rd June 1st September and 7th November 2011 and 8th December. Report to be submitted to the Panel meeting in January 2011.</p>	
07/07/11	<p>Councillor M F Shellens reported that he had recently received admission figures which had been produced on a 12 month rolling average which he would make available for the review.</p>		<p>Working Group will meet again to discuss the future strategic direction of the service in due course.</p>	

Panel Date	Decision	Action	Response	Date For Future Action
14/04/11	<p><u>Huntingdon Multi-Storey Car Park</u></p> <p>Councillor M F Shellens and Mr R Hall reported on their investigations into the business case for the multi-storey car park in Huntingdon.</p> <p>Suggested that the Council should introduce a more detailed methodology for the assessment of the projects that it is considering, to include provision for social benefit and risk assessment. A report has been requested on terms for the methodology for this purpose.</p>	Report on Project Management submitted to October meeting.		
06/10/11	Agreed to request further details of forthcoming Council projects to establish whether it was necessary to conduct a more detailed review.		<p>Forthcoming projects over £2m have been identified as:-</p> <p>Huntingdon Multi Storey Car Park – works expected to start in January 2012</p> <p>Huntingdon Western Relief Road – works expected to start in April 2012</p> <p>St Ivo Leisure Centre Development</p> <p>No further bids in MTP.</p>	
01/12/11	Requested an updated financial figures and a sensitivity analysis on the project prior to the Cabinet decision on the Supplementary Capital Estimate. Members to notify the Chairman of the Panel and the Executive Councillor for Resources if there were any matters they wished the Cabinet to take into account when the final decision is made.	Information circulated by Projects & Assets Manager. Cabinet met on 8 th December 2011. Cabinet endorsed the Supplementary Capital Estimate of £300k to enable the Huntingdon multi-storey car park scheme to proceed.		

Panel Date	Decision	Action	Response	Date For Future Action
10/6/10 10/06/10	<p><u>Visitor Development & Town Centre Vibrancy</u></p> <p>Received a presentation by the Head of People, Performance & Partnerships and the Sustainable Economic Development Manager.</p> <p>Requested a further report outlining the cost of the service and the benefits it brings to both the Council and the District.</p>	Report to be submitted to a future meeting.	This study is currently on hold until circumstances change.	TBC
07/07/11	<p><u>A14 Improvements</u></p> <p>Agreed that a representative of the Highways Agency should be invited to a future meeting to discuss their plans in the event of an interruption to traffic flow.</p> <p>Received an update on the steps that are being taken to pursue this matter with the Government. Panel to receive further updates on progress.</p>	Invitation sent to Highways Agency.	<p>Awaiting confirmation that a representative will attend. Members may wish to discuss the way forward.</p> <p>An update on the A14 has been circulated to Members. A14 Challenge commenced on 12th December 2011 – email box closes 31st January 2012.</p> <p>Members may wish to discuss the way forward.</p>	
07/07/11	<p><u>District Council Support Services</u></p> <p>Agreed to establish a Working Group to review the Document Centre and its costs to form a view on its efficiency and cost effectiveness.</p> <p>Councillors Bull, Greenall, Howe, Mackender-Lawrence, Rogers and Williams volunteered for the Group.</p>		<p>First meeting of working group held on 15th December 2011.</p> <p>Working Group has formed two sub groups to consider:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the financial cost of the service; and b) the operation of the service <p>Background meetings currently being arranged for January 2012.</p>	

Panel Date	Decision	Action	Response	Date For Future Action
07/07/11	<u>Changes to Business Rates</u> Requested further information with regard to the likely impact on the Council from the Government's Statement on Business Rates.		Information to be made available when it was appropriate.	06/12
06/10/11	<u>Cambridgeshire Public Sector Asset Management Strategy</u> Requested a report outlining the progress made on the Huntingdonshire projects in six months time.		Further report / presentation to be submitted to a future meeting.	05/04/12
03/11/11	<u>Community Infrastructure Levy</u> Informal Discussion held at the conclusion of the meeting. Agreed that Managing Director (CPP) would report back when it was appropriate.		Report to be submitted to Panel's April meeting to provide an update on any progress with CIL and future governance and spending arrangements.	10/04/12

This page is intentionally left blank

Decision Digest

Edition 120

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 28th November to 21st December 2011.

