

## Decision Digest

Edition 92

**Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 28th January to 27th February 2009.**

### **REVIEW OF CENTRAL SERVICES DIRECTORATE**

The Employment Panel has endorsed a new staffing structure for the Central Services Directorate. The revised structure reflects the outcome of a recent review of the Directorate and is intended to address a number of staffing matters, together with new opportunities which have arisen following the appointment of a new Director of Central Services.

In approving the proposals, the Panel was pleased to note that the review had produced significant savings towards the Council's overall targets. The initial findings of the review of the Democratic Structure Working Group also have been taken into consideration.

Having noted that the revised structure provides for the establishment and re-designation of a number of posts in the Directorate, including the deletion of the Head of Human Resources and Payroll Services, the Employment Panel has also approved the procedures for appointments to these posts with immediate effect. At the same time, the Panel has agreed to formally delete from the Council's

establishment the post of Head of Community Services which had been vacant for some time.

As part of the review, consideration also has been given to the role of the Council's Monitoring Officer. Having regard to the significant increase in the workload associated with ethical standards, the need to ensure that the Council adequately resources and uses expertise and knowledge in this field to maintain its own reputation and to ensure that Town and Parish Councils have adequate training to reduce the likelihood of future complaints, the Panel has recommended that the Head of Law, Property and Governance be formally appointed as the Council's Monitoring Officer.

Subsequently, the Cabinet has approved the associated financial implications of the changes.

### **ANNUAL PAY AWARD 2009/10**

Having regard to the Annual Pay Review prepared by Inbucon consultants and the outcome of negotiations with Employee Side Representatives, the Panel has agreed an increase of 2.2% in salary scales for District Council employees with effect from 1st April 2009.

As part of this year's award, the Panel also has agreed to review the salaries of those members of staff on the lower salary scales. The terms of the review are yet to be determined.

### **HOME WORKING**

The Employment Panel has endorsed the Home Working Policy for the Council, which outlined the process and principles in relation to employees undertaking home working on both a frequent and full-time basis.

The Policy is intended to address the issues which arose during the recent Home Working Pilot which formed one of several projects arising from the Council's Flexible Working Strategy and has been developed in conjunction with relevant services, managers and employees. Further reviews of the Policy will be undertaken when additional information regarding the management of and take up of the opportunity is forthcoming.

### **RECRUITMENT**

The Employment Panel has been informed of the Council's recruitment process for filling vacant posts, together with details of the circumstances in which external advisers are used in the recruitment of senior posts.

In so doing, the Panel has agreed that it would be premature to introduce any changes to recruitment procedures in advance of the review of the Council's People (HR) Strategy. However, the Panel has expressed some concerns

about the current composition of the Council's Appointments Panel which is used for appointments to senior positions within the Council. Specifically, comments were made about the need to establish a pool of Members from which the Appointments Panel could be constituted on an ad hoc basis, such that problems with availability could be avoided. The Panel has agreed that these comments should be included in the current review of the Constitution by the Corporate Governance Panel.

### **SECTION 106 WORKING GROUP**

Subject to a number of minor amendments, the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has endorsed the final report of its Working Group on the Council's Section 106 process. In so doing, the Panel has nominated Councillor D Harty to attend the relevant Cabinet meeting to present the Panel's report.

As part of their deliberations, the Panel discussed whether it would be appropriate to share the outcome of their investigations with the County Council and other local authorities. However it was concluded that this could best be dealt with on an informal basis by County Council members.

### **REGIONAL SCALE SETTLEMENT STUDY**

The Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy & Transport and the Head of Planning Services have updated the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) with details of the ongoing review of the 2008

East of England Plan and the Regional Scale Settlement Study which had been recently published by the East of England Assembly. The study had been commissioned to investigate and provide robust recommendations with regard to the potential regional scale new settlements within the East of England and outlined a number of possible new growth locations across the region – including one to the north of Huntingdon.

In discussing the current situation, Panel Members raised a number of questions relating to the options for providing additional housing if required to do so, the creation of sustainable communities, the level of development which would be sustainable within the District and the potential for a change in policy if there were to be a change in Government. At the conclusion of their discussions and having recognised that a certain degree of growth was necessary in the Region, the Panel endorsed proposals to put forward positive alternative location options to those proposed by the EERA study and has acknowledged the need for the District Council to provide suitable investment to respond to the study appropriately.

