
Cabinet

Report of the meetings held on 18th December 2008 and 29th January 2009

Matters for Decision

58. FINANCIAL STRATEGY, MEDIUM TERM PLAN AND BUDGET

The Cabinet has considered the content of the 2009/10 draft budget, the Medium Term Plan for the period 2010 - 2014 and the level of Council Tax for 2009/2010. A copy of the financial report considered by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 29th January 2009 is attached to the Financial Plan, Medium Term Plan, 2009/10 Budget and Associated Matters Report which is Item No.3 on the Council Agenda.

In discussing spending adjustments in the Medium Term Plan, Members' attention was drawn to the conclusions reached by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) on this matter. In so doing, the Cabinet has concurred with the Panel that, given the current economic climate and the need for budgetary flexibility, there is merit in establishing a working group to assist Executive Councillors in their continuing review of the budget and financial strategy. Having noted comments arising from the consultation with the business community on expenditure proposals, the Cabinet

RECOMMEND

- (a) that the proposed budget, Medium Term Plan and Financial Strategy appended hereto be approved; and**
- (b) that a Council Tax increase of £5.76 (4.99%) representing a level of £121.15 for Band D properties for 2009/10 be approved.**

59. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2009/10

Reproduced as Appendix A is a proposed Treasury Management Strategy for 2009/10. The strategy, which complies with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Code of Practice, has clear objectives for the management of the Council's borrowing and investments.

In noting the deliberations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) that, subject to the appropriate

safeguards, the Strategy be amended to provide the opportunity to invest in corporate bonds, the Cabinet

RECOMMEND

that the Treasury Management Strategy for 2009/10, as amended, be approved.

Matters for Information

60. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Cabinet has noted the Council's operational performance against 37 short, medium and long term objectives contained in "Growing Success," the Council's Corporate Plan. With regard to those objectives where actual performance has 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.

61. 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 has felt unable to support, currently, any option to remodel existing offices. As a result, 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 has also been given in principle for the relocation of the St. Neots Tourist Information Centre with existing staff being subsumed within the Customer Services Team.

62. DEVELOPMENT OF OPTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT DPD

Having regard to the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) (Item No. 29 of their Report refers) 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.

63. LETTINGS POLICY

Having considered a proposal to vary the Council's Lettings Policy, the Cabinet has authorised the Head of Housing Services, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health, to award priority to applicants with exceptional housing circumstances, where those circumstances are not adequately covered by the existing policy. Pending a further review of the policy, the change will correct unforeseen detrimental consequences which disadvantage an individual's 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.

64. WEB STRATEGY 2009 – 2011

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

65. COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE CENTRE – SAPLEY EAST

The Cabinet has agreed to submit an application for grant support from the East of England Development Agency's Investing in 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.

66. MONITORING OF THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2008/09

The Cabinet has been acquainted with variations to the approved capital programme in the current year and the consequential estimated revenue impact.

67. FINANCIAL MONITORING – REVENUE BUDGET

The Cabinet has noted the expected revenue budget variations already identified in the current year, together with the payments written-off in the year for Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rates.

68. ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Cabinet has noted details of the Council's management of assets against national property performance management indicators. In so doing, Executive Councillors have been advised that work to update the Council's land ownership records is continuing with a new computerised database being acquired to incorporate all information relating to property ownership and asset management.

69. HOMELESSNESS AND THE HOUSING MARKET

The Cabinet has been acquainted with the deliberations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) (Item No. 36 of their Report refers) regarding the current national and local economic factors affecting the housing market and the associated level of demand for social rented housing. It was reported that there has been a significant rise in the number of customers presenting themselves to the Council for housing related assistance of late and this has necessitated the deployment of resources to meet the increased level of demand. In discussing the current situation, the Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health has referred to the need to monitor the situation closely given the uncertainty of the current economic climate and the likelihood of a further increase in demand for housing services should conditions worsen. At the same time, the Cabinet has been reminded of a number of housing initiatives currently in place to ameliorate the effects of the economic downturn in terms of preventing house repossessions and homelessness and to help those experiencing financial difficulties.

