
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Support)

**Report of the meetings held on 9th October and
13th November 2007**

Matters for Information

20. CAR PARKING STRATEGY: DRAFT ACTION PLAN

The Panel has received a presentation and report detailing the Council's proposed Car Parking Strategy Action Plan following the work undertaken by the Members' Car Parking Strategy Working Group. Members were acquainted with the short, medium and long-term measures identified for each of the market towns to address the issues contained in a study commissioned from consultants.

The Panel raised a number of questions relating to commuter parking, alternative car parking provision to offset that lost by the closure of the car park at Pathfinder House, new ticket machines and methods of payment, the adequacy of the incentives proposed for use of cars with low emissions, the development of an improved working relationship with rail and bus operators and the possibility of establishing a park and ride facility at Hartford to access the guided bus service in St. Ives. Further concerns were expressed by Members regarding the potential impact that the introduction of parking charges at Riverside Car Park, Huntingdon, would have on nearby residential streets. The Panel discussed the need for further consideration to be given to the operation of residential permits/parking and thought that the proposed nine hours maximum parking period in Huntingdon to align with that at the railway station was too short. The Panel also felt that it would be inequitable for certain charges to be imposed at Riverside Car Park in Huntingdon but not at Riverside Car Park in St. Neots.

As a result, the Panel has requested the Cabinet to invite the Car Parking Strategy Working Group to consider and undertake further investigative work on the following matters prior to approval of the draft Action Plan and commencement of the public consultation exercise –

- ◆ the offer of incentives sufficient to motivate drivers to purchase vehicles with green low-vehicle emission rates (for example, free parking for a narrower group of vehicles available to all users and not just season ticket holder residents);

- ◆ that the time related charge of nine hours be extended to at least ten or eleven hours which should still be of sufficient length to deter rail commuters from parking in town centre car parks;
- ◆ that it be made clear where the surplus income generated by increased parking charges would be spent, given the target within the existing strategy to use this to encourage “integrated, sustainable and accessible” transport;
- ◆ that the long and medium term opportunities offered by the new guided bus be investigated eg. the possibility of a park and ride at Huntingdon and the benefits which might accrue from the award of grant to Cambridgeshire County Council from the Transport Innovation Fund;
- ◆ how the overspill of car parking in the residential roads of Huntingdon would be managed following the imposition of charges in the Riverside and other car parks in Huntingdon;
- ◆ whether the suggestion in Option 1 that a residents car parking permit in town centres should be priced at £40 was sufficient to encourage residents to consider whether it was necessary to have a car when living in a town centre location as opposed to using other forms of transport; and
- ◆ how a charge for long stay car parking in Riverside Car Park, Huntingdon could be justified when no similar charge was recommended for the Riverside Car Park in St. Neots.

21. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Panel has received a report summarising the progress made to date by the authority against the priority objectives identified in “Growing Success” the Corporate Plan adopted by the Council earlier in the year. In the ensuing debate, the Panel was informed that, although the responsible transport authority was the County Council, the District Council could still contribute towards the reduction of car journeys by influencing the Market Towns Transport Strategy through its membership of the Huntingdonshire Traffic Management Area Joint Committee and via Section 106 funding arising from developments in the towns. Following the success of the IWA Festival, the Panel has expressed its wish to see increased partnership working and the development of opportunities that would benefit local businesses.

22. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY: INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

The Panel has noted the outcome of an audit undertaken by the consultants Deloitte and Touche Public Sector of the Council's performance against its overview and scrutiny function.

Although areas of strength had been commended by the consultants, the Panel were advised of four issues that needed to be addressed relating to agreed timescales for the conclusion of studies, the linking of studies to the Council's strategic objectives, the establishment of formal terms of reference for studies and the need for Members to declare interests when participating in study groups. The Panel has agreed the actions required to meet the risks identified and introduced a template for capturing the information required in current and future studies.

23. CORPORATE PLAN WORKING GROUP

The Panel has appointed Councillor R G Tuplin to the Corporate Plan Working Group in place of Councillor D B Dew.

**24. CALL CENTRE QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE:
JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2007**

The Panel has received a quarterly performance report on the Council's Call Centre for the period July to September 2007 and discussed the reasons for the higher than anticipated call volumes in September with the change in refuse collection days coinciding with the Oxmoor fly tipping campaign. A high volume of calls extended to October with over 1,000 calls for concessionary bus passes alone.

Having regard to the need for Officers to improve communication with customer facing services when major changes or initiatives were taking place, the Panel has suggested that procedures are introduced that the Call Centre, Customer Service Centre and Document Centre be advised in advance in such circumstances.

Having regard to the length of time that the call centres now have been operational, the Panel decided that the performance monitoring report should be submitted to future meetings every six months but the information still collated on a quarterly basis.

25. CORE STRATEGY PREFERRED OPTIONS

The present position with regard to the adoption of the Core Strategy as part of the Local Development Framework has been explained to the Panel and a Preferred Options report submitted in advance of its approval by Cabinet for public consultation.

With regard to the projected scale of growth in the District, the Panel has been advised that all local planning authorities have been challenged by Government to deliver housing growth in excess of the targets set and in drafting the Core Strategy, Officers had attempted to be realistic in their approach which would enable a more robust defence to be made against inappropriate sites and provide an opportunity to address infrastructure deficits in those areas where growth is planned. With regard to the key service centres and smaller settlements in the District, the Panel also has been informed that some limited development and rural exception sites will be accommodated which similarly will enable infrastructure issues to be addressed.

In commending the Head of Planning Services and his staff for the effort in managing the volume and complexity of the work involved in producing the Core Strategy document, the Panel has expressed its support for the recommendations to be submitted to Cabinet.

26. AFFORDABLE HOUSING SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

The Panel has endorsed the contents of a proposed Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on Developer Contributions Towards Affordable Housing as part of the Local Development Framework. The document provides for an affordable housing level of 40% in the Cambridge sub-region compared to a figure of 35% in the East of England Regional Plan and 29% elsewhere in the District.

The methodology for the proposed levels has been explained to the Panel and the significance of the exercise to update the Housing Needs Assessment for the District. Noting the restraints imposed by national planning policy, particularly in relation to the exemption provided to small sites in larger settlements, the Panel has supported the recommendations to Cabinet but has asked that a copy of the final Housing Needs Assessment be circulated to the Panel Members when this becomes available.

27. ON-LINE PETITIONS: PROCEDURAL IMPLICATIONS

Further to Item No. 16 of their Report to the Council meeting held on 26th February 2007, the Panel has reviewed the constitutional implications of introducing an on-line petition facility on the Council's website. The Panel has recommended that, subject to certain criteria being met, on-line petitions should be dealt with in the same manner as petitions submitted in a traditional format and will be submitting recommendations to both the Corporate Governance Panel and Cabinet on the use of electronic communication to engage with the public.

28. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel has discussed its work plan and noted the progress made to date with the Travel Plan, Cycling, Parish Charter and Town Centre Initiatives Working Groups. The Panel has also requested preliminary work to be undertaken on issues relating to HGV parking throughout the District in preparation for a proposed future study.

29. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE SUPPORT) – PROGRESS

The Panel has been apprised of progress on actions required as a result of previous decisions.

30. FORWARD PLAN

The Panel has been acquainted with details of the forward plan of forthcoming key decisions prepared by the Leader of the Council. In so doing, Members have identified a number of items for consideration at future meetings and have been updated on the likely dates for consideration of those reports previously requested.

J A Gray
Chairman