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## Overview and Scrutiny (Planning and Finance)

Report of the meetings held on 12th April and 14th June 2005 and a Joint Meeting with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery & Resources) held on 7th June 2005

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### Matters for Determination

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#### 1. **PROPOSED UPGRADE OF A14 ELLINGTON TO FEN DITTON – HIGHWAYS AGENCY CONSULTATION**

The Panel has been acquainted with the current proposals that are the subject of consultation by the Highways Agency to improve the A14 between Ellington & Fen Ditton, together with the Council's proposed response to the consultation which has been endorsed by the Cabinet.

The Panel acknowledged that the precise details of the proposals would be a matter for discussion on an ongoing basis once the preferred route had been confirmed. However the Panel was conscious of the potential impact of the changes upon the community of Brampton and Members expressed their support for measures that would minimise the implications for local residents.

The Panel also recognised the need to adopt a pragmatic approach to the proposals put forward by the Highways Agency. Although disappointment was expressed at the failure to construct the new road to motorway standard, Members accepted that little would be achieved in pressing for additional investment by the Government and that this may further delay the implementation of the scheme.

Having been advised that a Project Team had been established to investigate the future of the existing A14 viaduct over the railway line in Huntingdon and the possible establishment of a replacement junction on Brampton Road, the Panel has requested sight of the design after the proposals became further advanced.

The Panel therefore

#### **RECOMMEND**

**that the recommendations agreed by the Cabinet on the A14 upgrade be supported and that sympathetic**

**consideration be given to proposals to the west of Brampton that will minimise the impact on that community.**

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### **Matters for Information**

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## **2. STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING REVIEW**

Following their study on the subject in 2002, the Panel has been updated on the current situation with respect to street naming and numbering in the District.

Having been informed that an assessment of existing street name plates and service standards was being undertaken as part of an exercise to digitise the Council's records, Members of the Panel have expressed their concern that inadequate street naming and numbering poses problems for the emergency services, represents a potential road hazard for visitors/ tradesmen and presents a poor impression of the area. Particular reference was made to the problems experienced on Oxmoor and in villages where houses are not numbered.

Having regard to Members' concerns in relation to the importance of ensuring that roads are adequately named and the importance of obtaining local opinion, the Panel has asked the Head of Environment & Transport to write to all town and parish councils informing them of the Council's exercise and inviting them to identify any current gaps in provision.

A further report will be submitted to the Panel's September meeting with the results of the survey, and details of further responses from Parish Councils.

## **3. MONITORING S106 AGREEMENTS: PLANNING OBLIGATIONS**

As part of their ongoing scrutiny of the expenditure of money obtained through Agreements made under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the Panel has considered the first quarterly monitoring report prepared by the Policy Division.

The Panel will continue to monitor the situation on a quarterly basis.

## **4. HEADQUARTERS AND OTHER ACCOMMODATION**

The Panel has been acquainted with the deliberations of the Cabinet at their meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2005 in respect of Office Accommodation.

In so doing, the Panel has been pleased to note that the Cabinet has authorised further work on the availability of edge of town centre land in Huntingdon and to invite expressions of interest from developers to

provide potential sites and design and construct alternative accommodation.

Subsequent to that report, at a joint meeting of the two Overview and Scrutiny Panels, Members have been updated on a range of matters relating to the procurement process and the output specification for the Council's new accommodation. During discussion the following were noted and/or agreed in conjunction with the Leader of the Council -

- ◆ decisions on the acceptance of tenderers at Stages I and II of the tender evaluation process will be made by the full Council at meetings in September and December 2005 respectively;
- ◆ despite acceptance by the Panels that expert advice is required on a range of matters during the procurement and construction processes, concern was expressed at the potential cost of consultancy work with an assurance being given that this would be subject to a competitive tendering exercise;
- ◆ in response to a request for greater involvement on the part of Members in the choice of the successful scheme, it was agreed that both Panels would be consulted at a joint meeting on Stages I and II of the tender evaluation process prior to final decisions being taken by the Council;
- ◆ in response to a comment regarding the absence of any reference in the Employers' Requirements to a potential expansion of accommodation requirements in future years, the Panels were informed that the specification provided for greater space availability than in the current premises and that significant expansion was likely to result only from local government reorganisation, in which case other buildings would become available for the new authority. Other initiatives also were being progressed including hot-desking and home-working which would reduce overall space requirements;
- ◆ the overall criteria and their respective priorities for the assessment of tenders had yet to be determined, although this would provide the Council with the opportunity to provide services at the best value;
- ◆ it was not intended to undertake a public consultation exercise owing to the complexity of the project, although the development had been the subject of considerable media interest;
- ◆ the Council was able to fund the new development from existing resources but the implications of the development and the potential for Council Tax capping in the current year would result in the MTP being reviewed if necessary;
- ◆ the new building would have a high BREEAM rating, which would result in lower future operating costs for the Council;
- ◆ tenderers would be required to meet two fundamental requirements by specifying a gross maximum price for the new accommodation and a gross minimum price for the disposal of the Council's existing accommodation site. Once a tender had been accepted and following subsequent negotiation any

