

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 26th November to 21st December 2007

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000: FORWARD PLAN**

A special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) will be held in February to consider the Consultation Engagement Strategy, Communication and Marketing Strategy and revised Customer Service Strategy.

### **MONITORING OF SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has been updated on the receipt and expenditure of money negotiated under Section 106 agreements by the Council. The Panel expressed concerns regarding the lack of clarity involved in the distribution and allocation of Section 106 funding and expressed disappointment over the time taken to expend money received and the lack of any individual expenditure on schemes over the past quarter. With regard to the former, the Panel were advised that a meeting with the Leader of the Council and Officers would be held to review the current process, with a view to making changes to encourage greater transparency and establish clearer responsibilities and better communication with Ward Members.

### **LOCAL PROCUREMENT REVIEW**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has been acquainted

with the outcome of a review of local procurement that has been undertaken to monitor the actions agreed at a previous meeting held between Panel representatives and the local business community. The Panel were encouraged that a positive and constructive discussion had taken place and that a number of further measures had been agreed to facilitate the awareness of local businesses in future Council contracts and to improve opportunities for local procurement.

### **THE VALIDATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS – STANDARDISATION OF PLANNING APPLICATION FORMS**

The Development Control Panel has been informed that the Government proposes to introduce, with effect from 6th April 2008, a new national application form for planning permission to be known as IAPP. In addition to mandatory requirements, it is recommended that any additional information should be specified by inclusion in 'local lists' drawn from a nationally defined list but of relevance to particular locations ie flood risk assessments. IAPP will be available online, and in its electronic format would determine the scope of planning consents required thus reducing the possibility of an invalid application. In accordance with the necessary process for adoption, the Panel has endorsed the content of the suggested "local list" for consultation with relevant

stakeholders with a view to implementation of the new arrangements as close as possible to 6th April.

### **USE OF RESOURCES JUDGEMENTS 2006/07**

The Standards Committee has undertaken its annual survey of Code of Conduct complaints by type, locality and outcome and the training activity undertaken or planned to address any shortcomings identified. The survey is undertaken in response to a requirement identified by the Audit Commission. The Committee concluded that there did not appear to be any commonalities in the cases considered by the Standards Board which required to be addressed specifically. However, the Monitoring Officer has been asked to consider initiating a register to monitor/record Code of Conduct enquiries received, the nature of the enquiry and advice given.

### **CODE OF CONDUCT – STANDARDS BOARD NOTIFICATION**

The Standards Committee has noted a decision of the Standards Board not to take any further action in relation to allegations made against Councillors serving on Catworth and Earith Parish Councils.

### **TRAINING UPDATE**

Arising from a report on the response by District, Town and Parish Councillors to training sessions held on the new Code of Conduct, the Standards Committee has requested that further sessions be held for those parishes in the north of the District and for the 12 District Councillors who had not yet received training.

### **DISABILITY ACCESS STUDY**

As part of an ongoing study, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has reviewed responses received from Town and Parish Councils to a questionnaire on access for those with disabilities to premises, facilities and other sites in the District. The Panel has decided that the precise location of defective dropped kerbs and areas where dropped kerbs should be installed and their priority should be obtained from those Town and Parish Councils that had responded to the survey. This information will be forwarded to the County Council either for action or identification of those areas that do not fall within its remit and Town and Parish Councils will be informed accordingly. A similar exercise will be carried out on parking practices within the District, with the findings being forwarded to the Police for comment.

In addition, investigation is to be undertaken into the existence of a disability "blue" route scheme that was implemented by the Council in previous years.

With regard to public transport services, comments concerning the need for low level buses and training for public transport employees on the needs of those with disabilities are to be forwarded to bus operators. A suggestion that those who care for individuals with disabilities should be provided with free bus travel is to be referred to the County Council.

The Panel will consider potential consultees representing local disability groups in order to establish a list of individuals and bodies to consult on Council practices on services.

A representative of Directions Plus is to be invited to a future meeting to assist in the discussions on the study.

### **STATE OF THE DISTRICT CONSULTATION WORKING GROUP**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has noted progress by the State of the District Consultation Working Group. Members have expressed concern that significant numbers of members of the public are unlikely to attend four public meetings. Given the cost of advertising and hiring venues it is felt that initially only one of the area consultation events should be held in order to determine the level of public interest in such an event.

### **PROMOTING HEALTH IN OLDER PEOPLE THROUGH PHYSICAL EXERCISE**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has requested the Working Group that undertook the study on Promoting Better Health in Older People through Physical Exercise to meet to consider the Cabinet's request for further information and the Vice-Chairman's interest in pursuing further a number of matters raised in the course of the study.