70. DISABILITY ACCESS STUDY

The Cabinet has been acquainted with the findings of a study by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) into disability access

across the District, which examined access to premises/sites other than those provided by the District Council. In so doing, Members have concurred with the Panel that further work is required to promote advocacy/advice services to those with disabilities and to tackle problems relating to the misuse of disabled bays and blue badge parking. With this in mind, the Cabinet has –

- ◆ requested that representations be made to Cambridgeshire County Council to ensure that the enforcement of blue badge restrictions in any new arrangements for decriminalised parking be recognised;
- ◆ endorsed the view that the Council should continue to undertake enforcement of parking in disabled bays in the car parks it manages; and
- ◆ requested that the Council instigates discussions on the potential for comprehensive joint advocacy/advice services and other opportunities for joint working between those organisations supporting people with disabilities.

71. SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF ALCOHOL ABUSE

The Cabinet has considered the findings of a study by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) (Item No. 32 of their Report refers) regarding the impact of alcohol abuse consumption on levels of anti-social behaviour and alcohol related crime within the District. Although related incidents were evident in Huntingdonshire, it was of some reassurance to Executive Members that the study found that they were at a lower level than in many parts of the country. Nevertheless, the Cabinet welcomed and encouraged the actions being taken by various agencies to reduce such incidents, particularly the development of a countywide alcohol strategy.

Having considered the extent of powers available to enforcement agencies including the County Council's Trading Standards Service and the Police, the Cabinet has requested the Head of Administration to liaise formally with agencies to encourage them to use this power in a positive way to tackle alcohol related crime and disorder. At the same time, the Cabinet has requested that where appropriate the District Council's Licensing Section ensure that local residents are aware of the opportunities available to them, under the Licensing Act 2003, to initiate reviews of premises licences and club premises certificates in situations where they were experiencing problems caused by public disorder emanating from these premises.

72. GRANT AID WORKING GROUP

The Cabinet has noted the findings of a study by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) which reviewed capital and revenue grant aid schemes operating across the Council. Although the study has reviewed issues relating to the criteria for each scheme, the application process, member/officer involvement and external funding, the Cabinet has noted the involvement of the Executive Councillors for Finance and Transportation and for Housing and Public Health in the Council's grant processes. Under the

circumstances, the Cabinet has therefore requested that those Members meet with the Working Group to discuss the issues highlighted and to report thereon to a future meeting of Cabinet.

73. ICT STRATEGY 2009 - 11

The Cabinet has approved the contents of a ICT Strategy and supporting action plans for the three year period 2009 - 2011. The Strategy sets out a vision which supports specific elements of Growing Success, largely within the Council's aim "to improve our systems and practice".

**74. URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORKS –
LAND AT THE WHADDONS, MAYFIELD DRIVE, HUNTINGDON
AND LAND SOUTH OF HIGH STREET, RAMSEY**

Having been acquainted with the responses received from the consultation exercises on the Urban Design Frameworks for land at the Whaddons, Mayfield Drive, Huntingdon and land south of the High Street, Ramsey, the Cabinet has agreed to approve the contents of the documents and has authorised the Head of Planning Services, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transportation to make any minor consequential amendment to the text and illustrations as necessary. The frameworks examine the potential redevelopment and regeneration opportunities available to the areas.

**75. LUMINUS GROUP – PROPOSED CHANGES TO MEMORANDUM
AND ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION**

In response to a request from the Luminus Group, the Cabinet has approved in principle a proposed amendment to the Memorandum and Articles of Association of Luminus Homes and Oak Foundation, to permit remuneration of Board Members, subject in the case of Oak Foundation to the consent of the Charity Commissioners also being obtained and in both instances to the precise wording being agreed by the Head of Legal and Estates. The Cabinet also has agreed that the determination of any future proposed amendments to the Memorandum and Articles within the Luminus Group be delegated to the Head of Legal and Estates, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health.

**76. PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE & METHOD OF
OPERATIONS – COUNTRYSIDE GROUP**

The Cabinet has agreed to defer consideration of proposed revised terms of reference and method of operations for the Countryside Joint Group given the need to also consider the outcome of a review of management arrangements for Leisure Centre Management Committees currently being undertaken and to achieve consistency between the arrangements.

77. NEW ACCOMMODATION – BUILDING A – OPTIONS REVIEW

(The following item was considered as a confidential item under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.)

Having regard to the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework), the Cabinet has approved in principle the disposal of a leasehold interest in Council owned land fronting St Mary's Street, Huntingdon to the Luminus Group for the provision of affordable housing and has authorised the Chief Executive, after consultation with the Leader, to agree the final terms and conditions for the disposal. The land has become available as part of a major project to provide new accommodation for the Council's headquarters.

I C Bates
Chairman