

Decision Digest

Edition 90

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 1st to 17th December 2008.

DEVELOPMENT OF OPTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT DPD

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has considered the content of the Development Management DPD which sets out the Council's policies for managing future development in Huntingdonshire.

The Panel has commented on a variety of issues including parking provision and energy conservation in new development, the implications of the new Community Infrastructure levy and the retention of historic orchard. Members also noted that a framework had been developed for the first time to establish contributions from developers towards indoor sports facilities.

In respect of the draft policy concerning development as part of the Great Fen project, Members expressed concern that the policy was overly prescriptive and not consistent with the more conditional language adopted elsewhere in the document. The Panel felt that the terminology whereby "planning permission for development will be granted for proposals which will deliver the implementation of the

Great Fen project as identified on the Proposals Map and which are consistent with the Master Plan" could fetter the Council's discretion when considering future planning applications. As the content of the Master Plan was not yet known, Members felt unable to support the policy as drafted. With this in mind, the Panel has recommended to the Cabinet that they adopt a change in terminology with respect to this policy area.

Concerns were also expressed about the references within the document to the possible restriction of permitted development rights for specific farming or operational purposes which could disadvantage local landowners operating in the Master Plan area.

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Overview and Scrutiny Panels have considered the performance of the authority against the priority objectives identified in "Growing Success", the corporate plan updated by the Council in September 2008.

The Service Support Panel has noted that most of the targets within their priority areas were being met or exceeded. However comment

was made in relation to the target of maximising leisure centre income. Whilst this had fallen against target, Members acknowledged that the loss of income had been more than offset by reductions in expenditure in the Leisure Centres as a whole.

The Service Delivery Panel has endorsed the comments made by the Corporate Plan Working Group. However comment was made about the two priority areas where targets were not being met – namely the promotion of energy efficiency to householders and the percentage of affordable housing on qualifying sites. With regard to the latter the Panel has noted that the target was likely to be amended to reflect targets in the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Members also concurred with a suggestion that further measures should be taken to promote the Warmer Homes for Life scheme.

MONITORING OF SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS

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

Members were advised of the impact of the current economic climate and alerted to the future possibility of developers seeking to renegotiate agreements because properties were no longer achieving the previously anticipated values.

URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK – LAND AROUND BUTTSGROVE WAY, THE WHADDONS AND SUFFOLK HOUSE, HUNTINGDON

The contents of a draft Urban Design Framework for development opportunities in this part of Huntingdon was considered by the Overview & Scrutiny (Service Support).

Members attention was drawn to the comments that had been received by way of correspondence and questionnaires completed at public exhibitions that had been held on the proposals. It was noted that a number of replies had contained concerns over loss of green space in the area.

In welcoming the document as a positive step and one which had helped to alleviate initial misunderstanding, Members commented also on the question of highway safety in Buttsgrove Way, the future housing mix of development and the need to respect the private dwellings in the area in the subsequent development proposals.

CALCULATION OF COUNCIL TAX BASE 2009/10

In accordance with the legal requirement placed on the Council, the Corporate Governance Panel has set the tax base for the whole of the District for the year 2009/10 as 57,960 with figures apportioned for each Parish of the District.

REVIEW OF THE RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Corporate Governance Panel has endorsed the content of a revised Risk Management Strategy. In addition an exercise is currently underway to ensure that any partnership risks would be flagged up by the Council's performance management system.

REVIEW OF THE ANTI-FRAUD AND CORRUPTION STRATEGY

The outcome of a review of the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy has been reported to the Corporate Governance Panel. The review has identified the need for several changes principally arising from the External Auditor's Use of Resources report and best practice guidance issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and Association of Local Authority Risk Managers (ALARM).

WHISTLEBLOWING: ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE POLICY AND PROCEDURE

The annual review of the Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure has taken place and the Corporate Governance Panel has endorsed proposed changes to the guidance notes issued on Whistleblowing. At the Panel's request, future Whistleblowing reports will be submitted to the Panel at the same time as the annual Housing Benefit Fraud Investigation Activity report.

FEEDBACK PROCEDURE

Following a review of the Council's complaints procedure, the Corporate Governance Panel has endorsed proposals for changes to the procedure which will introduce a new feedback procedure allowing complimentary views and comments on services received other than complaints also to be formally registered.