EMPLOYMENT REPORT

The Employment Panel has considered a range of information relating to the management of the Council's workforce and the workload of the Human Resources Team. This has included the latest position and trends relating to:-

- ❖ Employee Numbers;
- ❖ Salary Costs;
- ❖ Employee Turnover;
- ❖ Retention of new starters;
- ❖ Sickness Absence reporting; and
- ❖ The Human Resources Caseload.

In considering the information, the Panel's attention was drawn to the number of days lost to sickness per full time employee. Whilst the figure remains below the average for local government, the Panel noted that the Council was taking action to manage and address short and long term sickness absence. In this respect, a new Sickness Absence Policy had been adopted in February 2011 and Heads of Service had been set a specific target regarding absence management. The caseload undertaken by the Human Resources team also reflected the efforts which were being taken to address long term sickness.

With regard to the presentation of future reports, it was suggested that it would be useful to receive a breakdown of sickness absence by department.

ANNUAL EQUALITY PROGRESS REPORT

The Employment Panel has been updated on progress made on the delivery of actions and targets set out in the Council's Single Equality Action Scheme (SES) Action Plan and the findings from the Equality Impact Assessments conducted during 2010/11. Members have noted that of the 51 actions contained within the Plan, 47 had been completed or were ongoing.

The Panel's attention was drawn to the requirement for an external assessment to be undertaken in February 2012. The assessment will seek to validate the Council's current status as an "Achieving" Council and Panel Members were invited to attend the discussion Forum, established as part of the process.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES EMPLOYMENT MONITORING

Having noted that the 2010 Equality Act requires the Council to publish information relating to the characteristics of its employees, the Employment Panel has received and noted the results of the equal opportunities monitoring of its workforce over the period 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2011. In reviewing the statistics, the Panel has noted that the composition of the workforce remained broadly similar to the previous year and that the analysis of HR practices and procedures suggest there was no

evidence of discrimination within the Council during the year.

Having noted that there may be more that the Council could do to make a contribution towards reducing youth unemployment in the District, the Panel has been informed of the exploratory work which had been undertaken on the potential to offer apprentice and work experience schemes. Having indicated their support in principle to these types of initiatives, the Panel has agreed that further reports on the actions that the Council could take to address youth unemployment and the rehabilitation of offenders should be presented at an appropriate time

SAFEGUARDING POLICY & CRB REVIEW

Following the approval of the Council's Safeguarding Policy in June 2011, recent changes to the Employees' Code of Conduct and a review of practices in neighbouring Local Education Authorities, the Employment Panel has endorsed a number of changes to the procedure for renewing Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosures for District Council employees.

REVIEW OF HDC REDUNDANCY POLICY

At the request of Employees' Side representatives, the Panel has endorsed a minor amendment to the Council's Redundancy Policy. The amendment clarifies the point at which employees are placed at risk of redundancy and will reflect current practice within the Council.

PAY REVIEW

The Employment Panel has considered the outcome of negotiations with Employees' side representatives on the

cost of living awards for 2011/12 and 12/13, the formal consultation on proposals to amend the District Council's pay structure and other changes to appraisal and incentive schemes. To inform the Panel's discussions, Members were provided with the results of the employee survey which had been undertaken on the consultation proposals.

Having been acquainted with the outcome of discussions between the Employees' and Employers' Side representatives, and having understood that the proposals were expected to generate budgetary savings of £244,000 in 2011/12 and £695,000 in 2012/13, provide a good basis for securing long term improvements in the Council's pay systems and that they had addressed a number of issues which had been raised during the formal consultation, the Panel agreed the following:-

- ❖ that there be no cost of living award for employees in 2011/12 and 2012/13;
- ❖ that no increments be awarded to employees for the year April 2011 – March 2012, although some non consolidated (taxable and non pensionable) awards would be made following the performance appraisals for this year to all staff on the incremental pay system who satisfied the specified conditions; and
- ❖ that eligible staff should receive an increase in salary of at least 2% from 1st April 2013, subject to there being 'no substantial shocks' to the Council's finances.

