

---

## Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance)

Report of the meetings held on 13th December 2005, 10th January 2006 and joint meetings with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery and Resources) held on 24th January and 7th February 2006

---

---

### Matters for Information

---

#### **33. REVIEW OF COUNCIL BUDGET & EXPENDITURE**

Having considered and noted the response of the Cabinet to their recommendations on the Council's budget and expenditure, the Panel has invited Councillors Mrs D C Reynolds, A Hansard and L M Simpson to their meetings to discuss the outcome of the Panel's review in relation to expenditure on social housing, information & promotion and customer first.

Having received information concerning the management of the call centre, recent savings achieved on communications and the position in relation to social housing grant, the Panel has been satisfied as to current levels of expenditure on those services.

With regard to the Panel's concern generally on future Council expenditure, the Leader of the Council has given an assurance that this had been acknowledged by the Cabinet and that measures will be implemented to identify potential savings within the Council's budget.

The Executive Councillor for Leisure Services and the Head of Community Services have been invited to attend the Panel's March meeting to discuss expenditure on leisure centres. However with the exception of the discussion referred to, the Panel has agreed to conclude their review of the subject.

#### **34. IMPLEMENTING ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT STATEMENT 2005**

The Panel has considered the content of the draft 2005 Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) statement for submission to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. As a consequence, the Panel has requested further information as to how grants received to date under the IEG programme have been allocated and expended, together with details of the outcome of a trial in the use of mobile technology within the Revenues and Benefits Division.

The Panel has also discussed the identification of efficiency savings from the implementation of the Customer First programme. Members have been reminded that its primary purpose is to improve customer service to the public, although savings will be achieved as part of the business re-engineering process. The Panel has been assured by the Executive Councillor that he is satisfied with the progress achieved and the likely attainment of targets within the programme.

(The Cabinet has subsequently recommended Council to approve the Statement for submission to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister – Item No. 90 of their Report refers.)

**35. DRAFT RESPONSES TO CORE STRATEGY PREFERRED OPTIONS REPORT**

The Panel has considered the issues emerging from the public consultation on the Core Strategy Development Plan Document and the suggested policy changes arising therefrom. Members have been assured that there will be an opportunity for the Panel to consider the Strategy at their March meeting prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

**36. MONITORING SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS: PLANNING OBLIGATIONS**

The Panel has considered the quarterly monitoring report detailing the receipt and expenditure of money negotiated under Section 106 Agreements. Having regard to assurances made at the Panel's previous meeting that the majority of expenditure on leisure provision will have been incurred by the end of the financial year, the Panel has agreed to review the situation again at the end of the next quarter.

**37. CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE: PLAN AND AREA MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE**

The Panel has considered the emerging Children & Young People's Plan which has been developed by the Cambridgeshire Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership and the priorities for 2006-09. The Panel has also considered proposals for the delivery and organisation of services for children and young people at area locality level.

In considering the content of the draft Plan, the Panel has reminded the Cabinet of the need to ensure that the needs of Huntingdonshire residents are being met and that suitable resources are allocated to the District in comparison to the remainder of the County. In that respect the Panel has stressed the importance of the Executive Councillor's role on the Partnership Board and other groups.

Arising from their concerns in relation to the level of Member involvement in the new governance structure and the role of the District Council in relation to the locality arrangements, the Panel has invited the Cabinet to consider this further in the development of the

plan and the need for Members to be briefed and informed in respect of their constituency roles. The Panel has also requested clarity as to how the locality teams will be resourced in Huntingdonshire.

(The comments of the Panel have been conveyed to their Cabinet for their consideration. Item No. 108 of their Report refers.)

### **38. LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS**

The Panel has considered the content of a draft Local Area Agreement (LAA) for Cambridgeshire. Agreements have been introduced as an initiative intended to streamline Government funding, to encourage more partnership working and to ensure investment is directed towards local priorities. The Agreements build upon the Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) concept to improve services through targeted prioritisation of funding.

