

Decision Digest

Edition 87

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 4th August to 30th September 2008.

GROWING SUCCESS – CORPORATE PLAN

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate & Strategic Framework) has considered the outcome of the annual review of the Corporate Plan – Growing Success. The revised document contains fewer priorities and will be used to inform the Council's financial planning. The Panel has taken into account work undertaken by the Corporate Plan Working Group in the course of their review.

The Panel has discussed a range of matters associated with the Plan, including climate change, affordable housing and public transport, particularly in rural areas although it refers only to matters that fall within the Council's remit. Given its links to the Council's financial planning, the Panel has decided to extend the Corporate Plan Working Group's remit by requesting it to investigate the cost implications of each priority area identified within the Plan.

Having been advised of the Panel's satisfaction with the content of the Plan and following discussions regarding its content, the Cabinet has recommended to full Council that the Strategy be approved.

FINANCIAL FORECAST

Members have been advised of the present position in relation to the Council's financial forecast for the period up to 2018/2019. The Council's net revenue expenditure has to be funded from Central Government grant, Council Tax and reserves. The Council has continued to spend carefully and this together with extra grants and budget income has resulted in last year's outturn being £1.2m less than budgeted. Members have been advised of the need to identify and implement savings to achieve a balanced Medium Term Plan. There may well be unavoidable areas of spending due to inflation and the downturn in the housing industry. The 2009/10 budget will be set by Council at its December meeting.

CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate & Strategic Framework) has reviewed the Action Plan to the Customer Service Strategy. The Plan which has subsequently been endorsed by the Cabinet outlines the actions proposed to achieve the following objectives:-

- ◆ provide high quality customer service;
- ◆ make it as easy as possible for customers to access services and get appropriate information; and
- ◆ be good at communicating with and listening to people and organisations.

These will link to the objectives of the Council's Corporate Plan – "Growing Success", the Corporate Equality Policy, the Consultation and Engagement Strategy and the Communications and Marketing Strategy.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS TO ST. IVES TOWN CENTRE

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has considered a range of options for Phase 2 environmental improvements to the Market Hill and Bridge Street areas of St. Ives. The options have been scrutinised by an Advisory Group comprising County, District and Town Councillors, together with Panel representatives and representatives from local consultative groups such as the Town Partnership, the Access Group and the Civic Society. The options will now be subject to public consultation. The Panel has been reminded that its role is to ensure that the Environmental Improvements Protocol has been adhered to and having reviewed details of the consultation, affirmed their satisfaction that the protocol had been followed on this occasion.

However, the Panel has expressed the view that extensive publicity

should be undertaken during the consultation process and that a number of methods of engaging with the public should be employed. Following discussions on bus services operating within the town centre, the Panel has been advised that access for buses will not be affected by any of the options.

The Panel has concluded that the Environmental Improvements Protocol previously approved by the Cabinet has been adhered to. Subsequently, the Cabinet has considered three design options for phase 2 and revised Traffic Orders for Bridge Street, and in doing so has

- ◆ approved the options in principle for the purpose of public consultation;
- ◆ agreed to submit the options to the Huntingdonshire Traffic Area Joint Committee for approval;
- ◆ requested that the results of the consultation exercise be reported back to a future meeting; and
- ◆ requested that significant financial contributions towards the cost of the work be sought from Cambridgeshire County Council and St Ives Town Council.

CUSTOMER SERVICE QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT: APRIL – JUNE 2008

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has received the Customer Service Quarterly Performance Report for the period April to June 2008. Following the formation of a new Customer Services Team in February 2008,

quarterly performance reports now cover all services within the Team.

Having noted the performance reported and the scope of a number of activities referred to, the Panel has requested additional information on the number of unanswered phone calls received by the Call Centre and on enquiries in areas that are not the responsibility of the District Council be incorporated into future performance reports.

ADOPTION OF LOCAL STANDARDS FOR THE PROVISION OF CORE SPORTS FACILITIES IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has considered a proposal to adopt local standards for the provision of core sports facilities in Huntingdonshire. The standards will help to achieve an appropriate range of sports facilities to meet future need. The proposal is particularly timely in the context of the preparations for the forthcoming Olympics. Members have been assured that the adoption of the standards will not result in the creation of new facilities that will compete with existing Council facilities.

Whilst the proposal is for five specified types of sports facilities, an emerging Leisure Facility Strategy will incorporate other facilities. In recognising that it is being encouraged by Sport England, the Cabinet, on the recommendation of the Panel has approved the adoption of local standards for the provision of core sports facilities within

Huntingdonshire on the understanding that the Council will not be responsible for their future operating and maintenance costs.

