

## Decision Digest

Edition 83

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 20<sup>th</sup> March to 30<sup>th</sup> April 2008.

### CHANGES TO THE CODE OF FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The Corporate Governance Panel has recommended the Council to approve a series of changes to the Code of Financial Management.

### ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK AND ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

In endorsing the content of an assurance framework, the Corporate Governance Panel also has noted the progress made to date in respect of the achievement of the action plan supporting the Annual Governance Statement.

### EXTERNAL AUDITOR'S REPORTS

Details of the external auditor's reports on the Council's Data Quality arrangements and Use of Resources for 2006/07 and their respective action plans have been presented to the Corporate Governance Panel. Both reports conclude that the Council's overall management arrangements and performance is of a satisfactory standard.

### ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER

Having regard to the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter for 2006/07, the Corporate Governance Panel was encouraged to note that the Council's rate of improvement in the priority areas identified compared favourably against other District Councils. The Council also has consistently exceeded the Audit Commission's criteria for "performing well". Discussions continue with the Audit Commission about the value of some Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI's).

### RISK REGISTER UPDATE

The attention of the Corporate Governance Panel has been drawn to the high "red" risks highlighted in the Risk Register, the basis on which the Register had been compiled and the process by which those risks identified had been reviewed. Future update reports will only include details of new or changed entries to the Register.

**INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE:  
INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2008**

The Internal Audit and Assurance Plan for the four months period commencing 1st April 2008 has been approved by the Corporate Governance Panel.

The Panel also has noted progress by the Internal Audit Service against the Audit Plan for 2007/08 and the performance standards achieved.

**WHISTLEBLOWING: ANNUAL  
REVIEW OF POLICY AND  
PROCEDURE**

Having been informed of the outcome of the annual review of the Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure, the Corporate Governance Panel has concluded that no changes are required.

**TRAVEL PLAN**

The Corporate Governance Panel has been acquainted with the conclusions reached by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) and Cabinet following a review of the Council's Travel Plan and, in particular, the proposals impinging on Members' Allowances, which would require changes to the Council's Constitution. Having dismissed a proposal to vary the allowances as recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet, the Panel has recommended the Council to approve a series of recommendations which will result in changes to mileage allowances

and the Members Allowances Scheme.

**TOWN CENTRE INITIATIVES**

The Cabinet has been informed of the findings of a review by a Working Group appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) into the purpose, cost and achievements of the Town Centre Initiatives across the District. In acknowledging that the work of the Partnerships has been extremely beneficial to the District, attention was drawn to their funding arrangements. To ensure their long-term stability and effectiveness, the Cabinet has agreed to invite the Partnerships to enter into three year funding arrangements which, in return for the maintenance of existing grants and other assistance from the Council, will require each Partnership to produce a three year business plan with annual action plans and targets designed to support delivery of the Local Economy Strategy and to sustain and encourage the economic viability of the town centres.

**THE ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) has considered the Council's Environment Strategy, scheduled to launch during Environment Week in June. The Strategy identifies and addresses three key environmental challenges to be delivered within the District through a five year implementation action plan. These are -

- \* Tackling climate change;

- \* Using resources efficiently; and
- \* Protecting and improving the environment.

The Panel has discussed various aspects of the Strategy including the financial and carbon cost implications; the importance of advice provided by the Council to residents when improving their homes; the assertiveness of the language to be included in the document; and the need to balance competing priorities between the environment and the economy.

The Panel also has recognised the value of the Council's involvement in the Energy Saving Trusts accreditation scheme for installers and subsequently endorsed the Strategy's submission to the Cabinet in April 2008.

### **DISABILITY ACCESS STUDY**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has received a presentation by the Forum Manager for Disability Cambridgeshire (Directions Plus) on her organisation's work and their achievements to date. The Panel has discussed with the Forum Manager the extent of consultation undertaken prior to the installation of defective dropped kerbs by Cambridgeshire County Council; unauthorised parking in disabled bays; the misuse of Blue Badge parking permits and in particular the process for obtaining Blue Badges and the consequences of their illegal use.

The Panel has reiterated the importance of consultation with disability groups and individuals on

the Council's procedures, policies and planning issues. In receiving updates on other aspects of the study, the Panel was disappointed at the response received to consultation regarding the provision of advocacy services and has agreed to reconsider how this can be improved with the assistance of the Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations, who will be invited to a future meeting.

### **OUTCOME OF THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE SUPPORTING PEOPLE HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY REVIEW**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has been updated on the progress of a review of Home Improvement Agencies in Cambridgeshire. Having noted the order of funding involved and the preliminary findings and variations between the District Councils on the costs and satisfaction levels of services offered, the Panel has welcomed the fact that Huntingdonshire compare favourably in both criteria.