Having been acquainted with the proposed governance arrangements for the implementation of the Agreement and the possibility of a reallocation of resources between Districts to reflect local needs, the Panel has expressed its concern that the LAA does not result in a transfer of resources out of Huntingdonshire to other parts of the County. Having noted that those targets previously in place within the LPSA for Cambridgeshire will be incorporated in the LAA, the Panel has questioned the relevance of some of the targets and the fact that, for some performance indicators, the County Council is shown as the lead delivery agency when the majority of the contributory services are provided by the District Council.

The Panel has also asked the Head of Policy to investigate the feasibility of the results of the quarterly monitoring of LAA and performance being reported to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panels as part of the normal performance management measures.

(The draft Agreement has subsequently been considered by the Cabinet. Item No. 116 of their Report refers.)

### **39. LOCAL AUTHORITY BUSINESS GROWTH INCENTIVE**

At their joint meeting on 24th January 2006, Members were acquainted with the introduction of the Local Authority Business Growth Incentive scheme which is designed to allow local authorities to retain a share of increased business rates revenue generated in their area.

The scheme will operate initially for three years subject to review following the first year of operation in the light of any recommendations made by the Lyons Inquiry into local government finance, together with the scheme's success in meeting its objectives. Although the amount of money likely to be received under the agreement is difficult to establish at this stage, Members have been informed that a report will be submitted to Cabinet in due course when this became known. Although use of any additional income is

not restricted, it has been suggested that it would be inappropriate for this to be used to fund projects with ongoing revenue implications.

The introduction of the scheme has also been reported to the Cabinet at their meeting on 2nd February 2006.

#### **40. FINANCIAL STRATEGY, MEDIUM TERM PLAN 2007-2011 AND BUDGET 2006-07**

At a joint meeting, the Panels have considered the Council's Financial Strategy, Medium Term Plan and 2006/07 Budget. In considering the proposed financial strategy, the Panels have expressed their support for the higher of 5% increase in Council Tax or a 5% increase in the budget requirement each year with a smoothed savings profile. The Panels have also endorsed the content of the proposed Budget and Medium Term Plan.

In relation to the savings profile which will need to be achieved if the Council approves this option, the Panels have stressed the importance of ensuring that appropriate procedures are in place to ensure that necessary reductions in expenditure can be achieved. The Panels have also asked for this exercise to be an inclusive process with Member involvement before changes to the Budget and MTP are considered by full Council. As a consequence the Panels have asked the Executive Councillor for Finance to report back to the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Planning & Finance) in March 2006 on the principles and procedure to be adopted when identifying savings, together with details of any suggested savings identified by that stage.

The comments of the Panels have been conveyed to the Cabinet at their meeting on 2nd February 2006 to assist them in formulating their recommendations to Council on these matters. (Item No. 88 of their Report refers.)

#### **41. WORKPLAN STUDIES**

The Panel has reviewed its work plan on studies. At the suggestion of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery & Resources) the Panel has agreed to investigate the implications of local procurement of goods and services.

Having regard to some of the issues encountered during the review of the Council's budget and expenditure, the Head of Administration has been asked to prepare a protocol for the operation of working groups established by the Panel.

#### **42. HEADQUARTERS AND OTHER ACCOMMODATION DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT**

At the joint meeting of the Planning and Finance and the Service Delivery Panels in February, Members considered recent elements with regard to the completion of a Development Agreement for the procurement of new headquarters and other accommodation and for

the location of the Call Centre. Having regard to the deliberations of the District Council Headquarters and Other Accommodation Advisory Group on the matter the Panel has agreed to endorse their recommendations.

The Panels have discussed occupancy levels of the new headquarters building and the flexibility built into its design in this respect, the Council's ability to manage car parking in Huntingdon, the facilities that will be available for Councillors and the adverse effects of any delays on construction costs.

Any potential questions with regard to the Panels' deliberations on this item should be dealt with as part of the Cabinet's report on Office Accommodation when the press and public have been excluded from the meeting.

P A Swales  
Chairman