CHEWING GUM LITTER REDUCTION TRIAL

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has reviewed the outcome of the chewing gum litter reduction trial and has considered a proposal to extend the scheme to St Neots. Having noted that the Council spends £17,000 per year removing chewing gum from pavements in town centres, questions have been raised regarding the level of savings achieved since the scheme was introduced. As the scheme was still in its early stages, the level of savings achieved was not yet identified. Nevertheless, owing to the success of the trial to date, the Panel has endorsed the decision to extend the scheme and has requested that Parish Councils are provided with details of it in order that they may introduce their own schemes.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) - PROGRESS

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has reviewed its programme of studies. In discussing the Great Fen Project concern has been raised about the loss of prime agricultural land. As the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) will be undertaking a study on the Project, Councillors E R Butler, P G Mitchell and J S Watt have expressed interests in participating in that study

and other Members of the Panel have been invited to attend a presentation at the November meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) on the Project.

A study on the impact of the new A14 in terms of air quality and noise pollution is also being investigated and the Panel has requested that a scoping report on affordable housing be submitted to a future meeting.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 – FORWARD PLAN

Following consideration of the Forward Plan, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has requested sight of the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy at a future meeting and have received background information on Customer Service Development in St Ives and St Neots and land at Mayfield Road, Huntingdon.

Arrangements have been made for reports to be submitted to future meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) as follows:-

- ◆ Parish Plans and Local Plan Policy;
- ◆ Proposals for Riverside Park;
- ◆ Development Control Policies Preferred Options;
- ◆ Huntingdon West Area Action Plan – Preferred Options;
- ◆ Great Fen Governance; and
- ◆ The Gypsy and Travellers Issues and Options Document.

THE NIGHT TIME ECONOMY IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

Following a suggestion that the night time economy in Huntingdonshire in the context of the Licensing Act 2003 might be a suitable subject for study, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has received further information on the Act, the situation in Huntingdonshire and national research into the impact of the Act.

The Panel has acknowledged the limitations placed on the licensing authority by the legislation when imposing conditions and initiating reviews of licences. Nevertheless concerns remain on the part of Members about the problems being experienced currently in St. Ives.

Overall, the Panel concluded that there was little that could be achieved in undertaking a review of the technicalities of the Act and that the majority of establishments within the District in the main were well managed. However, having regard to Members' concerns about the social consequences of alcohol abuse, the Panel has agreed to establish a working group to address the matter. Councillors J T Bell, P M D Godfrey and Ms S L Kemp have been appointed to a working group for this purpose.

MAXIMISING INCOME OPPORTUNITIES AND GRANT AVAILABILITY

Councillors P J Downes, L W McGuire and R J West have been appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) to

a working group to ensure that the Council is maximising its income opportunities and grant availability.

MONITORING OF SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS – PLANNING OBLIGATIONS

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has been updated on the receipt & expenditure of money negotiated under Section 106 Agreements by the Council.

ENHANCED CLEANSING SERVICES PROPOSAL FOR MARKET TOWNS

The findings of a study by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) regarding the introduction of additional cleansing services in the District's town centres on Sundays to deal with the litter left as a result of the Saturday night time economy have been considered by the Cabinet.

In discussing those areas identified as requiring additional cleansing on Sundays, Executive Councillors have queried various operational matters associated with the proposal and its effect on the existing cleaning regime. Particular reference was made to extensiveness of the areas identified and the need to target specific streets. The Cabinet recognised also that additional cleansing was likely to cause some early morning noise which could be a cause of disturbance to some residents. The Overview & Scrutiny Panel has been requested to investigate these issues further.

With regard to the cost of introducing an additional cleansing service, the Cabinet has requested that the possibility of financial contributions towards its cost be investigated with local town councils. Further aid may be available via a new Government measure entitled Alcohol Disorder Zones, designed to require those establishments responsible for the litter problem to make good the effected area. The Cabinet has requested that their use be investigated further.

REVIEW OF COUNCIL STRUCTURE: APPOINTMENT OF WORKING GROUP

The Cabinet has appointed Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, K J Churchill, W T Clough, S J Criswell, T D Sanderson, Ms M Thomas, G S E Thorpe and R G Tuplin to a Structural Working Group established to review the existing Council structure in light of experience and recent legislative change. The first meeting of the Working Group is scheduled to take place on 24th September and the review is expected to be concluded with the intention to implement any changes in the new Municipal Year.