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY MEMBERS AND EMPLOYEES

The Standards Committee has responded on behalf of the District Council to a consultation paper published by DCLG entitled "Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power" which had invited comments on proposals to review the Members' Code of Conduct. It is the intention to publish a revised code to come into effect by May 2009. The most significant revision to the code involves the issue of "private capacity" to cover those occasions when a Member's criminal behaviour in a private capacity brings disrepute upon the local authority.

USE OF RESOURCES JUDGEMENTS 2007/08

To comply with Audit Commission requirements, the Standards Committee has undertaken "an annual assessment of standards of ethical conduct across the organisation." As there does not appear to be any trend emerging in terms of the aspects of code which give rise to the most complaints, the Committee has endorsed the continuation of the approach

towards training being adopted by the Monitoring Officer which involves responding to Parish Councils as circumstances evolve and the need for training is identified. However, the Committee has requested the Monitoring Officer to establish whether the Quality Status awarded to Parish Councils requires Code of Conduct training and refresher sessions to be undertaken.

OTHER STANDARDS ISSUES

The Standards Committee has noted the nature of the Code of Conduct enquiries which had been logged by the Monitoring Officer since their last meeting and have extended an invitation to both the Leaders of the Council and of the Opposition Group to address them at future meetings on their expectations in terms of the Committee's contribution to the Council and to maintaining standards and conduct locally.

SCHEME OF DELEGATED POWERS – DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PANEL

The Development Control Panel has reviewed its delegated powers and proposed several minor amendments to the current scheme to sustain performance levels, make best use of resources and to ensure that Members continue to focus on those applications considered to be major or controversial. The changes will take place with immediate effect but will not vary the opportunity which exists for Members to request the Head of Planning Services, within 21 days of the publication of the weekly list to submit an

application to the Panel for determination.

CUSTOMER SERVICE DEVELOPMENT IN ST IVES AND ST NEOTS

The outcome of a review of the services delivered by the St Ives and St Neots Customer Service Centres has been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery). The review had been prompted following the adoption of the Customer Services Strategy in 2008.

The Panel expressed general support for the recommendations – namely the proposal to increase the range of services in St Ives and St Neots, the principle of relocating the St Neots Tourist Information Centre and the investigation of alternative accommodation in St Neots and St Ives.

Members discussed the importance of offering customers a private meeting area, the incorporation of other services and facilities within the proposals, the importance of locating the Customer Service Centres in an accessible and highly visible location and the need to consult with Ward Councillors on any proposals to change the location of the Centres.

The Panel has acknowledged the financial implications for St Neots Museum of amalgamating the two current offices in St Neots, but concurred with a suggestion that the customer service facility should be in one single unit to enable efficiency savings to be achieved.

Further information was requested on the Town Council's position in the event that the District Council considers relocating its facilities which are currently located within the Priory Centre.

The Panel has also suggested that the provision of outreach services in larger villages should be investigated.

CARE QUALITY COMMISSION: ENFORCEMENT POLICY CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has considered a consultation document issued by the Care Quality Commission on its draft enforcement policy. The Commission has been established as an independent regulator of health, mental health and adult social care in England, and brings together the work of the three Commissions for Social Care Inspection, Healthcare and Mental Health.

The Panel has made a number of comments in response to the questions raised in the consultation paper and has requested that a report summarising their response be submitted to the next meeting.

In acknowledging the complexity of the framework represented in the consultation document, the Panel has invited a representative of the Care Quality Commission to attend a future meeting to deliver a presentation on its work.

ENHANCED SERVICES

CLEANING

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has been advised of the Cabinet's response to the recommendations arising from their study on enhanced cleansing services in the District's market towns.

Having noted that the Cabinet had endorsed the principle of introducing enhanced cleansing on Sundays but that work was required before its implementation would be considered, Members have requested further clarification as to how this would be completed from the Head of Operations.

IMPACT OF THE NEW A14 IN TERMS OF AIR QUALITY AND NOISE POLLUTION

Councillor M F Shellens has reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) his initial findings into the potential impact that the new A14 would have on air quality and noise pollution. Having been advised that relevant information contained in the Local Air Quality Management Further Review and Assessment Report had been presented to a previous meeting of the Licensing & Protection Panel, Councillor Shellens undertook to discuss this document with Officers in the Planning and Environmental and Community Health Services Divisions.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) – STUDIES

Having discussed a number of options for future study areas, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has requested the submission of reports to their future meetings on the provision of leisure facilities for young people and on trends in the value of recycled materials. The Panel also intend to discuss the future governance arrangements for Hinchingsbrooke Hospital at their January meeting.