### **GROWING SUCCESS**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has been informed of a request by the Cabinet that the views of the Corporate Plan Working Group be incorporated into future reports on the Council's performance under "Growing Success". Members have concurred with the suggestion that Panel's own comments should be forwarded to the Cabinet rather than

those of the Corporate Plan Working Group.

### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) - PROGRESS**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel has been acquainted with progress of the Environment Strategy, the Road and Sewers Working Group and the Grants Working Group.

### **CALCULATION OF COUNCIL TAX BASE 2008/09**

In accordance with the legal requirement placed on the Council, the Corporate Governance Panel has set the tax base for the whole of the District for the year 2008/09 as 57,785 with figures apportioned for each Parish of the District.

### **INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE – CHANGING REPORTING PERIODS**

The Corporate Governance Panel has accepted a suggestion that the Internal Audit Service reporting period should be changed. The new reporting period now will be August to July, which is the same as that for the Corporate Governance Statement. An audit plan for the four months to July 2008 will be presented to the March meeting of the Panel.

### **REVIEW OF THE ANTI-FRAUD AND CORRUPTION STRATEGY**

The Corporate Governance Panel has been informed of the outcome of a review of the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy. The review has identified a number of

recommended changes principally arising from fraud legislation.

The Panel has discussed whether the Strategy should refer to Members and have concluded that all matters concerning Members should instead be dealt with under the Code of Conduct. Having approved a revised version of the Strategy, Members have discussed the means by which Members, employees and the public will be informed of the changes to the Strategy.

### **THE USE OF ONLINE MEDIA – PROCEDURAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Corporate Governance Panel has recommended that the necessary changes are made to the Constitution to enable the public to submit online petitions to the Council.

In the event of an online petition not having the requisite number of signatories or the organiser not being prepared to present it to the Council, the petition will be submitted for consideration to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel, subject to the petition containing the names and addresses of at least ten persons who live, work or own property in the District.

Should an excessive number of petitions be organised by any one individual, the Panel will need to consider amending the vexatious complaints procedure to cover online petitions.

### **REVIEW OF CONSTITUTION**

The Corporate Governance Panel has noted a recommendation by the

Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) that a District Youth Forum should not be established at this time.

### **TREASURY MANAGEMENT INVESTMENT PERFORMANCE**

The Cabinet has reviewed the respective levels of performance achieved by Fund Managers during the quarter 1st July to 30 September 2007, in managing the investment of the Council's capital receipts. At the same time and whilst discussing the provisional 2008/11 revenue support grant settlement announced by the Government and the implications for the authority, the Cabinet has reiterated the need to review critically all budgets and medium term plan schemes.

The Cabinet has agreed to release funding from the medium term plan for 3 schemes relating to the Huntingdon and St Neots Leisure Centres. The schemes include the re-surfacing of the synthetic pitch and the replacement of the dry side boiler plant at St Neots Leisure Centre. Whilst at Huntingdon Leisure Centre repairs are to be made to the pool roof which has been experiencing poor environmental conditions during the winter months over the past few years.

On the dual-use agreement for the Centres, the County Council has agreed to make a contribution of 26.15% towards all agreed schemes within the Centres' condition survey.

**ANIMAL WELFARE ACT 2006**

The Cabinet has been acquainted with the new powers and duties created by the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Whilst the Act extends the powers of the Cabinet to deal with animal welfare issues, Executive Councillors have expressed concern that no direct additional funding was likely to be made available by the Government to assist in its implementation.

In adopting the powers set out in the Act, the Cabinet has authorised the Director of Operational Services and Head of Environmental and Community Health Services to appoint Officers as Inspectors and to initiate legal proceedings. The Cabinet has also agreed to give appointed Officers authority to exercise all powers set out in the Act in the course of their duties.

**HUNTINGDON CONSERVATION AREA**

Approval has been given by the Cabinet to a draft Character Statement and Boundary Review for the Huntingdon Conservation Area which will be used to guide decisions on planning matters to ensure that the character and appearance of the area is not diminished. The Development Control Panel also has indicated its support for the content of the documents.

**RISK REGISTER**

The Cabinet has been made aware of the implications of any potential delay in the construction of the new

A14 on the long-term economic, environmental and social development of the District which has been identified in the Council's Risk Action Plan as high risk. In so doing, the Cabinet has acknowledged the need to continue to lobby for a start on the scheme.