To address a number of problems associated with the current system for Sanctionable Pay which is in place in

the Operations Division for waste, recycling, street cleaners, grounds maintenance and vehicle fitters, the Panel endorsed a proposal to introduce an Attendance Allowance with effect from 1st April 2012. This will be reviewed in April 2013 to determine the impact that it may have had on sickness levels during the year. The Panel has also agreed to revise the basic pay for operational staff with effect from 1st April 2012 and reduce the overtime rate for some employees so that it is standardised after 30th June 2012.

Having recognised that there remained a need to address a number of issues relating to the District Council's pay systems, the Panel has also endorsed a suggestion that a working group should be established to review the Council's pay grades and bands with a view to implementing a revised pay structure from 1st April 2013. Reports on progress will be submitted to future meetings of the Panel.

DRAFT BUDGET AND MTP

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has reviewed the draft Budget 2012/13 and MTP. The Executive Councillor for Resources has informed Members that the Council will have to operate under financial constraints for a number of years and many of the Council's decisions would be influenced by external events. He also presented an outline on the current situation, including:

- ◆ the progress that has been made towards achieving the current and next year's targets, helped in part by efficiency savings being higher than expected;
- ◆ some of the significant variations in the Financial Plan

including the introduction of the New Homes Bonus, and

- ◆ the savings that still need to be made over the MTP period.

In considering the contents of the report, the view has been expressed that the format could be clearer and more detail should be provided on explicit changes to revenue variations as the year has progressed. It has been agreed that a group of Members will meet with the Head of Financial Services to discuss these points and report back to the Panel in due course.

The Panel has accepted the proposed spending variations and congratulated the Cabinet and Officers on the significant progress that has been made in both the efficiency and savings measures that have been identified for the next two financial years. However, appreciating the current economic climate and the many unknown factors, it has been recommended that further investigation be undertaken to determine the feasibility of achieving some savings earlier than planned.

With regard to the supplementary capital estimate for Huntingdon multi storey car park, the Panel has noted that the project had already been approved and that the only change is that Trinity Place Car Park will now not be sold thereby leaving a £300K deficit. In view of the urgency to meet the necessary legal agreements so that the project can proceed to the agreed timescale, a proposed supplementary capital estimate of £300K has been supported. However, the Panel has requested an updated analysis on the project and Members are to notify the Chairman of the Panel and the Executive Councillor for Resources if there are any matters they want the Cabinet to take into account when the final decision is made.

The Panel has noted the possible relationship between the New Homes Bonus (NHB) and Formula Grant (FG), especially the lack of sufficient government funding for the former. Members have sought reassurance that the planning projections for future years are accurate. It has been noted that the retention of Business Rates might possibly replace the FG in future years and the possible implications of this.

The Panel has also recommended that the Council does not accept the proposed Council Tax Freeze Grant. It has been noted that £210K of additional savings will need to be identified as a result of accepting the 4 Year Reward Grant and that the acceptance of the second tranche would require the Council to find further savings in excess of £200k by 2015/16. It is understood that a significant number of other local authorities are unlikely to accept the Council Tax Freeze Grant.

The Panel has been informed that the Council Tax base is £25K better than forecast and that the Government is expected shortly to announce the Council's grant for 2012/13 and the level of Council Tax increase that will trigger a referendum. There are clear indications that the referendum legislation will replace capping and is likely to be enacted by February 2012. This will put the Council in a more informed position on which to make a decision on next year's Council Tax than has been the case in previous years. Before the Council Tax is set for 2012/13, the Panel has recommended that the Cabinet should identify those services that might be retained for a range of increases in Council Tax within the referendum limit.

