

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 30th June and 24th August 2007

MEDIUM TERM PLAN

The Cabinet has agreed to release funding from the Medium Term Plan for a scheme to extend the Impressions Fitness Suite at Huntingdon Leisure Centre. The scheme involves the creation of new areas including a soft play area, team zone, spa facilities and a vibration training room, which will be of particular benefit to the elderly and disabled.

FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Cabinet has noted the outturn of revenue and capital expenditure in 2006 – 2007 along with variations between the original and revised budget provision for that year.

In discussing the Budget and Medium Term Plan review process and having noted that the Council has been successful in preventing the need to use its reserves to fund revenue spending, Executive Councillors have expressed their thanks to staff for their efforts in achieving the budgetary outcomes.

CHOICE-BASED LETTINGS POLICY

A lettings policy for Huntingdonshire has been approved by the Cabinet. The policy has been developed as part of a wider Sub-Regional Choice-Based Lettings Scheme for Cambridgeshire. It sets out how properties will be allocated using bands rather than the previous points system. These will

reflect the length of time applicants have been registered within a band and will respond better to the needs of vulnerable people. The new policy will take effect when the Choice-Based Lettings Scheme "goes live" which is likely to be February 2008 at the earliest. A report on the progress of the scheme will be submitted to Cabinet 12 months after its implementation.

HOUSING RENEWAL ASSISTANCE POLICY

Three amendments to the Council's Housing Renewal Assistance Policy relating to exempt disposal where the repayment of loans are not required, disabled facilities "top-up" assistance and the determination of a loan or grant for repairs assistance have been approved by the Cabinet. Having expressed some apprehension about the potential for anomalies, particularly where grants in excess of £25,000 are made for adaptations to a home of a family member or relative who is not the disabled person, the Cabinet has requested that this be raised with the Members of Parliament for the Huntingdon and North-West Cambridgeshire Constituencies.

OPEN SPACE, SPORT AND RECREATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND AUDIT

The Cabinet has been acquainted with the key findings of the Open Space, Sport and Recreational Needs

Assessment which reviewed the District's informal open space, outdoor recreational facilities, allotments and children's play areas. At the same time, the Cabinet has approved a series of new standards for each area as interim policy for use when negotiating contributions from developers towards open space or when considering the future provision of open space funded from other sources.

PLANNING FOR GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION

A consultation paper issued by the East of England Assembly entitled "Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation East of England: Issues and Options" has been considered by the Cabinet.

Having requested that clarification be sought over the reference in the document to the extension of the current site in St. Neots, the Cabinet has authorised the Heads of Planning Services and of Housing Services to respond to the paper on their behalf.

The Overview and Scrutiny (Service Support) Panel raised concerns over the number of areas where planning issues had arisen and at the practice of those authorities who have chosen to locate sites close to Huntingdonshire boundaries. Cabinet were therefore asked to consider these concerns and recommended that liaison should take place with neighbouring authorities to avoid sites being established near district boundaries.

REVIEW OF SMALL SCALE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS GRANT SCHEME

Subject to some minor amendments, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has approved the

final report of the Small Scale Environmental Improvements Scheme Working Group. The Panel have noted the Working Groups' activities, which culminated in a series of site visits, where applications for funding have been made for various scales of projects. The Panel also has been acquainted with the Groups' key findings in relation to the Council's Corporate Objectives and Community Aims, arrangements for involving town and parish councils and the scheme's criteria.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Services Delivery) has drawn the Cabinet's attention to the findings of the study and having discussed their recommendations, the Cabinet has authorised the Director of Operational Services, after consultation with the Group and the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Environment and Transport to prepare an amended scheme.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE PLAY STRATEGY

The contents of a Play Strategy and associated action plan have been approved by the Cabinet prior to their submission to the National Lottery Board for funding to create, improve and develop children and young people's play spaces locally. The strategy includes a proposal to establish a play partnership with representatives from both the statutory and voluntary sectors.

APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATIONS

Details of applications received for dispensations to allow Members of Colne, Ellington, Great Gransden, Huntingdon, St Neots and Upwood &

The Raveleys Town and Parish Councils to discuss and vote on matters relating to particular circumstances in their parishes have been considered by the Standards Committee.

With one exception where details relating to Huntingdon Town Council were not sufficiently clear – dispensations were granted in all cases for the period ending 30th April 2011. The Committee reiterated their unease at granting dispensations in situations where all Members of a Town/Parish Council served as trustees to a community facility so, to overcome conflicts of interest, the Monitoring Officer has suggested to the Parishes involved that they might wish to explore ways of changing their trustee arrangements to encourage people other than Councillors to become trustees.

TRAINING ISSUES

The Standards Committee have endorsed the approach to be taken by the Monitoring Officer towards the training of District, Town and Parish Councillors on the new Code of Conduct. At the request of the Committee, the Monitoring Officer will seek to establish, after 1st October 2007, that all Town and Parish Councils in Huntingdonshire have adopted the new Model Code of Conduct.

DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

At the July and August meetings, the Development Control Panel has approved sixteen and refused five applications. Amongst those applications approved was one for the construction of a car park on the site of the Depot at Bridge Place, Godmanchester. In response to representations from the local Town and County Councillors, the Panel has

acknowledged the importance of the creation of a 'toucan' crossing opposite the car park and requested County Councillors to lobby the Area Joint Committee for completion of this scheme in conjunction with the development of the car park.

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL: PROGRESS REPORT

As part of their regular monitoring of the activities of the Development Control Team in the Planning Division, the Development Control Panel has noted that over the quarter 1st April to 30th June 2007, 576 applications had been received, an increase of 32 over the same period last year. Of these, 448 had been determined indicating a slight backlog of cases. However, national performance targets for the determination of major, minor and other applications continue to be met.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 – FORWARD PLAN

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has requested sight of the Local Economy Strategy before it is submitted to the Cabinet.

REVIEW OF SMALL SCALE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS GRANT SCHEME

ADOPTION OF ROADS AND SEWERS

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has considered background information on a study in to the adoption of roads and sewers. This appears to be a national problem and often arises from a lack of communication between local authorities and developers. Particular attention has been given to recent building regulations, which include

sewers, setting an industry standard together with the procedure, legal agreements and timescales for the adoption process.

Having noted ongoing problems encountered by Officers and Members when investigating reasons for the potential causes of delay or disruption to the adoption of various roads and sewers, the Panel has established a working group comprising Councillors J D Ablewhite, D A Giles, Mrs C A Godley and P K Ursell, to undertake a review on the process with the aim of putting measures in place that will streamline the process and make the procedures more transparent, initially by investigating the introduction of a district-wide register of unadopted roads and sewers.

investigate the use of smaller area consultation groups involving all tiers of local government in the process.

A working group has been established comprising Councillors K J Churchill, P J Downes and Mrs M Banerjee to discuss the concept of local area forums, together with potential subject areas, for discussion at a future meeting of the Panel.

STATE OF THE DISTRICT CONFERENCE

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has looked at the feasibility of introducing a State of the District conference by reviewing the findings of an investigation into how other local authorities engage with their communities.

The Panel has noted that a similar exercise was undertaken by the Corporate Governance Panel in 2005 and the responses to a consultation with Members on the subject at that time. Generally few councillors supported a proposal to hold a State of the District conference; however, the view has been expressed that the existing debate would benefit from improved publicity.

Members have acknowledged the difficulty in engaging the public, particularly on a district-wide level and, as a result, the Panel is keen to