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## **Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery)**

**Reports of the meetings held on 2nd December 2008,  
6th January and 3rd February 2009**

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### **Matters for Information**

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

The Panel has considered the outcome of a review of the services delivered by the St Ives and St Neots Customer Service Centres. The review was prompted following the adoption of a Customer Services Strategy in 2008. The Panel has expressed support for the recommendations, which are that the range of services provided in St Ives and St Neots should be increased, that the St Neots Tourist Information Centre should, in principle, be relocated and alternative accommodation in St Neots and St Ives should be investigated.

Members have discussed the importance of offering customers a private meeting area, the incorporation of other services and facilities within the proposals, the value of locating the Customer Service Centres in an accessible and highly visible location and the need to consult 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 nevertheless has concurred with a suggestion that the customer service facility should be in one single unit to enable efficiency savings to be achieved. Further information has been requested on the Town Council's position in the event that the District Council considers relocating its facilities which are currently located within the Town Council's offices at the Priory Centre. The Panel has also suggested that the provision of outreach services in larger villages should be investigated.

#### **31. PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

The Panel has reviewed the Council's performance against its priority objectives, which are contained in "Growing Success" - the Corporate Plan. In endorsing the views of the Corporate Plan Working Group, Members have commented on two priority areas where targets have not been met, namely the promotion of energy efficiency to householders and the percentage of affordable housing on qualifying

sites. With regard to the former, Members have concurred with the Working Group's recommendation that further measures should be taken to promote energy efficiency. It has been suggested that the high levels of performance to date indicate that delays in excess of the target are not significant and that the performance reflects seasonal trends. Furthermore, it has been noted that the allocation of additional resources in order to achieve the target demonstrates that the performance management process is operating as intended. In terms of the percentage of affordable housing on qualifying sites, the Panel has noted that the target is likely to be amended to reflect that contained in the Regional Spatial Strategy.

**32. CARE QUALITY COMMISSION:  
ENFORCEMENT POLICY CONSULTATION DOCUMENT**

The Panel has submitted responses to questions raised by the Care Quality Commission on its proposed Enforcement Policy for the Regulation of Health and Adult Social Care Services in England. The Commission has been established as an independent regulator and brings together the work of the three Commissions for Social Care Inspection, Healthcare and Mental Health. Members have expressed the view that care services should be tightly regulated. However, concern has been expressed at the proposed use of financial penalties which could be detrimental to the level of patient care being delivered and might result in some facilities ceasing to operate. Members have also commented on the absence of any reference to the Local Involvement Network (LINK) and an inconsistency in the criteria for instigating formal investigations.

In acknowledging the complexity of the framework represented in the consultation document and in noting that the Commission would not begin operating until 1st April 2009, the Panel has agreed to invite a representative of the Care Quality Commission to attend a future Panel meeting in the spring.

**33. ENHANCED CLEANSING SERVICES**

The Panel has been advised of the Cabinet's response to recommendations arising from its study on enhanced cleansing services in the District's market towns. Whilst the Cabinet has endorsed the principal of introducing enhanced cleansing on Sundays, further work will be needed before it can be implemented. The Head of Operations will carry out this work.

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

Councillor M F Shellens has reported to Members his initial findings into the potential impact that the new A14 will have on local air quality and noise levels. Although much of this information is contained in the Local Air Quality Management Further Review and Assessment Report, Councillor Shellens has undertaken to discuss the details of this document directly with Officers in the Planning and Environmental and Community Health Services Divisions.

**35. FUTURE GOVERNANCE OF HINCHINGBROOKE HOSPITAL: CONSULTATION ARRANGEMENTS**

The Panel 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 proposals for the future governance and operation of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital. Ms J Bawden, Director of Communications, NHS Cambridgeshire was also in attendance.

The Panel has been apprised of the background to the proposals and has been advised that a number of governance models for the Trust have been explored, with a franchised agreement for a defined period being selected as the preferred option. The main features of an operating franchise, its potential strengths and the competitive process through which a franchisee will be identified have been outlined to Panel Members.

Subject to the Government accepting the new governance arrangements, the Panel has been advised of details of the planned approach to public engagement on the implementation of them, which includes the establishment of a Stakeholder Panel. The purpose of the Stakeholder Panel will be to brief, involve and consult with interested groups and parties. The Stakeholder Panel will be chaired by the District Council's Chief Executive.

The Panel has questioned whether the competition exercise will facilitate the repayment of the Hospital's existing debt and if market testing will permit future subsidy of services. The role of the Government and the implications of not approving the franchise proposal have also been discussed. It has been reported that the range and quality of services will be ensured by the contract specification and that these matters will form part of the Stakeholder Panel's deliberations. It is expected that patient choice will make it possible for the Hospital to attract greater numbers of patients and Members have been assured that there is no intention to sell any land or buildings currently in the Hospital's ownership. The Panel has been advised that a franchise is a robust model, which is employed by other Strategic Health Authorities. Finally, Members have been acquainted with the cost of the process to date and the likely timescale for its completion.

