

Decision Digest

Edition 86

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 26th June to 31st July 2008.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND LOCAL ECONOMY STRATEGY

The draft delivery plans for the Huntingdonshire Community Strategy and action plan associated with the Local Economy Strategy have been approved by the Cabinet. The Strategy aims to involve partners and stakeholders including the business and voluntary sectors in the process of improving the economic, social and environmental well being of the District.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE – REVIEW OF HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCIES

The Cabinet has approved the content of a suggested response to a review of the Home Improvement Agency services undertaken on behalf of the Cambridgeshire Supporting People's Commissioning Body. In considering the key findings outlined in the paper, the Cabinet has expressed concern at the continuing and unacceptable time taken to complete occupational therapy assessments for vulnerable, older and disabled people in the District. Having concluded that an approach which seeks to maintain high levels of customer care, improve efficiency and lower costs

through shared or combined services rather than market testing should be examined, the Cabinet has requested that Officers explore further the opportunities available to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the HIA through shared services or other options.

CAMBRIDGE SUB - REGION STRATEGIC HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT

Details of the Cambridge Sub - Region Strategic Housing Market Assessment and its implications for Huntingdonshire have been considered by the Cabinet. The assessment outlines the evidence of need and demand for market and affordable housing based on seven local authority areas within the sub-region and replaces the need for local assessments.

PLANNING DESIGN BRIEFS

Approval has been given by the Cabinet to design briefs for the redevelopment of an area of open space adjoining Mayfield Road, Huntingdon and the former Primrose Lane Hospital in Huntingdon. In so doing, the Cabinet has requested that the retention of the Primrose Centre building be included as part of the development of the site but in the event that this proves not to be

possible consideration be given to its replacement with a scheme of high design quality.

A141 KINGS RIPTON ROAD

The Cabinet has approved funding options to provide a £75,000 contribution towards the County Council scheme for improvements to the junction of the A141 and Kings Ripton Road, Huntingdon.

HEAVY GOODS VEHICLE WORKING GROUP

The findings of a review by a Working Group appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) into the issue of heavy goods vehicles parking throughout the District have been reported to the Cabinet. Having considered the Working Group's recommendations in relation to the need to provide suitable parking on the trunk road network to avoid the problems which arise from a lack of provision, the Cabinet has :-

- invited the County Council to establish a county-wide forum, involving the County Council, District Councils, local Members of Parliament, Cambridgeshire Constabulary and HGV operators to lobby Government to investigate the problem urgently and to take steps to resolve it;
- requested that support for the forum be sought via Cambridgeshire Together: Local Area Agreement Board; and
- agreed that the District Council, as Local Planning

Authority, seek to influence the development of suitable HGV parking opportunities adjacent to the trunk roads in the District.

SCORES ON THE DOORS

A food hygiene rating scheme which aims to improve food standards across the District has been approved by the Licensing and Protection Panel. Under the proposals all caterers and take-away businesses within the District will be awarded up to five stars for food hygiene and safety, cleaning and confidence in management. Premises will be assessed during their scheduled food hygiene inspections and a certificate and window sticker showing the appropriate stars will be awarded for display at the premises. It is also intended to publish the results on the Council's website. Should a premises receive one or zero stars then the certificate will not be issued.

The Food Standards Agency is currently consulting on proposals to establish a nationwide "Scores on the Doors" scheme. Despite the existence of a large number of five star pilot schemes, the Agency has decided to only consult on a three star plus/fail (4-tier) scheme and a pass/improvement required (2-tier) scheme. In Cambridgeshire four councils currently operate a five star scoring system and they have indicated that they will not be willing to change to an alternative scheme. These authorities believe that the reason being that the five star system allows for differentiation of businesses and provides an

incentive for improvement. In the event that the FSA's national scheme becomes mandatory, Members have been reassured that the software for the new Huntingdonshire scheme is flexible and will be suitable for any integration.

SERVICE PLAN FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY ENFORCEMENT

The Licensing and Protection Panel has endorsed the Service Plan for Health and Safety Enforcement for 2008/09 which has been developed in accordance with guidance issued by the Health and Safety Commission. The Plan contains sections on the aims and objectives of the service and the resources available and reviews work undertaken in the previous year.

Members have been informed that a full programme of inspections of premises has been carried out in 2007/08 and a high customer satisfaction rating has been recorded.

SERVICE PLAN FOR FOOD LAW ENFORCEMENT 2007/08

Having considered an executive summary, the Licensing and Protection Panel has recommended that the Council should approve the Service Plan for Food Law Enforcement 2008/09. The Plan has been developed to comply with the requirements of the Food Standards Agency. The Plan incorporates the aims and objectives of the service, an indication of the resources available, and reviews work undertaken during the previous year.

LICENSING ACT 2003 - DELEGATIONS

The Licensing Committee has authorised the Head of Planning Services to act on behalf of the local planning authority and the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services to act on behalf of the environmental health authority under the Licensing Act 2003.

