
Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery)

Report of the meeting held on 3rd June 2008

Matters for Information

1. CAMBRIDGE SUB-REGION STRATEGIC HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT

The Panel has appraised the contents of the Cambridge Sub-Region Strategic Housing Market Assessment and its implications for the District. The resulting document sets out the evidence of need and demand for market and affordable housing based on seven local authority areas within the region. The document will replace the need for local Housing Needs Assessments and will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

The Panel has discussed housing register trends, migration into and out of the District and the availability of affordable housing in light of current economic trends throughout the country. With regard to the latter, the Panel has been informed that there has not to date been an increase in homelessness. Furthermore, the government is currently discussing with the Housing Corporation the possible relaxation of restrictions which might enable registered social landlords to utilise unoccupied private sector housing as, at present, the specification for these buildings is not the same as that required for social housing.

2. CORPORATE EQUALITY POLICY: ACTION PLAN PROGRESS

The Panel has been acquainted with the progress made to date in respect of the Council's Corporate Equality Policy Action Plan. Having noted the achievements under the Plan that have been made by the Council over the previous year, including the attainment of Level 2 of the Equality Standard, Members have been advised that the Council will now work towards achieving Level 3 of the Standard.

The Panel has been informed that a random sample survey carried out by an independent market research company has revealed that 84% of local people believe that the Council offers services that meet their needs. The target for 2008/09 for this indicator is 85%.

Regarding the availability of bilingual staff and literature on Council services in other languages, the Panel has been advised that the Council maintains a directory of employees fluent in other languages and that an interpretation service, both face to face and via the

telephone, is available if required. In terms of literature, documents are made available in the four main languages spoken in the District.

As a result of their deliberations the Panel has suggested that the Cabinet should approve the new Corporate Equality Action Plan and a revised Equality Impact Assessment timetable.

3. GROWING SUCCESS: PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Panel has reviewed the Council's performance against its priority objectives. The report identified two areas where the Council has not achieved its targets. With regard to the key measure concerning attendance at school, outreach and holiday activity programmes, the quarterly targets that had been set did not reflect seasonal variations. Additionally, the programmes offered by the five Leisure Centres across the District have not been incorporated within the measure. Both matters will be factored into this measure in future.

In terms of the key measure relating to the delivery of a proportion of affordable housing (commitments) on qualifying sites, the Panel has been advised that the actual performance has been affected by the fact that limited affordable housing had been allocated in the particular area that had been constructed during that period.

The Panel has expressed their satisfaction with the levels of performance achieved by the Council in 2007/08. A review of Growing Success will be completed over the ensuing months and the views of the Corporate Plan Working Group will be taken into account during this process.

4. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) – STUDIES

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies and considered its work programme for the forthcoming year. The Panel has been reminded of the adoption of a study template following an internal audit of the Overview and Scrutiny function in the previous year and that both Scrutiny Panels had a budget of approximately £6,000 for use to pursue their study aims.

In reviewing the existing programme of studies and membership of Working Groups, the Panel has decided that as the study on Grant Aid is nearing completion, it will not be necessary to appoint any new Members to the Working Group. However, owing to their interests in the study, Councillors M F Shellens and J S Watt have been appointed to the Adoption of Roads and Sewers Working Group.

In acknowledging that the study on Disability Access will conclude shortly, the Panel has discussed potential future study areas, including the Community Safety Partnership, the Great Fen Project and the impact of the new A14 in terms of air quality and noise pollution. A meeting of the Great Fen Project will be held shortly, and following this, Councillor P G Mitchell has been asked to report back to the next Panel meeting on whether a study needs to be

undertaken. The Panel has made a request for a scoping report on Community Safety Partnerships to be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel.

Other Matters of Interest

5. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000: FORWARD PLAN

The Panel has been acquainted with details of the relevant Forward Plan of Key Decisions and noted the background to the items on Community Engagement, Insurance Test Case – Zurich Municipal/MMI, Response to Consultation on Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Grant Aid to Voluntary and Community Organisations.

6. SCRUTINY

The Panel considered the latest edition of the Decision Digest and discussed matters contained therein.

S J Criswell
Chairman