**36. HOMELESSNESS AND THE HOUSING MARKET**

In pursuit of its investigations into matters associated with the Council's performance against the Corporate Plan at Item 31 above, the Panel has considered an analysis of current national and local economic factors affecting the housing market and the associated demand for social housing, together with details of a proposal to remodel Coneygear Court. There has not been a significant increase in home repossessions locally when compared to the previous year. However, it is likely that demand for housing services will increase over the course of the next year. The Housing Service already has a

number of initiatives in place to address the effects of the economic downturn in terms of preventing homelessness and home repossessions. Efforts are being made to promote these services to residents experiencing financial difficulties in order that they seek advice at the earliest opportunity. As a result of these measures having been out in place Members have been informed that the Housing Service is currently operating at maximum capacity. The Panel has, therefore, requested the Cabinet 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 will be made to accommodate occupiers of the property during the construction period.

**37. CUSTOMER SERVICE – QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT: OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2008**

The Panel has received the Customer Service Quarterly Performance Report for the period October to December 2008, which outlines the levels of performance and standards achieved by the Service. The Panel has received clarification on the scope of the activities referred to within the report, including the procedure for logging complaints at the Call Centre for missed refuse collections and the categorisation of service enquiries by the Customer Service Centres.

The Panel has been apprised with the outcome of a “Mystery Shopper” exercise undertaken on the service provided by the Council via the Call Centre, on email enquiries and on the Council’s website. Members have been informed that the Council performed well in comparison with other local authorities.

In future the format of the report will reflect the organisation of the Corporate Plan – “Growing Success”.

An update also has been received on the Customer Service Centres in St Ives and St Neots. The cost implications of relocating the Customer Service Centres currently are being worked on.

**38. LEISURE CENTRE MANAGEMENT AGREEMENTS**

The Panel has been acquainted with a proposal to change the funding and management arrangements of the District’s jointly provided Leisure Centres, which has arisen as a result of recent legislative change affecting the way the education service operates. Members have noted that the proposal to dispense with the current Management Committees and to replace them with an Active Leisure Forum will result in savings on audit fees and on the administrative costs associated with servicing the meetings. Whilst it also has been noted that the arrangements will change the way the Centres are funded, the Panel has been advised that the County Council will

continue to have an obligation to meet the cost of capital repairs at each of the Centres.

The Panel has reviewed the proposed terms of reference for the Forum. In so doing, suggestions have been made for changes to the areas covered by the St Ives and Huntingdon Leisure Centres. The Panel has also expressed the view that the notification period for meetings of the Forum should be longer than the proposed five day period.

Subject to the comments outlined above, the Panel has recommended the Cabinet to endorse the recommendations contained within the report.

**39. DISABILITY ACCESS STUDY**

The Panel has approved the final report on the study into disability access across the District for submission to the Cabinet. The Chairman had been nominated to attend the relevant Cabinet meeting to present the report and, following consideration of it, the Cabinet has endorsed the Panel's recommendations (Item No. 70 of the Cabinet's report refers.). A report on responses to the Panel's representations in the course of the study has been requested in six months time.

**40. PROMOTING BETTER HEALTH IN OLDER PEOPLE THROUGH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

Members have reviewed the progress made in respect of the Panel's previous study into promoting better health in older people through physical activity. The Panel has been encouraged by the progress that has been made to enhance the services available for older people within Huntingdonshire, with particular achievements being made via the "Active at 50" project. Having regard to the latter, the Panel has been pleased to note that in addition to a Big Lottery Fund award, further grant has been received through the Local Public Service Agreement reward funding.

The Panel has been advised that a lack of resources has prevented the creation and maintenance of a database of exercise services and facilities for older people from taking place. The Panel are keen that such a database is made publicly available and have asked officers to investigate ways in which the recommendation on this matter might be implemented.

**41. ADOPTION OF ROADS AND SEWERS**

The Adoption of Roads and Sewers Working Group has submitted some preliminary findings to the Panel. Members have been reminded that the Working Group had previously been tasked with undertaking a study on "the process of adopting estate roads and sewers with an aim to put measures in place that could streamline the process and make the procedures more transparent, initially by investigation of introducing a District-wide register of unadopted roads

and sewers.” The Working Group has completed its investigations into the procedures associated with the adoption of sewers and the findings are encouraging in that the Government intends to transfer responsibility for privately owned sewers and lateral drains in England to statutory water and sewerage companies.

An update also has been received on a recent meeting of the Working Group on the County Council’s procedure for adopting roads and the District Council’s powers as the local Planning Authority in the procedure. It has become apparent that the absence of legal powers throughout the adoption process can inhibit the adoption process.

In the course of a lengthy discussion on the adoption of roads, the Panel has unanimously expressed the view that a more proactive approach should be taken by the responsible bodies to ensuring that roads are adopted in a timely manner. Some of the options available to do this will be investigated by the Working Group at its next meeting when the study will be nearing completion.

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### **Other Matters of Interest**

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#### **42. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) PROGRESS**

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies at each of its meetings. The Panel has discussed future potential study areas and has requested scoping reports on trends in the value of recycled materials and on the provision of leisure facilities for young people to be submitted to future meetings. Members also have noted that the Cabinet has deferred consideration of their final report on Grant Aid to enable consultation with the relevant Executive Members to take place.

#### **43. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 – FORWARD PLAN**

The Panel has been acquainted with details of the current Forward Plan of Key Decisions at each of its meetings. The Panel has requested sight of items on the Leisure Facilities Strategy and on the Structure Review Working Group’s Findings prior to their consideration by the Cabinet.

#### **44. 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