

## Decision Digest

Edition 91

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 18<sup>th</sup> December 2008 to 26th January 2009

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000: FORWARD PLAN**

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has requested sight of the reports on the Leisure Facilities Strategy and Structure Review Working Group Findings for submission to future Panel meetings.

### **FUTURE GOVERNANCE OF HINCHINGBROOKE HOSPITAL: CONSULTATION ARRANGEMENTS**

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has received a presentation from Dr S Dunn, Director of Strategy and Hinchingsbrooke Next Steps Project Co-ordinator for the East of England Strategic Health Authority on the proposals for the future governance and operation of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital. Ms J Bawden, Director of Communications for NHS Cambridgeshire was also in attendance.

The Panel was apprised of the background to the proposals, the governance models which the Trust had explored thus far and the conclusion that a franchised

agreement for a defined period had been selected as the preferred option for the Hospital's future governance.

The Panel has been advised of the proposed approach to public engagement, which comprises the establishment of a Stakeholder Panel which would brief, involve and consult interested groups and parties. The Stakeholder Panel would be chaired by the District Council's Chief Executive.

The Panel has questioned whether potential franchisees would contribute towards the repayment of the Hospital's existing debt and discussed the future subsidy of services. The role of the Government and the implications of not approving the franchise proposal has also been discussed. It was understood that the range and quality of services would be maintained by the contract specification, which the Stakeholder Panel would discuss and monitor. It was anticipated that the hospital would attract greater numbers of patients and an assurance was given that there was no intention to sell any land or buildings currently in the Hospital's ownership.

In noting the cost of the process and likely timescale for its completion the Panel were advised that the franchise was a robust model employed by other Strategic Health Authorities.

## **HOMELESSNESS AND THE HOUSING MARKET**

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has considered current national and local economic factors affecting the housing market and the associated demand for social housing, together with details of a proposal to re-model Coneygear Court.

The Panel was encouraged to note that a number of initiatives are in place to address the effects of the economic downturn in preventing homelessness and home repossessions. Locally it was reported that there was no significant increase in home repossessions when compared to the previous year. Efforts were also being made to promote the range of services available to residents experiencing financial difficulties who were encouraged to seek advice at the earliest opportunity.

The Panel was advised that the demand for housing services was likely to increase over the course of the next year and Members noted that the Housing Service was currently operating at maximum capacity. The Panel has submitted a report to the Cabinet requesting them to look sympathetically on future requests for additional resources to meet any further

increases in demand should they arise.

With regard to the re-modelling of Coneygear Court, the Panel has received assurances, that should the Granta Housing Society bid for the redevelopment of the site be successful, interim arrangements would be made to accommodate occupiers of the property during the construction period.

## **CARE QUALITY COMMISSION: ENFORCEMENT POLICY CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has endorsed the content of a consultation response on the Care Quality Commission's proposed enforcement policy for the regulation of health and adult social care services across the country. The document was previously considered by the Panel at their December 2008 meeting.

## **DISABILITY ACCESS STUDY**

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has endorsed their final report on the study into disability access for submission to the Cabinet. A further report reviewing the outcome of the study has also been requested for submission to the Panel in six months time. The Panel has nominated the Chairman to attend the relevant Cabinet meeting to present the Panel's report.

## **SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF ALCOHOL ABUSE**

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has received the

final report of its Working Group which was established to consider the problems of alcohol abuse and its social consequences within the District. Subject to an amendment to emphasise the importance of enforcement agencies making full use of the powers available to them to tackle the effects of alcohol misuse and resultant public disorder, the Panel has endorsed the contents of the report. The Panel has also agreed to re-visit the study towards the end of the year to review progress made towards the achievement of the county-wide alcohol action plan, the night watch project and the availability of statistics from Hinchingbrooke Hospital on alcohol related accidents and emergency treatment.

The Panel's report has subsequently been considered by the Cabinet.

### **IMPROVEMENT WORKS TO CAR PARKS AT HUNTINGDON AND ST. NEOTS RAIL STATIONS**

The District Council's Transportation Team Leader has provided an update to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) on discussions between the local planning authority and network rail concerning the extension of the car parking facilities at St. Neots and Huntingdon stations. Arising from the expansion proposals the Panel expressed concerns about vehicular access to St Neots Station and the Western Car Park in Huntingdon.

Members commented that any changes to vehicular access to Huntingdon station could not be considered in isolation from the

Huntingdon West Area Action Plan and on the parking capacity problems experienced by off-peak travellers in the town.

The Panel has also discussed connections between train and bus services operating from the Huntingdon and St. Neots Stations. Problems in this respect were particularly apparent in St. Neots. The Panel were informed that while Stagecoach had already been advised of problems, Councillor P L E Bucknell would be meeting with bus companies to discuss the matter in the near future.

### **PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

The Cabinet has noted the Council's operational performance against 37 short, medium and long term objectives presented in "Growing Success" the Council's Corporate Plan. With regard to those objectives where actual performance had not progressed as well as anticipated, Executive Councillors have been reassured that a system has been introduced to ensure that applications for loft and cavity wall insulation are processed within 5 working days. Particular reference also was made to the implications of the current economic climate on the Council's ability to achieve the target of affordable housing commitment on qualifying sites.