LAND AT MAYFIELD ROAD, HUNTINGDON

The Cabinet has approved the disposal of Council owned land at Mayfield Road, Huntingdon to Wherry Housing Association for the purpose of providing affordable housing.

LEISURE CENTRES RESTRUCTURING

For the purposes of consultation with affected staff, the Employment Panel has approved an indicative management structure for the Leisure Centre Service. The proposed arrangements are designed to improve the levels of co-ordination and cohesion across the five sites and to develop the Centres as a stronger, more unified service. The proposals are also intended to establish a management structure which will be better placed to achieve significant savings targets which have been set over the next few years.

Under the revised structure, specific responsibilities will be aligned to individual managers in an attempt to reduce duplication of effort, improve efficiency and enable further business and service improvements to be brought forward.

REQUESTS TO FILL VACANT POSTS

Given the circumstances applicable to a number of vacancies across the Council's Directorates the Employment Panel has authorised the HR Manager to recruit to the following posts:-

- ◆ Corporate ICT Systems Officer;
- ◆ Assistant Engineer;
- ◆ Training and Development Advisor; and
- ◆ Environmental Protection Officer.

The Panel has also authorised the HR Manager to recruit to any subsequent posts vacated as a

result of internal promotion to these posts.

RETIREMENT OF PERSONNEL – ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Employment Panel has placed on record its recognition of, and gratitude for, the excellent contributions made by the following employees during their employment in the local government service and conveyed its best wishes to them for a long and happy retirement.

Name	Directorate	Local Government Service
Mrs S Nesbitt	Commerce & Technology	37 years
Mr A Strand	Environmental & Community Services	4 years
Mrs A Davies	Environmental & Community Services	4 years

CUSTOMER SERVICES TEAM - TECHNICAL SENIOR ADVISOR POST

As a consequence of recent changes to staff working hours and the changing requirements of the District Council's Call Centre, the Employment Panel has approved a proposal to create a post of Senior Technical Advisor at the Centre. The new position will be responsible for systems and management support and provide performance management statistics and information. The cost of the post will be met by the deletion of another post in the call centre establishment.

APPOINTMENT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR, CENTRAL SERVICES

With the assistance of a report prepared by the Consultants who had been employed to manage the recruitment process to the vacant position of Director of Central Services, the Employment Panel has approved a number of recommendations to facilitate a successful appointment, including a move to spot salaries and changes to the arrangements for performance related pay for the post. The Panel had previously authorised the Head of HR and Payroll to recruit to the post at their meeting in June. In the light of market conditions relating to Chief Officer salaries, the Panel has also agreed to implement the proposals for the Chief Executive and existing Directors from 1st April 2009.

The Panel has also suggested that the same consultants be commissioned to prepare the annual report received at the Employment Panel in the New Year to facilitate Officer salary negotiations for 2009/10.

REVIEW OF PUBLIC SPEAKING AT DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PANEL MEETINGS

The Development Control Panel has considered the results of a survey of those who had addressed the Panel on a planning application under the new arrangements for speaking at meetings. In response to comments about the intimidating and daunting nature of the Panel, the Chairman, will, in future welcome public

speakers informally before the start of meetings to try and put them at their ease. Whilst endorsing the continuation of existing procedures, the Panel has expressed the view that supporters of applications should also be entitled to speak so the procedure will be amended to give effect to this change.

ENFORCEMENT ACTION – LITTLE END ROAD, EATON SOCON, ST NEOTS

The Development Control Panel has instructed the Head of Planning Services to take enforcement action to secure the cessation of the unauthorised use for B2 (general industrial) purposes of premises at 20 Little End Road, Eaton Socon. In general the Notice will require compliance within 4 calendar months but elements of it need to be addressed within 3 days given the detrimental effect of the unauthorised activity on residents in Admirals Way, Eaton Socon.

URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK, LAND SOUTH OF HIGH STREET, RAMSEY

The Development Control Panel has welcomed the publication of an Urban Design Framework Document for land south of the High Street, Ramsey and recommended that it be adopted by the Cabinet as Council policy.

The document identifies important settlement characteristics, open spaces and settings and potential locations for appropriate development that with guidance could be used to achieve

successful, imaginative and distinctive schemes.

STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND: ANNUAL REVIEW

The Chairman has presented to the Standards Committee the outcome of his review of the content of the Annual Review document 2007/08 published by the Standards Board for England. Although there is little for them to follow up, the Committee has requested that the DVD "The Code Uncovered" be made available for all Members of the Council to view and that that part of the website relating to standards and conduct be enhanced by the inclusion of material relating to the new standards framework.

