
Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery)

**Report of the meetings held on 7th October and
4th November 2008**

Matters for Information

17. FLEXIBLE WORKING STRATEGY

The Panel has been acquainted with changes the Council has made in the area of flexible working for its employees and the benefits that they will bring. The Corporate Mobile Working Project has resulted in technological developments being deployed within service departments, including the introduction of new back office systems and processes. Other developments include the introduction of touchdown working and the use of digital pens, Blackberrys for some core workers and integrated electronic forms.

Members also have been acquainted with the aims of a pilot involving volunteers from the Revenues and Benefits and the Environmental and Community Health Services Divisions on the feasibility of introducing full time home working. As a result of discussion on the management of employees, Members have been assured that appropriate performance management systems are in place to monitor the performance of Officers working full time from home. The view has been expressed that care should be taken to avoid any adverse effects on team spirit caused by individuals working away from their teams.

The use of Remote Access Technology and, in particular, the deployment of security key fobs, which provide an additional level of security for those using the Council's information technology systems from home, has been discussed. Members have then questioned the financial implications of introducing flexible working and the level of savings achieved. As the level of savings achieved has not yet been identified, the Panel has expressed their view that the savings should be quantified.

18. CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH JOINT MUNICIPAL WASTE STRATEGY

The Panel has reviewed the contents of a revised version of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Joint Municipal Waste Strategy. The original Strategy had been adopted in 2002 and the Recycling Plans, which were appended to the Strategy, were revised in 2005.

Partner authorities had been successful in achieving the Plans' performance targets for recycling and composting. As a result, the revised Strategy now focused on new priority areas such as business waste and environmental issues. The revised Strategy has no financial implications for the Council.

Members have been assured that actions to reduce the impact of waste management activities on climate change will only be pursued where they were financially viable. They also have established that the closure of the Buckden waste disposal facility has made no difference to the distances travelled by the Council's refuse vehicles. Indeed, it has produced a number of operational benefits, including a reduction in damage caused to vehicles. Finally, the Panel has discussed the level of waste generated in the District and the measures that have been introduced to encourage commercial waste recycling. External funding has been received, which has enabled pilot studies to be carried out into recycling initiatives for small businesses. It is hoped that some of the pilot schemes will be introduced across the County.

At the conclusion of their discussions, the Panel has recommended the Cabinet to adopt the revised Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Joint Municipal Waste Strategy.

19. ENHANCED CLEANSING SERVICES

Pursuant to Item No. 8 of their Report to the meeting of the Council held on 24th September 2008, the Panel has addressed the Cabinet's requests for further information on the Panel's recommendations arising from the study on Enhanced Cleansing Services for the District's market towns.

In the course of discussions on the question of the scope of the areas to be cleaned, the Panel has been advised that those areas highlighted within the plans originally circulated with the report represent the minimum deemed necessary for cleansing. With regard to concerns relating to the effect of early morning noise on residents living within the vicinity of the areas to be cleaned, the Panel has informed the Cabinet that the proposed cleansing service will be limited to the emptying of litter bins and the use of small mechanical road sweepers. In addition, whilst employees would report to Eastfield House at 6.00am, work in the market towns will not commence until approximately 7.30am.

Members have reiterated their view that financial contributions should be sought from Town Councils if the Cabinet agrees the principle of providing an enhanced cleansing service. This will then enable the Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services to arrange for a financial proposal to be prepared for consideration as part of the Council's Medium Term Planning process. The Cabinet will be formally notified of the Panel's responses to the points of clarification sought.

20. ALCOHOL DISORDER ZONES

In pursuit of the study on Enhanced Cleansing Services (Item No. 19 above refers), the Panel has requested advice on whether the Council might use powers available to it to designate Alcohol Disorder Zones in order to achieve the aims of the study. In receiving this advice Members have noted that the introduction of the Zones can only be used to address nuisance and annoyance to members of the public in relation to alcohol consumption and therefore cannot be applied to other problems associated with late night entertainment such as litter from hot food outlets. As a result the Panel has decided not to pursue this line of enquiry.

