

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 2nd January to 1st February 2008

CAR PARKING STRATEGY AND REVISED PARKING CHARGES

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has had further discussion on car parking within the District in the light of the revised draft of the action plan addressing the recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) and Cabinet at their October 2007 meetings. The Panel has been informed of a consultation exercise carried out by the Working Party to obtain the views of relevant stakeholders. The Panel has questioned the broadness of the consultation and did not feel that the action plan was sufficiently ambitious to produce a noticeable impact when motorists consider emissions on buying their next car. The Panel has expressed disappointment that of the recommendations made, only one appears to have been adopted – that relating to the extension of the long-stay period in car parks from nine hours to ten before the charge was increased to deter commuters. After much discussion, the Panel acknowledges that in order to progress the matter, the action plan should be implemented but reviewed with immediate effect. In the mean time, the Cabinet have been requested to note –

- that the Panel have no objection to the implementation of the action plan to enable changes to car parking charges in Huntingdonshire to be implemented;

- the Panel's disappointment over the Working Party's retention of 25% reduction in season ticket charges for low emission vehicles and its serious reservation that this will not have the significant impact desired;
- the panel's view that any surplus income generated through increased car parking charges be spent in accordance with the current strategy; and
- the Panel's recommendation that a further review of the car parking strategy be commenced immediately after the existing changes have been implemented.

EQUALITY CHARTER FOR GROWTH IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE

A draft Quality Charter document on Growth in Cambridgeshire has been endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support). The document has been compiled by Cambridgeshire Horizons through joint working with a range of partners and identifies how to achieve higher standards in the new housing developments that are planned for Cambridgeshire. Having raised issues regarding the consistency of the geographical terminology used, the Panel has requested the Head of Planning Services to raise these issues with Cambridgeshire Horizons.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DESIGN GUIDE REVIEW: PILOT PROJECT

The Development Control Panel has approved a procedure and methodology for a Huntingdonshire Design Review. This will involve the undertaking of a pilot project for a trial period of twelve months which will review completed development to identify any areas where the planning application and design process might have been improved to secure, for the future, a higher quality of development in the District. In the first instance, a team comprising Panel Members and Officers will consider four completed developments in Huntingdon on sites at Watersmeet, the Model Library, Royal Oak Passage and Saunders Garage, Ermine Street and report back to a future meeting. The review process will be applied to completed developments in other towns/villages in due course.

CONSULTATION ON ORDERS AND REGULATIONS RELATING TO THE CONDUCT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY MEMBERS IN ENGLAND

The Standards Committee has approved a suggested response to a consultation paper published by the Department of Communities and Local Government entitled "Orders and Regulations Relating to the Conduct of Local Authority Members in England". The consultation focuses primarily on local authority standards committees becoming responsible for assessing allegations of misconduct against councillors and makes suggestions as to how the regime could operate via appropriate regulations and orders under the Local Government Act 2000, as amended.

MIGRANT WORKERS IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has received a presentation by the Community Manager on Migrant Workers in Huntingdonshire. Members have been informed of recent increases in migrant workers arriving in new areas of the Country and specifically in Huntingdonshire; however, as data is difficult to obtain, the figures have been treated cautiously. Members' attention has been drawn to the key areas of activity for the District Council regarding migrant workers and the additional financial burden on Councils in a number of service areas for which no additional funding is available.

In the discussion, Members have been informed of the remit and work of the Cambridgeshire Migrant Workers Network which comprises agencies that engage with migrant workers. The Panel also has discussed migrants' entitlement to benefits and noted that only limited benefits are available.

Having discussed the effect of migrant workers on local businesses and the economy, Members have discussed the language and accommodation problems migrant workers experience and the cessation of funding for the Regional College for language courses. With regard to the latter, the Panel has suggested that the Local Strategic Partnership should lobby the Government for Cambridgeshire to become an English for Speakers of Other Languages targeted area.

The Panel has commented on the need for improved recognition of migrant workers' qualifications and for partner organisations to refer un-registered workers to other appropriate agencies. The Citizens Advice Bureau is one of the most active organisations working with migrant workers and it has

incurred additional resource burdens as a result of language difficulties which prolong client interviews. On a related matter, the Migrant Gateway, amongst other services, provides interpreters for employers.

ENHANCED CLEANSING SERVICES: PILOT STUDY

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has reviewed the current arrangements for cleansing in the District and options to increase service levels in St. Ives. Members have been reminded of the background to a study on the subject and been provided with a detailed explanation of the options. In particular, reference has been made to the street cleansing standards the Council has adopted and the current financial constraints on the Council.

The Panel has discussed the cleanliness of the District's town centres as a result of the Saturday night time economy and the adverse effect of litter on Sunday trade and tourism. Members have noted the financial implications for the Council of providing a full cleansing service on Sundays principally arising from its health and safety responsibilities. Given the levels of litter in towns on Sundays, Members have expressed general support for the introduction of a full cleansing service on every day of the week. A further report on this has been requested for the Panel's meeting in March.

DISABILITY ACCESS STUDY

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has been acquainted with progress of the study on disability access. With regard to a list of potential organisations to consult on the Council's policies, it has been suggested that each should be asked

whether they would be prepared to assist the Council in this way.

PATIENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT FORUMS: ANNUAL REPORT

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has received and noted the Patient and Public Involvement Forum's Annual Report 2006/07 National Summary. It has been decided to await the establishment of Local Improvement Networks before considering whether to undertake any studies on health matters.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) - PROGRESS

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has been acquainted with progress of its ongoing studies. Members have accepted a suggestion that Councillor D Harty should continue on the Older Persons' Working Group until the study is concluded.

FINANCIAL STRATEGY, MEDIUM TERM PLAN 2009 – 2013 AND BUDGET 2008/09

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) has reviewed the Financial Strategy, Medium Term Plan (MTP) 2009 – 2013 and the budget and Council Tax for 2008/09 in advance of their consideration by the Cabinet and final determination by the Council. Members have been acquainted with the process involved in developing the Financial Strategy in the current year and the Government's grant settlement and its approach to Council Tax levels.

The Panel has been informed of Executive Councillors' involvement in developing the proposals contained in

the report and the rationale for changing the procedure for approving expenditure. The Panel has endorsed the proposed change.

With regard to the proposed level of Council Tax for 2008/09, the Panel has discussed the Government's expectations and the approach taken by other Councils. As a result and following discussion on the mechanism by which the Council's grant is determined, Members have expressed support for Option B which represents an increase of £5.48 (4.99%) in Band D equivalent Council Tax in 2008/09. Having discussed a number of other items for inclusion, Members also have expressed support for the proposed budget and MTP.