

Decision Digest

Edition 88

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 1st to 31st October 2008.

IMPROVING LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY CONSULTATION: CHANGES TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY POWERS

Both the Overview and Scrutiny Panels have considered a consultation paper by the Department for Communities and Local Government on 'improving local accountability' and the Service Delivery Panel has endorsed the responses suggested, and –

- ◆ expressed general support for area scrutiny committees operating on a district basis, especially given the need to scrutinise the LAA/LSP and their effect on Huntingdonshire;
- ◆ emphasised that it is councillors who should be accountable to the public and not officers;
- ◆ suggested that in order to increase public interest, the Council's website should be updated after each overview and scrutiny meeting on the subjects discussed and decisions taken;
- ◆ suggested that, if officers are to be held to account, this should apply to officers

of other bodies that the Council is in partnership with only, with Councillors being held to account in the case of local authorities;

- ◆ emphasised the resource implications if overview and scrutiny's profile / role are to be raised.

The Service Support Panel has endorsed the responses suggested in the report, emphasising that these matters were best left to local discretion rather than the prescriptive approach adopted in the consultation paper. The Panel had no objection to the views expressed by the Service Delivery Panel.

Having been advised of the Panels views, the Cabinet has questioned the requirement to make provision for a dedicated scrutiny resource to support the overview and scrutiny function. Although not a requirement for district councils, the Cabinet has suggested that this should be at the discretion of individual authorities depending on local circumstances. The Cabinet also recognised that several of the initiatives proposed to raise the profile of overview and scrutiny have either been tried or have already implemented by the Council.

ON-LINE PETITIONS

An on-line petition signed by ten people was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) drawing attention to the problems experienced by local residents with commuter parking in the Longsands area of St. Neots. St. Neots Town Councillor Mrs Ottolangui addressed the Panel and explained that she would like to see restrictions imposed to restrict on-street parking in the area to one hour during the day.

Having noted that the matter had been the subject of a recent petition presented to the Huntingdonshire Traffic Management Area Joint Committee, the Panel asked the Chairman to write to the AJC outlining their concerns and requesting that the matter be progressed at the earliest opportunity.

The Panel has also agreed that a representative from First Capital Connect should be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss their plans for the car parks at Huntingdon and St. Neots stations.

LOCAL PROCUREMENT REVIEW

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has been updated with discussions held recently between Panel representatives and the local business community.

The meeting was arranged to monitor the actions contained in the Panel's review of local procurement and to review progress made since the last meeting.

The Chairman of the meeting, Councillor M G Baker was satisfied that a positive and constructive discussion had taken place. During the meeting, the Group was advised of developments within the Economic Development Service, ongoing work to standardise the terms and conditions of procurement with other District Councils and the implications of the Council's emerging Environment Strategy. It was also noted that the electronic alert for additions to the contracts register was now working correctly.

A further meeting with business representatives is to be held on 12th March 2009.

PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

The Development Control Panel has been advised of the circumstances which have arisen following the receipt of an objection to an Order made under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to divert parts of public footpath No1 at Buckden. As the proposed line of the footpath has also been obstructed by new development and cannot be used as a public footpath, the diversion cannot proceed under the Town and Country Planning Act legislation and therefore the Panel has formally agreed not to confirm the Order. An alternative diversion is being pursued, however, under the Highways Act by the Nene Housing Association.

ALCOHOL DISORDER ZONES

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) and the Cabinet have been briefed on the

background to Alcohol Disorder Zones (ADZs), a Government initiative aimed at tackling the problems in city and town centres as a result of excessive alcohol consumption. Having noted that ADZs are intended as a short term, last resort measure to address high levels of alcohol related nuisance and disorder, circumstances not applicable to Huntingdonshire, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) and the Cabinet has recognised that their use would not deal with the problem of litter left as a result of the Saturday night time economy which has been highlighted as a concern in the District.

MARKET RULES

The Cabinet has approved revised rates for Council-run markets in Huntingdonshire. The rules have been updated to ensure they are relevant and appropriate to current trading practices.

REPRESENTATION ON ORGANISATIONS

Councillors J A Gray, T V Rogers and L M Simpson have been appointed by the Cabinet as the Members with whom the Director of Commerce and Technology is required to consult to exercise delegated authority on treasury management matters.

FLEXIBLE WORKING STRATEGY

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has received a presentation on the Council's progress in respect of flexible

working and noted the benefits that it would bring.

The Corporate Mobile Working Project has been successful in rolling out mobile devices, new back office systems and processes, touchdown working, digital pens and Blackberrys to service departments.

The use of Remote Access Technology has also been discussed and the Panel has been advised of the recent introduction of a key fob system, which provides an additional level of security for employees accessing the Council's information systems from home.

The Full Time Home Working Pilot has involved employees who had volunteered to take part from the Revenues and Benefits and Environmental and Community Health Services Divisions.

The Panel also discussed the financial implications of introducing the initiatives, the levels of savings achieved, the management of employees and the monitoring of their performance whilst working full time from home. It was also reported that all projects had been implemented within existing budgets.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH JOINT MUNICIPAL WASTE STRATEGY

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has approved the content of the revised Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Joint Municipal Waste Strategy.

The original Strategy had been adopted by the Council in 2002 and the Recycling Plans appended to the Strategy had been reviewed in 2005. The revised Strategy now focuses on new priority areas such as business waste and environmental issues and would have no financial implications for the Council.

Discussions also have taken place on the actions taken by the Council to reduce the impact of waste management activities on climate change, the effects of the closure of the Buckden Waste disposal facility, the level of commercial waste generated in the District and the measures that have been introduced to encourage commercial waste recycling. Having regard to the latter, the Panel noted that external funding had been received to carry out pilot studies into recycling initiatives for small businesses with a view to introducing schemes across the County.

ENHANCED SERVICES CLEANSING

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has noted the Cabinet's response to the Panel's recommendations arising from the study on Enhanced Cleansing Services for the District's market towns.

In noting their requests for additional information, the Panel has confirmed that those areas highlighted within the plans originally circulated with the report had represented the scope of the areas to be cleaned. In response to

concerns relating to the effect of early morning noise on residents living within the vicinity of the areas to be cleaned, it has been reported that the proposed cleansing service would be limited to the emptying of litter bins and the use of small mechanical road sweepers. In addition, it was noted that whilst employees would report to Eastfield House at 6:00am, work in the market towns would not commence until approximately 7:30am.

The Panel has endorsed the view that financial contributions should be sought from the Town Councils and Members have stressed that this should only be done once the Cabinet has agreed the principle of providing an enhanced cleansing service.

STRATEGIC HEALTH AUTHORITY: STRATEGIC VISION DOCUMENT

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has noted the Strategic Health Authority's Strategic Vision Document, which outlines the Vision for the National Health Service over the next 10 years.

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