21. IMPROVING LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY CONSULTATION CHANGES TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY POWERS

In conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support), the Panel has considered a series of questions raised in a consultation paper issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on Overview and Scrutiny powers and the potential changes to the way it operates. The paper forms part of a series of consultation documents, which have been produced as part of the process to implement proposals in the recent Communities in Control White Paper.

The Panel has expressed general support for area scrutiny committees operating on a district basis, especially given the need to scrutinise the Local Area Agreement and the Local Strategic Partnership and their effect on Huntingdonshire. The Panel has also expressed their view that it is Councillors rather than Officers whom the public should hold to account. It has however, been suggested that, if Officers are to be held to account, this should apply only to Officers of other bodies with which the Council is in partnership.

Members have further suggested that in order to increase public interest in overview and scrutiny, the relevant area of the Council's website should be updated on a regular basis. Subject to these comments outlined above, the Panel has endorsed suggested responses to questions in the consultation document for submission to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

22. STRATEGIC HEALTH AUTHORITY: STRATEGIC VISION DOCUMENT

The Panel has been acquainted with the contents of the Strategic Health Authority's Strategic Vision Document, which outlines its Vision for the National Health Service over the next ten years.

23. HOUSING STRATEGY FOR THE CAMBRIDGE SUB-REGION

The Panel has reviewed the draft Housing Strategy for the Cambridge Sub-Region. The Strategy sets out how the District Council will work in partnership on housing issues that extend across local authority boundaries, with the six other local authorities that make up the sub-

region. Its importance lies in the fact that it enables bids for funding for housing purposes to be made at a regional level.

The Panel has discussed the economic downturn and the implications of it in terms of the achievement of the Action Plan, which is attached to the Strategy. It has been noted that there has not been an increase locally in home repossessions and that the downturn has produced some positive effects in terms of the construction of social housing; however, Members have registered their concerns at the significant increase in demand for advice from those experiencing difficulties in making mortgage repayments.

24. OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSESSMENTS

The Panel has received an update on the latest position on the average length of time Occupational Therapists take in Huntingdonshire to complete assessments of need for home adaptations for those with disabilities. Members have been informed that significant reductions in waiting times have been achieved in the last six months. The financial implications for the Council of expediting the processing of applications for home adaptations has also been discussed.

25. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD PANELS

The Panel has been updated with developments in respect of local and national initiatives arising from the Government's White Paper – Communities in Control: Real Power, Real People in relation to community engagement.

The Panel has been acquainted with the strengths and weaknesses of a series of models through which community engagement might be achieved. All the models are broadly based on multi-agency neighbourhood panels and vary according to the degree of formalisation of the operating procedures involved. Following extensive discussions on the new panels' powers, size and membership and on the training that would be required, the Panel has expressed concern over the financial and other resource implications that the proposals might have for the Council. As a result, Members have expressed the view that any new panels should not have executive decision making powers and they have concluded that new arrangements should be kept as simple as possible.

The Panel has endorsed a proposal that the Democratic Structure Working Group should incorporate the question of community engagement into their remit and Members have requested the Working Group to take into account their views on the establishment of any new arrangements.

26. GRANT AID

The Grant Aid Working Group has submitted its findings to the Panel. Following the completion of its work on the Small Scale Environmental Improvements Scheme, the Working Group has

previously been tasked with investigating all the remaining grant aid schemes operated by the Council, including the criteria for each scheme, how they relate to the Council's corporate priorities, the methods adopted to publicise the availability of grant funding, the application process, Officer/Member involvement in the approval process and the level of external funding brought into the District. Having completed its work in each of these areas, the Working Group has made a number of recommendations which are intended to streamline and promote the current grant aid administration process.

The Panel has endorsed the Working Group's findings but suggested that half yearly reports by organisations in service level agreements with the Council, should be taken into consideration before its report is submitted to the Cabinet.

Other Matters of Interest

27. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) – PROGRESS

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies at each of its meetings.

28. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 - FORWARD PLAN

The Panel has been acquainted with details of the current Forward Plan of Key Decisions at its meetings.

29. SCRUTINY

The Panel has received and noted the latest editions of the Decision Digest and has received answers to questions raised on their contents.

S J Criswell
Chairman