### **CUSTOMER SERVICE DEVELOPMENT IN ST IVES AND ST NEOTS**

The Cabinet has noted a proposal to increase a range of services being offered to customers via the St. Ives

and St. Neots Customer Services Centres. In reviewing the issues involved, Executive Councillors have stressed that such services should be delivered, if possible, from the High Street or a central location. In that respect, the Cabinet have felt unable to support, currently, any option to re-model existing offices. As a result of which, Executive Councillors have requested the Head of Customer Services to investigate the financial viability of acquiring shop units in St. Ives and St. Neots and to explore the possibility of sharing the properties with one or more partners. Members have requested that local Councillors be consulted on the location of any alternative accommodation. Approval also has been given in principle for the relocation of the St. Neots Tourist Information Centre with existing staff being subsumed within the Customer Services Team.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF OPTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT DPD**

Having regard to the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support), the Cabinet has approved for public consultation the contents of the Development Plan Document (DPD) Development of Options and the Sustainability Appraisal. The document forms part of the local development framework and will support the Core Strategy and East of England Plan as well as setting out the Council's policies for managing development in Huntingdonshire including the assessment and determination of

planning applications. The draft policy has evolved from the Huntingdonshire Interim Planning Policy Statement, 2007 and from those representations received during the Issues and Options Consultation and Initial Sustainability Appraisal and has been updated to reflect changes in national guidance. It is anticipated that public consultation will commence in mid-January.

### **LETTINGS POLICY**

Having considered a proposal to vary the Council's Letting Policy, the Cabinet has authorised the Head of Housing Services, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health, to award priority status to applicants with exceptional circumstances, where those circumstances are not adequately covered and, pending a further review of the policy, to correct unforeseen detrimental consequences which disadvantage an individuals' opportunity for being housed in comparison with the priority of other applicants. This delegation has previously been used in exceptional circumstances but was omitted, in error, from the current policy.

### **WEB STRATEGY 2009 – 2011**

The Cabinet has approved the content of a revised web strategy for the Council and a supporting action plan for a three-year period 2009/2011. The document covers shared services, revenue generation, monitoring and evaluation, risks and resources.

### **COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE**

### CENTRE – SAPLEY EAST

The Cabinet has agreed to submit an application for grant support from the East of England Development Agencies Investing in a Communities Programme for the construction of a community enterprise centre in the Sapley East area. The development of such a Centre is an accepted element of regeneration schemes and will provide small scale employment, skill and learning opportunities to match particular community needs. The initiative accords with the objectives of the Local Economy Strategy and the activities of the Council and its partners in these areas. Having acknowledged that current and future funding opportunities will be maximised if the community enterprise centre was owned and controlled by a community interest company, the Cabinet has –

- ◆ reaffirmed a decision to reinvest the proceeds of the disposal of land in this regeneration scheme to produce future community benefits;
- ◆ supported the principle of establishing a community interest company which owns and manages the proposed community enterprise centre and other assets if opportunities arise;
- ◆ authorised the Director of Environmental and Community Services to obtain an agreement, in principle, from

appropriate organisations to form a community interest company and to work with those organisations to prepare a robust business plan to demonstrate the viability of the community enterprise centre; and

- ◆ agreed to consider a masterplan for the regeneration of the Sapley East area and the Business Plan for the community enterprise centre before a final decision is made by the Cabinet in March/April 2009.

### NEIGHBOUR NOTIFICATION

Regulations prescribe that all applications for planning permission should be subject to a form of mandatory notification and / or advertising. The District Council's practice on neighbour notification has evolved through practical experience and currently is wider than required by legislation. The Development Control Panel has endorsed continuation of the current notification process and approved some minor changes to avoid confusion amongst neighbours in residential neighbourhoods.

**ENFORCEMENT  
HARTFORD  
HUNTINGDON**

**ACTION:  
MARINA,**

Following representations made to the Development Control Panel, the Panel has agreed to establish a working party comprising Councillors J D Ablewhite, P A Swales, G S E Thorpe and R J West to consider the preparation of Supplementary Planning Guidance on marinas, the way forward for enforcement action and the wider issues involved in seeking to resolve the alleged unauthorised occupation of various lodges, houseboats etc at Harford Marina.

visitor minibus service from Huntingdon to the prison.

### **ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITY**

The Development Control Panel has received an update on the activities of the enforcement team during 2008 and noted progress and achievements against objectives set for that year.

In endorsing seven objectives for 2009, the Panel requested that priority should be given to the production of a leaflet for Town and Parish Councils on the enforcement process and the investigation at Hartford Marina.

### **DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS**

Seven applications were considered by the Development Control Panel in January and these included a proposal to develop a 480 place prison for 18-21 year old male prisoners at Littlehey Prison for which approval was given subject to the completion of a S106 agreement which will secure the upgrading of the cycle route through Perry and the continuation and extension of a