
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Support)

**Report of the meetings held on 12th and
20th February and 11th March 2008**

Matters for Information

38. CAR PARKING STRATEGY

Following publication of the Cabinet's decision on 31st January 2008 regarding the development of a Car Parking Strategy Action Plan, the Panel called-in the matter for further consideration. The Panel was concerned and disappointed that its previous recommendations had not been accepted by the Cabinet and, at the Panel's invitation, Councillors I C Bates and P L Bucknell as Leader of the Council and appropriate Executive Councillor respectively attended the meeting when the call in was discussed. The Panel felt that the Cabinet should have adopted a more innovative approach to car parking and introduced greater incentives to encourage motorists to purchase and use low emission vehicles.

Following a wide ranging discussion, the Panel agreed that the decisions of the Cabinet on the Car Parking Action Plan should be referred back to the Cabinet for further consideration. In so doing, the Panel made the following recommendations in relation to incentives for low emission vehicles, the ring-fencing of surplus income and the commencement of the review of the Car Parking Action Plan -

- ◆ that a proposal to permit free parking for vehicles with CO² emissions of 120g/km or less in all Council car parks be introduced in the forthcoming car parking order;
- ◆ that the wider issues of encouraging the use of low emission vehicles be dealt with in the forthcoming Environment Strategy and in the next review of the car parking action plan;
- ◆ that the current inconsistency in the Car Parking Strategy vis-à-vis Council policy in terms of the ring-fencing of surplus income from car parking charges for integrated, sustainable and accessible transport be removed;
- ◆ that the car parking action plan proposals be implemented during the forthcoming summer; and
- ◆ that a review of the car parking action plan be commenced with effect from January 2009 to enable the impact of the forthcoming changes to be assessed for six months following their implementation.

The Panel also agreed to accept an invitation by the Leader of the Council for a representative of the Panel to consider with the appropriate Executive Councillor and relevant Officers the initial scoping of the next review of the car parking action plan.

The Panel's deliberations were considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 21st February 2008, details of which are set out in its Report to this meeting (Item No. 75 refers).

Subsequently a Notice of Motion submitted by seven Executive Councillors enabled the Cabinet to reconsider its decision in respect of the introduction of car parking charges. In advance of the Cabinet meeting, the Executive Councillor outlined a revised charging structure which was considered by the Panel at its meeting in March, when the Panel asked for further consideration of the proposed differential between the two hour/three hour charge in the "inner car parks" and the retention of a 50p charge for one hour on-street parking. The Panel reiterated its frustration with the situation whereby the policy contained in the car parking strategy for ring-fencing income from car parking conflicts with the Cabinet's recent decision and requested again that the anomaly be rectified to remove any confusion. The Panel also reiterated that it wished to encourage the Cabinet to consider the issues raised during the current debate as part of the review of the Action Plan.

39. PETITION BY ST. AUDREY LANE RESIDENTS, ST. IVES

A petition signed by 26 people has been presented to the Panel drawing attention to problems experienced by residents in the vicinity of St. Audrey Lane, St. Ives in times of heavy rainfall. The Panel has been informed that, in times of even moderate rainfall, the foul sewerage system backs up and discharges in gardens and inside houses.

Having regard to the discussions which have taken place to date with Anglian Water and in light of the difficulty in identifying the cause of the incidents and how this can be rectified, the Panel has asked for its concern to be conveyed to Anglian Water and for a report to be submitted outlining the respective responsibilities of the relevant agencies with a view to inviting a representative from Anglian Water to attend a future meeting to discuss the matter further.

40. SPEAKING AT DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PANEL MEETINGS

The Panel has considered the procedure for public speaking at meetings of the Development Control Panel which was implemented in January 2007 with the intention of the process being reviewed after twelve months.

The Panel feels that the system, which was introduced after a Scrutiny Panel investigation, has been successful in engaging the public in the decision making process on development control applications. However, Members were of the opinion that as the process was instigated by the Panel, they should co-ordinate any

review. The Panel has therefore agreed to invite comments from all Members for co-ordination and submission to the Development Control Panel.

A questionnaire will shortly be circulated to all Members for this purpose.

41. FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS TO RIVERSIDE PARK, HUNTINGDON

The content of a draft Management Plan for Huntingdon Riverside Park - Eastern End has been endorsed by the Panel for submission to the Cabinet. (Item No. 77 of their Report refers). The Plan, which will be subject to a wide ranging consultation exercise with residents and other users is intended to provide a co-ordinated approach to a number of changes affecting the park in the coming years.

In view of previous public concerns regarding changes to the football pitches at the park which it was now proposed to replace with two mini-soccer pitches, the Panel has been assured that research has indicated that there is sufficient capacity elsewhere in Huntingdon for full size pitches and that the demand for formal games can be met by the smaller pitches. However, the Panel has suggested that the current proposal for tree planting to separate the two pitches should be withdrawn so that, if the need were to arise, a larger pitch could be reinstated.

42. CYCLING WORKING GROUP

The Panel has received the final report of its Working Group which had been established to investigate the Council's expenditure on cycling in Huntingdonshire and its effectiveness in providing dedicated cycle paths and promoting cycling as a means of transport. In doing so, the Panel has noted that the Group had been unable to establish a clear link between Section 106 contributions for transport and its expenditure on individual cycleway schemes in Huntingdonshire. Arising from the report, the Panel has recommended to the Cabinet -

- ◆ that the offer by the County Council to update the Council's existing Cycling Strategy and to prepare an action plan for its implementation be welcomed and Officers requested to conclude this work within the next six months;
- ◆ that following completion of the strategy and action plan, specific contributions be sought in Section 106 Agreements for cycleway provision in Huntingdonshire in appropriate cases;
- ◆ that such contributions be retained by the District Council for expenditure on implementation of the Cycling Strategy Action Plan;
- ◆ that the District Council seek the allocation of specific funding through the Local Transport Plan for cycleway provision in Huntingdonshire; and

- ◆ that the approval of individual cycleway schemes continue to be the responsibility of the Huntingdonshire Traffic Management Area Joint Committee with District Council expenditure continuing to be allocated on a scheme by scheme basis.

Having subsequently noted the Cabinet's response to its recommendations (Item No. 82 of their Report refers) and its decision to request a further report addressing the wider issues of Section 106 funding and partnership working, the Panel has agreed to delay any response or further action until this has been circulated and discussed.

43. TRAVEL PLAN WORKING GROUP

The Panel has been acquainted with the outcome of the deliberations of its Working Group which had been established to investigate the Council's Travel Plan and the question of travel allowances and incentives/disincentives for Members and Officers to use more environmentally sensitive means of transport. In doing so, the Panel has endorsed the Group's belief that the Council should be innovative in its approach to the question of mileage allowances and that incentives should be made available for employees and Members to reduce the use of, in particular, heavily polluting cars as an example of good practice.

The Panel has subsequently approved the following recommendations for submission to the Cabinet –

- ◆ that an alternative form of mileage allowance be introduced for Members of the Council based upon exhaust emissions;
- ◆ that the new mileage allowance be optional for existing Members but compulsory for all newly elected Members with effect from 1st May 2008;
- ◆ that the Members Independent Remuneration Panel be requested to confirm their agreement to the changes to the mileage allowance for Members;
- ◆ that the necessary changes be made to the Members Allowance Scheme;
- ◆ that employees travelling to work by means of car share be permitted to park in Bridge Park Car Park at a concessionary rate if car parking charges are introduced for that car park by the Council and suitable arrangements be made to enable those who car share to travel home in an emergency if they are left without suitable means of transport;
- ◆ that enquiries continue to be made regarding potential funding for the implementation and publicity of the proposed changes to the mileage allowances to Members;
- ◆ that regular reports be produced highlighting the savings in both emissions and costs to the Council from the use of pool cars; and

- ◆ that further consideration be given to incentives for employees to use public transport, cycling and walking by the Working Group in the future.

Having noted that its recommendations were endorsed by the Cabinet at the meeting on 21st February (Item No. 83 of their Report refers), the Panel has asked the Corporate Governance Panel to consider those recommendations relating to Members Allowances. The Head of Environmental Management has also been invited to consider the implications of the remaining recommendations in conjunction with the preparation of the new Environment Strategy.