- variations from the prices specified would be shared between the Council and the company; and
- ◆ support was expressed by the Panels for the development approach now adopted, in particular the market testing element to ensure that all options were explored.

The Panels have decided to hold a further joint meeting on 13th September to consider the outcome of Stage I of the evaluation process.

## **5. GROWING SUCCESS: A CORPORATE PLAN**

The Panel has reviewed the Council's Corporate Plan, together with the results of an annual survey of a representative sample of Huntingdonshire residents. Details of performance information collected for the Council's balanced scorecard and the National Best Value Performance Indicators also have been supplied and will continue to be reported to both Panels on a quarterly basis.

## **6. TRAVEL PLAN**

Further to item No. 54 of their Report to the meeting of the Council held on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2005, the Panel has considered the latest draft of the proposed Travel Plan, together with the outcome of the consultation to date with employees.

The Panel is of the opinion that more extensive consultation should take place with staff and that this should be extended to include Members who will also be affected by the proposals. The Panel has also commented on the importance of providing incentives in the Plan to encourage employees and Councillors to change their reliance on the motor car and adopt alternative forms of transportation.

## **7. DISCOUNTS TO CUSTOMERS**

The Panel has considered current practice regarding the provision of discounts to customers for the use of Council services and has noted that this is primarily left to the discretion of service managers under the Council's existing policy on fees and charges. Currently those discounts which are offered are primarily age related but the Panel is of the opinion that discounts should be extended to those in receipt of benefits.

The Panel has also queried the level of usage of the Council's leisure centres by residents living in neighbouring authority areas. Having regard to the net cost to the Council in operating the Centres, the Panel has questioned whether non-Huntingdonshire residents should be subject to a higher charge for using Centre facilities. As a result the Panel has asked the Director of Commerce & Technology to investigate the feasibility of introducing a discount scheme for leisure centre usage for residents of Huntingdonshire and report back to a future meeting. The Panel has also recommended the Cabinet to consider authorising service managers to use their discretion under

the existing policy to offer discounts for Council services to benefit recipients.

**8. PFI PARTNERING AGREEMENT**

The Panel has noted the content of the draft Partnering Agreement for the Private Finance Initiative with the County Council for future waste disposal arrangements within Cambridgeshire.

Having noted that the agreement builds upon the Statement of Understanding previously signed by the District Council and that the Council can withdraw from the agreement by giving 3 months notice, the Panel has no objection to the agreement as drafted.

**9. HUNTINGDONSHIRE FLOOD FORUM**

The Panel has appointed Councillor P A Swales (or his nominee) as their representative on the Huntingdonshire Flood Forum.

**10. CAMBRIDGESHIRE HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

At the invitation of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery & Resources), the Panel has nominated Councillor P G Mitchell as the substitute representative to attend meetings of the Cambridgeshire Health & Social Care Committee.

**11. WORKPLAN STUDIES**

The Panel has reviewed its workplan on studies. In so doing the Panel has decided to scrutinise the ongoing formulation of the Local Development Framework and invited the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery & Resources) to consider the present policy on the kerbside sorting of recyclable materials.

Following the recent publication of the Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report, the Panel has decided to invite Town & Parish Councils to suggest potential subjects for study.

**12. FORWARD PLAN**

The Panel has been acquainted with details of the Forward Plan of key decisions which had been prepared by the Leader of the Council. Arising from the Panel's concerns regarding the Highways Agency consultation on the new A14, an urgent item of business was considered at the Council meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2005, to enable the Council to make representations to the Highways Agency over the cancellation of exhibitions at short notice prior to the recent General Election.

P A Swales  
Chairman