GAMBLING ACT 2005 - DELEGATIONS

The Licensing Committee has approved further delegations to the Licensing Manager and the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services to enable them to implement and administer the provisions of the Gambling Act 2005.

EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF THE LICENSING ACT 2003

The Licensing Committee has been acquainted with the outcome of a recent review by the Government into the implementation and impact of the Licensing Act 2003 which came into force in November 2005. Overall the freedoms introduced by the Act are being used well but powers to tackle problems are not sufficiently well known and are not being taken advantage of. Members were advised that this reflects the situation locally where the implementation and administration of the Act and its provisions has operated smoothly, despite the somewhat last minute issue of many of the required regulations.

REVIEW OF PUBLIC SPEAKING AT DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PANEL

With the assistance of the results of a recent survey distributed to all Members of the Council and to members of the public who had addressed the Development Control Panel since July 2007, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has considered whether to recommend any changes to the current arrangements for public speaking at meetings of the Development Control Panel.

Overall, the Panel concluded that the current arrangements were working satisfactorily and that the Chairman of the Development Control Panel was able to offer sufficient discretion / flexibility to address the issues which had arisen from the questionnaire. Although there were no changes that the Panel wished to raise directly with the Development Control Panel, Members have noted the intention of the Chairman of the latter Panel to seek to address the comments made by members of the public in relation to the intimidating and daunting nature of Panel proceedings.

The Panel has also discussed the current situation with regard to the presentation of petitions at meetings of the Council. In doing so, the Panel has agreed that it would be preferable for such petitions to be dealt with as part of the public speaking arrangements and this will be dealt with in the next biennial review of the constitution which will be undertaken next Spring.

PARISH CHARTER FOR HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has received the final report of its Working Group which had been established to consider the preparation of a Parish Charter for the Council's relationship with town and parish councils in the District.

The Panel has agreed that there is little value in proceeding with a Parish Charter with the town and parish councils at the present time. However having acknowledged that there would be disappointment expressed by the parishes if a charter were not to proceed, the Panel agreed that it would be important for the reasons for its conclusion to be explained to town and parish councils, together with an explanation that they would keep the matter under review as the powers and responsibilities of the various tiers of local government alter with changing legislation.

Subsequently, the Cabinet has agreed that no further action be taken to develop a Parish Charter with the town and parish councils and that an explanation be given to those involved. At the same time and having referred to recent ministerial announcements suggesting a devolution of service responsibility from county to district and finally parish councils, the Cabinet has requested the Head of Administration to inform the Local Government Association of the scrutiny investigation, particularly the suggestion that there appears little enthusiasm on the part of parish

councils for additional powers and duties.

SEWAGE PROBLEMS, ST AUDREY LANE, ST IVES

Following the receipt of petition signed by 26 people and presented to their February meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has met with representatives of Anglian Water to discuss the problems being experienced by residents of St Audrey Lane, Warren Road and Pig Lane, St Ives with flooding from the foul sewerage system.

Having discussed a number of issues which had been identified from the Panel's previous discussions with local residents and the Council's Asset and Project Manager, the Panel has been pleased to note that the profile of the issue had been raised as a consequence of their investigations. The Panel has asked Anglian Water to provide details of the outcome of their investigations to local residents and to provide the Council with an update of their progress in 6 months time.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE ISSUES

The Standards Committee has noted that the Council has:-

- given approval for the appointment of an additional Independent Member to assist in the authority's response to the Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2008. The position has

been offered to and accepted by Ms S Stafford;

- noted that the Standards Board for England has decided not to take any further action in relation to allegations made against two Councillors serving on St Ives Town Council; and
- noted details of Code of Conduct enquiries recorded by the Monitoring Officer since March, the number of allegations received by the Standards Board in the period 1st April 2007 – 31st March 2008 and the referral and investigation statistics over the same period.

The Committee also has participated in a training exercise, led by the Monitoring Officer to familiarise themselves with the processes involved in the local assessment of complaints.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000: FORWARD PLAN

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has requested sight of the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy item prior to its consideration by the Cabinet. Additionally, the Panel has asked for the reports on the sale of land at Mayfield Road, Huntingdon and Community Engagement to be circulated informally to Panel Members.

DISABILITY ACCESS STUDY

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has received a presentation by the Chief Executive for Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations on the background to the services offered by the organisation, which included details of the Shopmobility scheme, the organisation's Disability Forum, local advocacy services and the contribution made to the community by the Huntingdonshire Coalition of Disabled People.

The Panel has been apprised with details of plans to launch a pilot Shopmobility scheme in St Ives and of its intention to become established as a registered charity with effect from 10th July 2008. In terms of the Disability Forum, the Panel has been advised that the organisation offered a range of services to its stakeholders, which included networking events for members and carers of disabled people, training sessions for local traders, compilation of surveys/questionnaires to members and acting as a general point of contact to the community.

The Panel has discussed the contribution made by the Huntingdonshire Coalition of Disabled People and the recent proposal to disband the group. The role of Disability Cambridgeshire and recent government requests to establish a countywide coalition for disabled people has also been discussed. The view has been expressed that the establishment of a separate group would not be necessary and that funding should be provided to the existing organisations.