44. LOCAL PETITION AND CALLS FOR ACTION

The Panel has been acquainted with the implications for the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function of the Local Government and Public Health Act 2007 and the Police and Justice Act 2006 which are likely to be implemented later this year. Members have been informed that further information will be submitted to the Panel when guidance has been issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The Panel has also considered the content of a consultation paper on local petitions and Councillors' "calls for action" which would enable them to place appropriate items on Committee agenda. In doing so, the Panel has endorsed a suggested response to the consultation subject to a number of specific amendments for incorporation in the reply.

45. CALL CENTRE, QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE: OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2007

The Panel has been acquainted with the Call Centre's quarterly report outlining performance by the service during the period October to December 2007.

The Panel has been pleased to note the recent achievement by the Call Centre team in gaining a Charter Mark in recognition of continuous improvement, value for money and investment in people. Members were also pleased to note that following their earlier comments, the introduction of weekly bulletins have improved communication throughout the Council and have enabled, in some instances, Call Centre staff to receive additional training in preparation for customer queries.

46. MONITORING SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS

The Panel has been updated on the receipt and expenditure of money negotiated under Section 106 Agreements by the Council.

The Panel has noted the concerns of Councillor T D Sanderson regarding the current monitoring of Section 106 Agreements and his view that further clarification and action is required in the expenditure of Section 106 money to prevent delays in the delivery of service. As

a result, Members have noted that the matter is currently being investigated by a number of Divisions throughout the Council in an effort to improve the present arrangements.

In relation to the question of funding for transportation, the Panel has welcomed the fact that a meeting has been arranged between a County Council representative and the District Council's Director of Environmental and Community Services to explore the current situation with regard to Section 106 expenditure.

47. GROWING SUCCESS: PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Council's performance against the targets within the Corporate Plan – "Growing Success" has been reviewed by the Panel.

48. SHARED SERVICES

The Panel has noted progress being made in the development of a shared services initiative by Huntingdonshire, East Cambridgeshire, South Cambridgeshire and Fenland District Councils with the assistance of a grant of £50,000 from the Regional Centre of Excellence.

Having discussed the financial implications of introducing the initiative, Members' attention has been drawn to potential savings to be made as a result of sharing software and the increased resilience of systems and staffing resources.

49. BUILDINGS OF SPECIAL ARCHITECTURAL OR HISTORIC INTEREST

The Panel has been acquainted with the consultation and notification procedure for the listing and de-listing of historic buildings which is currently being reviewed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) with English Heritage recently having become responsible for the administration of the listing system.

In discussing the implications locally for the de-listing of buildings, the Panel has identified a number of issues relating to the Pike and Eel Public House at Needingworth where the special interest of the building had been significantly eroded by numerous extensions and alterations which had meant that it no longer met the criteria for inclusion on the list.

50. TOWN CENTRE INITIATIVES WORKING GROUP

The Panel has been acquainted with the deliberations of its Working Group which had been established to investigate the purpose, cost and achievements of the town centre initiatives across the District.

Having agreed that the work of the Partnerships was extremely beneficial to the District, the Panel has noted their limited financial stability as the District Council's grant is determined on an annual basis which detracts from their ability to achieve their aims and

objectives. With this in mind, the Panel has recommended to the Cabinet that the District Council should enter into a financial agreement with the Partnerships over a five year period with a suitable clause that will enable the Council to terminate the agreement in appropriate circumstances. (Item No. 87 of their Report to Council refers.)

The Panel has also supported a continuation of the District Council provision of direct Officer support to the Partnerships.

51. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel has concluded its studies on the Council's Travel Plan, Cycling in Huntingdonshire and Town Centre initiatives, arising from which recommendations have been made to the Cabinet for their consideration as summarised elsewhere in this report.

In order to progress a number of new issues, the Panel has agreed to establish two Working Groups to investigate aspects of the Council's Section 106 Agreements and Heavy Goods Vehicle parking throughout the District. Members of the former group have been asked to meet with the Leader of the Council to ensure that the work of the Group does not duplicate similar investigations by the Executive. Ideas for future studies will be discussed at the April meeting.

52. 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 doing so, Members have identified a number of items for consideration at future meetings.

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

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

J A Gray
Chairman