
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery)

**Report of the meetings held on 2nd October and
6th November 2007**

Matters for Information

12. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Panel has reviewed the Council's performance against the priorities contained in "Growing Success" – the Council's Corporate Plan that fall within its remit. Members have been reminded that the Council continues to monitor its performance against all of its aims and objectives and details are available if required.

With regard to the Council's homelessness objectives, attention has been drawn to the risks that might hinder the provision of affordable housing. Members have requested that future reports include the number and proportion of housing completions on qualifying sites that are affordable.

13. MARKET UPDATE 2006/07

The Panel has received updated information on the District's markets. Additional information on the markets budget and on the Ramsey market has been requested. The Panel has decided not to undertake any further study work in this area.

14. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

In conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support), the Panel has been acquainted with the findings of an internal audit report on Overview and Scrutiny. Attention has been drawn to the overall conclusion that the Overview and Scrutiny function at the Council is performing well and suggested recommendations for improvements.

The Panel has approved amendments to the study template which are intended to address the identified audit actions.

15. A SUSTAINABLE LOCAL ECONOMY STRATEGY FOR HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The Panel has reviewed the draft Sustainable Local Economy Strategy for Huntingdonshire. The overall aim is to develop a

strategy that could contribute towards achieving 20,000 additional jobs that are needed in the District in the period to 2021 in line with the draft Regional Spatial Strategy.

The Panel has discussed each of the six strategic priorities in detail, which have been developed to focus future activities. With regard to the outcome of providing Business Support, Members have commented on the need for the Council to support the installation of infrastructure facilities in areas of land identified for industrial development in order to make them more attractive to businesses and on the need to promote existing sites for development. It has been suggested that older units should be refurbished for this purpose.

Members have been informed that the 20,000 new jobs will be in addition to the 68,000 existing jobs in the District. Members have requested that they are kept informed of changes to the designation of industrial land for planning purposes. In addition they are of the opinion that there is unmet demand for “move on” premises and that small companies need support to make the transition.

The Panel has noted that the Physical Infrastructure Development strategic priority refers to the importance of ensuring that infrastructure requirements are reflected in the Regional Spatial Strategy and, in particular, that there is a need for an effective transport network.

In respect of the Skill Development strategic priority, Members have commented that, in addition to providing training, priority housing also should be provided for key workers. Having been acquainted with an example of how similar assistance has been provided to a company which relocated to the District, Members have noted that the Regional College consults industry on its training needs and has developed courses to support creative industries.

The Panel has been informed of the objectives of the Town Centre Support and the Visitor Development strategic priorities. With regard to the latter, Members have requested and received details of the sub-regional approach it is intended to adopt. A regional brand will be developed and a Tourism Officer for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will be appointed and managed by the District Council to support partners across the County to deliver projects for the benefit of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

The final strategic priority covers the industry sectors it is intended to promote. The Panel has identified a need for planning policies to allow diversification in the use of redundant buildings in rural areas for this purpose and for measures to attract industries, including assistance with start-up, transfer and technical matters. Members have outlined their views on the desirability of providing adequate and sufficient services to serve the increased population. An extra 10,000 jobs are currently needed locally to balance the levels of inward and outward commuting to and from the District.

In the context of recent job losses in manufacturing in St. Neots, the Panel has stated that particular emphasis should be placed in this area by encouraging new types of industry, building housing and resisting the re-designation of industrial sites for residential purposes.

The Strategy and Action Plan will be submitted to the Panel in the New Year for further consideration.

16. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP SCRUTINY

The Panel has discussed the scrutiny of the Local Strategic Partnership. Members have been informed that the Community Strategy and Strategic Partnership structure are in the process of being reviewed. Having been informed that national studies have stressed the importance of involving Councillors in the process, the Panel has recognised the need for Executive Councillors to be involved at all levels of the Strategic Partnership and for it to be scrutinised. As a result, it has been agreed that the Corporate Plan Working Group will monitor the Strategic Partnership's progress and that reports on the allocation of funding by the Partnership will be received by the Panel as appropriate.

17. WORKING GROUPS

(a) Youth Forum

The final report of the Youth Forum Working Group had been submitted to the Panel.

The Working Group had been tasked with reviewing a suggestion, put forward under the review of the Council's Constitution, that the Council should consider introducing a District youth forum. Having examined the matter in detail, the Working Group has not identified a need to introduce a forum at the present time. Members' attention has been drawn to ongoing bids for funding and the successful Partnership Action in Rural Communities project. Work in this area generally is dependant on external funding continuing.

Having expressed the view that session workers are essential for Town and Parish Councils, Members have been acquainted with the timetable for a number of funding bids to be considered.

In endorsing the Working Group's recommendations, the Panel has decided:

- ◆ that the Corporate Governance Panel should be recommended to note the work being undertaken to involve young people and not to introduce a Youth Forum at this time but to remain open to re-considering this as and when circumstances permit;

- ◆ that the promotion of the Countywide model for involving children and young people in decision-making should be supported;
- ◆ that the submission of a bid for funding to the National Volunteering Charity “V” for work with 16-24 year olds should be supported;
- ◆ that the bid to the Local Public Service Agreement Board Reward Money for funding for developing strategic work, including how the involvement of children and young people can be embedded into the work of organisations and coordinating/promoting partnership working, should be supported;
- ◆ that the recommendation that application is made to the Local Public Service Agreement Board for funding to provide training for members of Town and Parish Councils on involving young people and to provide “session” workers to support Town and Parish Councils should be supported;
- ◆ that quarterly reports should be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) on the outcomes of the Council’s engagement work with children and young people;
- ◆ that measures to raise awareness of current work in this field should be supported; and
- ◆ that a progress report should be submitted to the Panel in 12 months time.

(b) State of the District Consultation

The Panel has received a progress report by the State of the District Consultation Working Group. Members’ attention has been drawn to the potential benefits of holding consultation events and a suggestion that a trial is held. They have endorsed a suggestion that the Working Group should look at using different consultation methods as part of the trial.

(c) Adoption of Roads and Sewers

The Panel has received an update on the work of the Adoption of the Roads and Sewers Working Group.

18. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) – PROGRESS

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies at each of its meetings. Members have requested details of the decision by the Cabinet in respect of the study on Promoting Better Health in Older People Through Physical Activity. They also have requested that information might usefully be obtained from Directions Plus and from the Papworth Trust on the study on disability access.

Other Matters of Interest

19. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 – FORWARD PLAN

The Panel has been acquainted with details of the relevant Forward Plan of Key Decisions at its meetings. Members will consider items on Migrant Workers in Huntingdonshire, the Consultation and Engagement Strategy and Decent Homes for Vulnerable People in the Private Sector at future meetings.

20. SCRUTINY

The Panel has considered the latest editions of the Decision Digest and received answers to queries on matters contained therein.

S J Criswell
Chairman