
Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance)

Report of the meetings held on 14th December 2004, 11th January 2005 and a Joint Meeting with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery and Resources) held on 25th January 2005

Matters for Information

41. BEST VALUE REVIEW: IMPROVING ACCESS TO SERVICES

The Panel has considered the outcome of the Access to Services Best Value Review.

Members noted that this Review had not followed the established pattern of previous BVRs because much of the work had been undertaken as part of the access to services project (later named as the Customer First Project). The latter had culminated in the Customer Service Strategy which had been approved by the Council in June 2003 and had provided the equivalent of a Service Improvement Plan to monitor and improve provision of better access to the Council's services. With this in mind, the Panel has recommended that the Cabinet sign off the Access to Services Best Value Review (Item No. 107 of their Report to Council refers).

42. REVIEW OF THE USE OF SECTION 106 INCOME

The Panel has considered the Council's use of Section 106 Agreement income. Having concentrated on the post Agreement process, the Panel has been acquainted with the procedure for the monitoring of agreements and the receipt and realisation of benefits.

Arising from the possibility of unallocated money remaining within the Section 106 account and the expiry of time limits associated with its expenditure, the Panel has asked the Head of Policy to submit a report on a quarterly basis to the Panel with a copy to all Members.

Having been informed that local authorities in Cambridgeshire were working towards the production of a combined Section 106 Agreement strategy managed by Cambridge Horizons, the Panel has commented on the need to ensure that Huntingdonshire receives an equitable share of income from the fund. The Panel has also therefore decided to monitor expenditure by Cambridge Horizons on infrastructure development in Huntingdonshire.

43. CRIME AND DISORDER AUDIT

The Panel has considered the results of the Crime and Disorder Audit undertaken on behalf of the Community Safety Partnership as a prelude to the drafting of the Community Safety Strategy for 2005 to 2008.

In considering the audit outcomes, Members of the Panel have drawn attention to a perceived lack of Police presence in some of the rural villages. In commenting on the Audit itself, the Panel feels that a reduction in anti-social behaviour should be afforded a higher priority than others in the Community Safety Strategy.

In discussing a possible linkage between smoking and a progression to the use of drugs, the Panel has agreed that the need for additional efforts to discourage smoking should be raised directly with the Community Safety Partnership. The Panel has noted that the draft Community Strategy would be considered at a forthcoming meeting, prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

44. STAFF TRAVEL PLAN

Arising from their continuing interest in the subject, the Panel has been updated with progress to date in relation to the preparation of a Staff Travel Plan for the District Council which it is anticipated will be submitted to their February meeting.

45. AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER 2003/04

The Panel has noted the content of the Audit and Inspection letter produced by the District Auditor for 2003/04 prior to its consideration by the Council's Corporate Governance Panel.

**46. COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT -
PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

The Panel has discussed those areas of the Council's priorities upon which it wishes to receive future performance management information. Members have subsequently agreed that reports should be submitted on a quarterly basis outlining the Council's achievements against local performance data relating to -

- ◆ low crime and fear of crime;
- ◆ places to meet and things to do;
- ◆ recycling/pollution/energy efficiency;
- ◆ biodiversity; and
- ◆ effective partnerships.

**47. RAMSEY TOWN CENTRE
ENVIRONMENT IMPROVEMENT SCHEME**

Councillors M F Newman and D B Dew have been appointed by the Panel to attend future meetings of the Ramsey Town Centre Environmental Improvements Group.

48. HEADQUARTERS FEASIBILITY STUDY: UPDATE

The Panel has been updated on a range of issues relating to the Council's future office and other accommodation.

Having been acquainted with details of the current situation, Panel Members have reiterated their concern relating to the absence of an appraisal on the cost of a greenfield site and requested details of the research which has been undertaken on the ways in which customers currently travel to and from Pathfinder House.

49. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000/FORWARD PLAN

The Panel has been acquainted with details of the Forward Plan of key decisions which has been prepared by the Leader of the Council. The Panel has subsequently identified a number of items for inclusion on their future agendas.

50. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel has reviewed its workplan on Studies.

51. PROGRESS

The Panel has been apprised of the progress of actions required as a result of its previous decisions. In so doing, the Panel has noted that the deliberations of the working group established to consider the issues associated with the Council's budget were progressing, and have expressed their ongoing interest in issues associated with the deployment of PCSOs in the District.

52. SCRUTINY

The Panel has considered the latest editions of the Decision Digest. A number of queries raised with regard to items appearing in the Digest have been answered.

53. BUDGET 2005/06 AND MEDIUM TERM PLAN 2006 - 2010

At a joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels (Service Delivery & Resources) and (Planning & Finance) consideration has been given to proposals for the 2005/06 Budget and draft Medium Term Plan for 2006 – 2010. In so doing, the Panels have reaffirmed their support for an increase in Council Tax of £12 per annum for a Band D property. However Members have suggested that if a monetary increase of £12 is to continue in future years this will be unlikely to be sufficient to meet the Council's expenditure profile and that consideration will need to be given to an increase in percentage terms to maintain the required level of income from the Council Tax.

In relation to the forecast increase in Council Tax in future years, Members have noted that the projected requirements for a significant increase is now likely to be delayed until 2011/12. In discussing alternative scenarios to avoid a steep increase in one financial year,

Members have requested that information be made available to them on the level of Council Tax increase required to achieve the forecast level of expenditure without a large increase in any one year. Information had also been requested as to the level of expenditure which could be financed in the longer term by a Council Tax increase of £12 per annum if this is maintained in future years.

The comments of the Panels have been conveyed to the Cabinet for consideration in formulating their recommendations to the Council. Item No.117 of their Report refers.

P A Swales
Chairman