In acknowledging that the study on Disability Access was nearing completion, the Panel established a Working Group comprising Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, Mrs K E Cooper, S J Criswell and Mrs J A Dew to review the findings of the Disability Access study.

ENHANCED CLEANING SERVICES – PROPOSALS FOR THE MARKET TOWNS

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has considered a proposal for enhanced Sunday cleansing services in all four market towns across the District. Their attention having been drawn to the resource implications and operational costs for the proposal, the Panel has been advised that no provision in the Council's financial plan has been made for enhanced cleansing services.

The Panel has considered a representation made by Holywell-cum-Needlingworth Parish Council expressing concerns that the District Council were focusing their cleansing regimes on town centres. Nevertheless, the Panel reiterated their concerns about the cleanliness of the District's town centres on Sundays, in light of the fact that Sunday trade and tourism was increasing at both a local and national level. The possibility of establishing Alcohol Disorder Zones has also been discussed.

The Panel has concluded that the annual cost of £52,400 demonstrated good value for money, particularly, in light of the anticipated benefits that would be achieved. The Panel has

recommended the Cabinet to introduce cleansing services on Sundays in all four market towns across the District and has requested that financial contributions towards the costs of implementing the proposal be sought from the Town Councils. Additionally, the Panel has recommended the Cabinet to include a bid for funding for the proposal in the Medium Term Plan and has requested that further investigation into the introduction of Alcohol Disorder Zones be undertaken.

SCOPING REPORT: BACKGROUND ON WORK OF THE HUNTINGDONSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has been acquainted with the background to the work of the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership, together with the benefits that the Partnership brings to the Council. The Panel has been advised that the Partnership was set up in response to the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which aimed to reduce crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour across the District. The Panel has noted the existence of a number of strategic links to both county-wide and district-wide groups such as the Cambridgeshire Strategic Community Safety Partnership and the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership.

A number of matters were discussed, which included the structure of the Partnership, Town

and Parish Council representation on Neighbourhood Management Boards, publication of crime statistics and the formulation and agreement of LAA targets.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) – STUDIES

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has been acquainted with the progress of its ongoing studies. The Panel has received a brief update from Councillor P G Mitchell on a meeting of the Great Fen Project. The Panel has previously raised concerns over the loss of prime agricultural land and has been advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) would be undertaking a study on the matter. In that light, Councillors E R Butler, P G Mitchell and J S Watt expressed their interests in participating in the study.

Councillor S J Criswell reported upon recent changes to the Panel's remit which would be introduced informally with effect from 1st September 2008.

FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Cabinet has noted the outturn of revenue and capital expenditure in 2007/2008 along with variations between the original and revised budget provision for that year.

In discussing the Budget and Medium Term Plan review process, Executive Councillors have raised concerns over the increasing level of fuel and utility costs and the impact of the current economic downturn on land charges income. Particular mention was made to the potential implications of this for future levels of Council Tax and the budget for 2009/10 if the Government fails to acknowledge the impact of the increasing costs and loss of income in the annual award of revenue support grant.

Members' attention also was drawn to the possibility of a reduction in the level of government grant for disabled facilities. It was noted that fewer assessments were being undertaken in Huntingdonshire due to a shortage of occupational therapists. Following discussions with Chris Banks, Chief Executive of the Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust, Officers are investigating the idea of possibly using therapists based in neighbouring districts to undertake assessments in Huntingdonshire in order to reduce the waiting lists.

CAR PARKING ORDERS

Under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, the Cabinet has agreed to confirm two new Orders governing the use of car parks operated by the

Council. The first Order will introduce a new three year pricing policy to manage paid and controlled car parks in the town centre with the aim of keeping demand at the 2007 baseline. Order No. 2 is for free car parks, its purpose is to ensure that the car parks are used for the purpose for which they are provided. Both Orders should come into force in the Autumn.

RAISING SPONSORSHIP AND ADVERTISING REVENUES FROM COUNCIL WEBSITES.

A trial to generate revenue from the sale of sponsorship and advertising space on the Council's website and, in future, other e-channels has been endorsed by the Cabinet. The Director of Commerce and Technology has been authorised, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for IT and Customer Service, to appoint an agency to manage the web advertising on behalf of the Council. This new initiative will be reviewed in January 2009 with a further report being submitted to Cabinet on 19th February 2009.

NEW ACCOMMODATION

The Cabinet has noted the progress made on the delivery of the new accommodation project and a programme of work for the current year. In so doing, the Cabinet has approved a virement from the headquarters repairs and renewals fund of £170,000 and authorised the Chief Executive, after consultation with the Deputy Leader, to enter into contract(s) for the supply of furniture for the new building. Having

discussed issues associated with the proposed development of an area of land fronting St. Mary's Street, the Cabinet has requested that the options available be investigated and the finding along with their financial implications be submitted to a future meeting.