The Panel has discussed the proposal to increase the minimum level of General reserves from £3M to £4M. Several Panel Members have questioned whether the new proposed

level is adequate in light of the unknown factors. For example, the NHB represents 25% of the Council's predicted income in 2015/16 and a reduction in home building is already included in the Risks and Unknowns assessment. This could, therefore, be a significant risk and the Panel is of the view that the Council should make greater provision to protect itself. Although in the past the Auditor has effectively required the Council to reduce its reserves, the general consensus is that it is desirable for the Council in the current economic climate to hold greater reserves. However, the Panel has recognised that such action would place an insurmountable burden on the savings programme in the short term. The Panel has, therefore, recommended that the minimum level of reserves should be £4M for now but that this should be reviewed in 2 years and if it is reasonable should be increased to £5M. This should be tested and considered in the forecast report each year and built into the draft budget if deemed necessary.

The Panel has noted that the Low End Assumptions have already been built into the MTP. However, Members have questioned if the pay award assumptions should be included as they raise expectations, particularly as actual pay awards have been negotiated for the next few years. As regards the Risks and Unknowns contained with the report, the Panel has recommended that the following should be included:

- ◆ the implications of planning fees from the Enterprise Zone should be assessed and either included in the financial plan or identified as a risk/unknown; and
- ◆ the Panel are concerned about the projected levels of homelessness

and the increased demand for Disabled Facilities Grants. The Cabinet has been requested to verify that the figures on which the respective budgets have been prepared are reliable.

At the conclusion of their deliberations, the Panel invited the Cabinet to consider its discussions as part of their deliberations on this item.

GREAT FEN SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

The Cabinet has considered the content of the Great Fen Masterplan: Statement of Consultation which has been compiled by project partners to accompany planning guidance for the area. In recognising its importance when determining forthcoming planning applications within the Great Fen, the Cabinet has agreed to adopt the Masterplan as Supplementary Planning Guidance to be used to inform Council policy and guide development management decisions. At the same time, the Cabinet has approved a Statement of Recognition which explains the document's status and will be included as a preface text with the final document.

RAF BRAMPTON URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK (UDF)

The Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel has endorsed for submission to Cabinet, a report on the RAF Brampton Urban Design Framework.

Having regard to the responses received during the recent consultation, the Cabinet has authorised the Head of Planning Services, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing and the

Chairman of the Development Management Panel, to finalise the content of the UDF.

The UDF will inform Council Policy and development management decisions on potential planning applications for the area. The Cabinet has requested that the final document should make reference to potential options for the retention of the Brampton Park Theatre as a community building.

DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (SPD)

The Cabinet has agreed to adopt the Developer Contributions SPD as supplementary planning guidance. It has been necessary to update the SPD to complement the Draft Charging Schedule for the Huntingdonshire CIL which also was subject to preliminary consultation in November/December 2011.

UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S CORE STRATEGY – ITS LOCAL PLAN.

The Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel has approved for submission to Cabinet a report on the need for the Council to consider updating its Core Strategy. The work is necessary in order to provide Huntingdonshire with a robust ongoing local planning policy and development framework.

With regard to the proposal to use the existing Core Strategy as a basis for the work to be undertaken, some Members have expressed a view that the work will need to be started from scratch. In light of the constraints on the Council in terms of planning conditions for the completion of infrastructure works when granting permission for development, the Panel has recommended that an updated local infrastructure strategy should be

developed. Furthermore the Panel has recommended that the Council should establish and maintain an ongoing dialogue with the Highways Agency and the County Council on road provision and the local infrastructure generally.

Subsequently arrangements for the review and update of the Council's Core Strategy have been approved by the Cabinet. Its approval will result in a new Local Plan for the area and the Cabinet has requested the Head of Planning Services to bring forward an update of the Local Development Scheme to include a timetable for preparing and delivering this new local plan.

In the interim, the Cabinet has supported the continued use of the Core Strategy for defining sustainable development needs.

Sound evidence will need to be gathered to demonstrate the local need for additional economic growth, associated housing development and related infrastructure. The Cabinet has endorsed the commencement of this work with colleagues across Cambridgeshire and the LEP area.