### **WORK PROGRAMME AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE EXECUTIVE**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has reviewed the way in which it engages with the Executive and has noted that in the current year fewer items in the Forward Plan appear to have fallen under the remit of the Service Delivery Panel compared with the Service Support Panel.

The Panel has decided to await the outcome of discussions between the Scrutiny Panel Chairmen before inviting Executive Councillors to future meetings to discuss their plans for the forthcoming year and to create a work programme in which the Scrutiny Panel constructively contributes to the Cabinet's business.

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

The Panel has been acquainted with the progress of the Roads and Sewers Working Group and the Grants Working Group.

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

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has requested sight of a report on "Adoption of Local Standards for the Provision of Sports Facilities in Huntingdonshire" report prior to its consideration by Cabinet.

In addition, the Panel has asked to consider reports by the Planning Policy Manager on the adoption of the Core Strategy and preferred options for Development Control policies at a future meeting.

### **REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY – PLANNING FOR GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION (DRAFT POLICY)**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) and Cabinet have

considered the Council's suggested response to the draft policy by the East of England Assembly on the numbers of gypsy and traveller pitches to be accommodated by each local planning authority as part of the Regional Spatial Strategy.

In endorsing the recommendations presented as a sensible approach, the Panel expressed concern about the potential for some authorities to object to the proposed allocation because they wished to make no or inadequate provision for gypsies and travellers. Any consequential re-distribution of pitches could, therefore, adversely impact upon Huntingdonshire's proposed allocation.

The Panel has been informed that the preparation of a Development Plan Document (DPD) to determine sites for gypsies and travellers in the District was unlikely to be finalised until some time in 2009 as part of the Local Development Framework (LDF). However the Panel was conscious of the potential difficulty in dealing with unauthorised encampments and determining planning applications in the interim and have therefore suggested that the DPD should be developed as soon as practicable within the LDF timescale.

Subsequently, the Cabinet has given its support to the policy on the basis it is consistent with the local need for Huntingdonshire identified in the Assessment of Need and the evidence base. The Cabinet also has noted the requirement for all local authorities to provide at least some pitches, including areas where previously no or little provision has

been made. However, Executive Councillors have agreed that the Council should reserve its position should some local authorities seek to challenge this equality of provision by any alternative redistribution which would result in unjustified increase in provision within Huntingdonshire. At the same time, the East of England Regional Assembly has been requested to include within the policy an explanation as to why a 3% compound rate of increase is proposed and an indication that a future review will need to take into account the requirement for transit sites and the needs of travelling show people.

### **SEWERAGE PROBLEMS, ST AUDREYS LANE, ST IVES**

Following the presentation to their meeting in February, of a petition signed by 26 people, the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has considered further information on the sewerage problems experienced in St Audrey's Lane, St Ives and the responsibilities of those parties involved in the drainage of this area.

The Panel's attention has been drawn to the recent Statutory Instrument, the Water Supply and Sewerage Services (Customer Service Standards) 2008 which came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008 and provides for financial compensation to customers for each and every occurrence of internal and external flooding from foul sewers.

Having listened to the concerns of local residents and been advised of the outcome of discussions and correspondence with Anglian Water, the Panel have invited a representative from Anglian Water to attend a future meeting to discuss the way forward.

In the event of Anglian Water choosing to accept this invitation, Councillors K Baker, M G Baker and J W Davies have been appointed to a working group for the purpose of gathering further information from local residents.

### **FINANCIAL MONITORING – REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMMES – 2007/08**

The Cabinet has noted the expected Revenue Budget variations identified in the current year and also been acquainted with variations in the Capital Programme.

### **DESIGN SCORING EXERCISE – HUNTINGDON**

The Development Control Panel has reviewed the outcome of the design scoring exercise undertaken in February which related to four recently completed developments in Huntingdon. Whilst supporting the continuation of the initiative, Members were of the view that the scoring method required improvement, that the team of advisors accompanying the visits should include representatives from Environmental Management and the police to bring a different view point and that more Members should

participate in future planned visits for St Ives and St Neots. The scoring method reflected criteria used in the 'Building for Life' guide.

## APPEAL DECISIONS

As part of their regular review of decisions made by HM Planning Inspectorate following appeals against decisions taken by the District Council on development applications, the Development Control Panel has requested the Head of Planning Services to seek clarification of terms used by an Inspector in a case which involved development in a conservation area. The Inspector used the phrase "would not be unacceptably diminished by the proposed works" contrary to planning legislation which seeks to "protect and enhance".

## DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

Of the eight applications considered by the Development Control Panel in April, three were approved and five refused. Most notable of these was the approval given for the erection of a community building and car parking on land rear of the Rainbow Superstore, Eaton Socon. The building will comprise a main hall to be used by various community groups and a nursery able to accommodate 26 children.