REFERRALS (ASSESSMENT) SUB COMMITTEE

The Chairman of the Referrals (Assessment) Sub Committee has reported upon the outcome of the 3 cases considered by the Sub Committee to date and the action taken by the Monitoring Officer in each case.

REGISTRATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

Although pleased to note that only 20 of the 672 Councillors elected or appointed to office have failed, to date, to return their declarations of financial or other interests, the Standards Committee requested the Monitoring Officer to specifically follow up those parishes/individuals where forms were outstanding.

CREATIVE ENTERPRISE CENTRE, ST NEOTS

The Cabinet has authorised the Head of Legal and Estates, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy, to agree final terms for the management of the new Creative Enterprise Centre in St Neots. At the same time, the Cabinet has been informed of the outcome of a tender exercise for the management of the Centre and has approved a tender received from NWES.

The building will provide accommodation for about 24 small creative businesses, together with other facilities for educational exhibition and conference purposes. The project is being developed in conjunction with Longsands College and the Department of Communities and Local Government.

HOUSING BENEFIT FRAUD INVESTIGATION ACTIVITY

The Corporate Governance Panel has been acquainted with the work undertaken by the Benefits Fraud Investigation Team over the past three years and in particular the background to the Council's subscription to two data matching schemes and the level of partnership work being undertaken with partner agencies. Annual update reports on this activity will be submitted to future meetings.

INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

The Corporate Governance Panel has been acquainted with progress made against the 2007/08 Annual Audit Plan, the performance standards achieved and the Audit

and Risk Manager's opinion on the level of assurance provided by the Council's internal control environment in terms of the effective exercise of its functions.

RISK REGISTER

The Corporate Governance Panel has received and noted details of new or changed entries made to the Risk Register since it was last reviewed in March 2008.

RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE

The Corporate Governance Panel has been acquainted with progress made to embed risk management within the Council and noted a requirement to improve the Council's current rating to Level 3 against the risk management standard.

REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PANEL

The Corporate Governance Panel has been acquainted with the outcome of the Panel's own review of its effectiveness and endorsed the content of the Action Plan referred to within the report.

PROTOCOL BETWEEN THE LEADER AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

In accordance with the CIPFA/SOLACE publication on Good Governance in Local Government, the Corporate Governance Panel has approved the content of a protocol for the relationship between the Leader of

the Council and the Chief Executive, an issue which has been outstanding from the Council's Governance Statement.

GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Corporate Governance Panel has approved the Governance Statement for 2008/09, which reviews the Council's governance arrangements and identifies matters to be addressed next year.

APPROVAL FOR PUBLICATION OF THE 2007/08 ACCOUNTS

The Corporate Governance Panel has approved the accounts for the year 2007/08. Having endorsed the Council's Letter of Representation, the Panel has been informed by the Council's external auditors that an unqualified opinion will be provided on the accounts. Matters contained in the Action Plan to the auditor's report have also been noted.

ELECTORAL CYCLE IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The Elections Panel has been acquainted with recent legislative changes that enable the Council to alter its electoral cycle from the current elections by for a third of its Members each year followed by a fallow year when no District elections are held to whole council elections and, should the need arise, to revert to elections by thirds.

The Panel has noted the procedure involved, the implications for town and parish councils, the financial implications and other consequential considerations.

Before coming to a view on whether the Council should change its electoral

cycle, the Panel has requested that a range of further information is collected and that District Council Members are consulted on what would be suitable electoral arrangements for the Council.

Should the Council wish to move to whole Council elections it will need to pass a resolution to that effect by the end of 2010.

REVIEW OF PARISH ARRANGEMENTS IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The Elections Panel has received an update on progress of implementation of recommendations made following the conclusion of the review of parish arrangements in Huntingdonshire.

The necessary Orders have been made to bring into effect a series of recommendations for changes to parish electoral arrangements. Copies of the Orders have been sent to the councils affected and to various other bodies prescribed in legislation.

The Department of Communities and Local Government will undertake the process of implementing a number of other recommendations involving boundary changes. Once this process has been completed the Council will be responsible for taking resulting consequential actions such as making Orders to specify the number of councillors a new parish council has.

There are expected to be a small number of other minor boundary changes that the Electoral Commission will be requested to make. The Panel has asked that those parishes affected by these recommendations are informed of progress.