HOUSING BENEFIT CHANGES AND THE POTENTIAL IMPACT ON HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The effect of Government changes to the Housing Benefits system has been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) which results in a reduction in Benefit entitlement of between £3 and £70 per week by existing claimants. The Panel is particularly concerned over larger households that will experience a significant reduction in their entitlement, such as those living in four bedroom properties. It is anticipated that these households will turn to the Council for assistance. However, with a shortage in the availability of social rented housing,

it is likely that there will be an increase in the number of households facing homelessness. This could result in additional costs incurred by the Council. Additional provision has however been made in the budget for this purpose.

An additional report on the wider housing policy implications arising from further proposals in the Welfare Reform Bill will be presented to a future meeting of the Panel.

NHS CONSULTATION – PROPOSED REDESIGN OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ACROSS CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH

Before submitting a response to NHS Cambridgeshire's current consultation on the proposed redesign of mental health services across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has decided to seek service users' views on the proposals and requested that a representative from NHS Cambridgeshire attend the Panel's January meeting. Preliminary views have been expressed over the proposed closure of Acer Ward at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital, the risks associated with the Care in the Community approach proposed by NHS Cambridgeshire, the adequacy of the transportation system to Peterborough and the establishment of the new 24/7 Advice and Brief Intervention Centre.

VOLUNTARY SECTOR WORKING GROUP

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) have considered the Voluntary Sector Working Group's investigations into the potential impact on demand for District Council services of reductions in the services currently procured from voluntary organisations through Service Level Agreements. In addition, the

Panel has received details of potential financial liabilities relating to the Maple Centre, which is currently managed by the Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations.

The Panel has endorsed a list of priority areas for future voluntary activity in Huntingdonshire and has suggested that the services procured should be accessible to all residents across the District. These priorities will inform a report by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services on voluntary sector support which will be considered by the Panel in January. This report will also propose options on what future funding methods are to be employed by the Council.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS WORKING GROUP

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has endorsed a suggestion to adopt the Shape My Place initiative within Huntingdonshire. A recommendation to this effect will be submitted to the Cabinet at its January meeting.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE ADULTS WELLBEING AND HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Matters due for consideration by the Cambridgeshire Adults Well-Being and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee have been noted by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being).

REVIEW OF REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT (RIPA) POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Amendments to the existing RIPA Covert Surveillance Policy and Procedure and the content of a new Communications Data Policy and

Procedure have been endorsed for submission to the Council. These changes had been prompted following the outcome of an inspection by the Office of the Surveillance Commissioner, guidance issued by the Home Office and changes in the operational structure of the Council.

REVIEW OF HOUSING BENEFIT FRAUD INVESTIGATION ACTIVITY AND THE COUNCIL'S WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

The Corporate Governance Panel has been acquainted with the activity of the Benefits Fraud Investigation Team over 2010/11 and has received details of new work areas undertaken by the Team which include the collection of debts arising from benefit overpayments, partnership working with recruitment agencies and the recovery of social housing.

In terms of the annual review of the whistleblowing policy and guidance, the Panel has been advised that only minor changes have been required and that 23 incidents were received through the various whistleblowing channels over the past year.

REVIEW OF THE ANTI-FRAUD AND CORRUPTION STRATEGY

The outcome of a review of the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy has been noted by the Corporate Governance Panel and minor changes have been endorsed. The Panel has agreed to review the Strategy on a triennial basis.

NATIONAL FRAUD INITIATIVE

The work undertaken by the Council on the potentially fraudulent matches in data provided by the Audit Commission has been noted by Members of the Corporate Governance Panel. Two thirds of these cases relate to the

concessionary fares scheme and have been referred to Cambridgeshire County Council for investigation. A total of 55 days has been spent across the authority reviewing and investigating the matches identified.

APPROVAL FOR PUBLICATION OF THE 2010/11 ACCOUNTS

The efforts made by the Head of Financial Services and the Council's External Auditors to complete the process for finalising and publishing the Council's accounts for 2010/11 have been noted by the Corporate Governance Panel. It is hoped that this work will be completed early in the New Year. Delays to the process are attributed to the implementation of the new International Financial Reporting Standards, an underestimation of the time spent with the Council's new auditors explaining the Council's systems and practices, together with the introduction of new more onerous auditing standards, and unforeseen staff issues.

The Panel has received the External Auditor's draft report relating to the 2010/11 audit and agreed to amend the Annual Governance Statement to reflect the delay in publication of the Council's accounts.

It has been acknowledged that changes to the draft statement of accounts will be required. The Panel has delegated approval of any further amendments to the Managing Director (Resources), following consultation with the Chairman of the Panel and the external auditor, subject to there being no "material" change. The Panel has also authorised the Managing Director (Resources) and the Chairman of the Panel to sign the Letter of Representation on behalf of the Council when the accounts are completed. It is not anticipated that any changes will be required, but if they are, any changes to

the Letter of Representation have been delegated to the Managing Director (Resources) following consultation with the Chairman of the Panel and the external auditor.

ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Corporate Governance Panel has endorsed changes to the Risk Management Strategy. The Strategy was amended to reflect the current working practices employed by the Council.

POLICY ON THE MANAGEMENT OF UNREASONABLE COMPLAINANT BEHAVIOUR

The content of a policy on the management of unreasonable complainant behaviour has been endorsed by the Corporate Governance Panel.

TRAINING OF PANEL MEMBERS

In receiving their anticipated work programme for 2012, the Corporate Governance Panel has agreed to address any future training requirements on a meeting by meeting basis.

DRAINAGE ISSUES

The Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel has considered a petition in respect of sewage overflow at Windsor Road and Main Street, Yaxley. The petition had been referred to the Panel from the Council meeting on 2nd November 2011.

The Panel was advised that the Executive Leader had written to Anglian Water expressing his concerns over the flooding problems in Yaxley and that a response has been received. Although Anglian Water's response had

addressed the particular instance of flooding, Members still were not satisfied with their programme to prevent problems occurring with the drainage system in the District and with their response to sewerage system failures. It has been suggested to the Panel that the Environment Agency has enforcement powers to deal with such situations. Given the lack of powers that the Council has to influence Anglian Water, the Panel requested the Executive Leader to write to the Environment Agency highlighting the Panel's concerns and asking them to use their enforcement powers.

LOCALISM ACT AND NEW STANDARDS REGIME

The Standards Committee has considered the provisions of the Localism Act and specifically those sections which relate to standards and the Code of Conduct. It is expected that the Act will come into force on 1st April 2012.

Interestingly, the Act still requires each authority to 'promote and maintain high standards of conduct' and to adopt a Code of Conduct which should provide for the registration of disclosable pecuniary interests. The Monitoring Officer still has a duty to maintain and publish a Members Register of Interests and Councillors will still be required to declare disclosable pecuniary interests although these have yet to be defined.

Rather surprisingly, the Council also will be required to have in place arrangements to deal with complaints of breaches of the Code about both District and Parish Councillors.

There are a number of other matters in the Act which will need to be looked at in detail and the Committee is hopeful that the Statutory Instruments which should follow will help in this task.

QUICK GUIDE TO BLOGGING

The outcome of a recent case considered in the Upper Tribunal could have implications for Member activity on blogs, twitter and other internet sites. Depending on circumstances, such communications might be regarded as conducting the business of the office of Member or 'acting as a representative of your authority' as set out in the Code of Conduct. As Standards for England have revised their quick guide to blogging to take account of this judgement, the Standards Committee has asked that this be circulated to Parish Councils for information and made available on the Members Homepage.

DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

At its December meeting, the Development Management Panel determined ten applications. Amongst the eight applications approved and two items refused by the Panel was the proposal for the provision of a six screen cinema and four restaurant buildings and associated infrastructure on the site of the former fire station and household waste recycling centre off Huntingdon Street, St Neots. Having received representations from a number of District Councillors, an objector and the applicant, the Panel concluded that the application represented an opportunity to significantly improve leisure facilities in the town for all age groups and encourage and support the vitality and viability of St Neots town centre. The application was therefore approved subject to a number of conditions and a S106 agreement to secure a contribution from the applicant towards the upgrading of the traffic lights at the Cambridge Road/Tebbutts Road junction.

This page is intentionally left blank