The Head of Planning Services has been invited to attend a future meeting to report on the outcome of the Cambridgeshire Development Study and the District Council's response to the Regional Scale Settlement Study in due course.

### **LOCAL INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK**

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) has considered the content of the Local Investment Framework whose purpose was to determine the level of local and strategic infrastructure required to meet the target of new homes coming forward in Huntingdonshire up to 2026.

In so doing, the Panel has discussed the possible introduction of a Community Infrastructure levy as part of the 2008 Planning Act and the potential for tariff arrangements to be applied on a house by house basis instead of through a Section 106 agreement. In that respect, the Panel has noted that the Council is working with Cambridgeshire Horizons and other Cambridgeshire Councils to produce a potential scheme for a sub-regional infrastructure tariff.

Whereupon and having raised no objections to the future work programme with regard to the development of the Local Infrastructure Framework and the Community Infrastructure Levy, the Panel endorsed the recommendations within the report for submission to the Cabinet.

### **FINANCIAL STRATEGY, MEDIUM TERM PLAN 2010 TO 2014 AND THE 2009/10 BUDGET**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) has reviewed the Financial Strategy, Medium Term Plan 2010 – 2014 and the Budget and level of Council Tax for 2009/10 in advance of their consideration by the Cabinet and final determination by the Council.

The Panel has been acquainted with details of Executive Councillors' involvement in identifying potential areas for spending adjustments. In so doing, suggestions have been made that investigations might be undertaken to consider the potential benefits of creating single budgets for each Executive Councillor's area of responsibility.

The proposed increases in expenditure on information technology has also been discussed and a further suggestion has been made that those matters identified as requiring approval by the Chief Officers Management Team should instead be submitted to the Cabinet before proceeding.

Having noted the level of unidentified spending adjustments required in the period to 2013/14, the Panel has established a Working Group to review the budget for future years and to express a view on the priority that should be accorded to items contained within it. The Working Group will also aim to identify which items within the budget are a statutory requirement and those which are permissive. The Leader of the Opposition has also suggested that the Council might wish to revisit some of his Party's previous suggestions for achieving savings.

The Panel has also discussed the overall approach that the Authority should adopt in the present economic climate and has identified that the Council should exercise restraint in its spending and implement measures to support and promote the local economy.

The Panel has nevertheless expressed general support for the Financial Strategy, Medium Term Plan and Budget and has recommended that the Cabinet endorse it for submission to the Council.

### **2009/10 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) has been acquainted with proposed changes to the Council's Treasury Management for 2009/10, which was requested by Members due to recent events concerning local authorities' investments.

The Panel has considered a proposal for Corporate Bonds to be included under non-specified investments within the Strategy and has discussed the risks associated with such investments. In so doing, the Panel has not expressed any objection to Corporate Bonds being adopted as one of the Council's forms of investment. The Panel has also considered and discussed the Council's approach to long term borrowing.

The Cabinet has recommended the adoption of the Treasury Management Strategy to Council.

### **NEW ACCOMODATION – BUILDING A - OPTION REVIEW**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) has considered the approach to be adopted to the site of Building A of the New Office Accommodation Project. The Panel

has expressed a preference for Option E – namely, disposal of the site by leasehold to Luminus for the construction of social rented housing. The Panel has concurred that this Option was likely to attract grant aid from the Homes and Communities Agency and would enable construction on the whole site to be completed by March 2010. The Panel has concluded that this option represented the most effective use of the site and would provide the best rate of return for the Council.

Subsequently, the Cabinet has approved in principle the disposal of the leasehold interest of the land to the Luminus Group and has authorised the Chief Executive, after consultation with the Leader, to agree the final terms and conditions for the disposal.

### **CUSTOMER SERVICE – QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT: OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2008**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has received the Customer Service Quarterly Performance Report for the period October to December 2008. The report outlines the levels of performance and standards achieved by the Service. Clarification on the scope of the activities referred to within the report has also been received, together with details of 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 also been acquainted with the outcome of a “Mystery Shopper” exercise undertaken on the service provided by the Council and has been updated with the latest developments with regard to the Customer Service Centres in St Ives and St Neots.

### **LEISURE CENTRE MANAGEMENT AGREEMENTS**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has considered a proposal to change the funding and management arrangements for the District’s jointly provided Leisure Centres. The proposal has arisen as a result of recent legislative change affecting the way the education service operates. Savings on audit fees and on the administrative costs associated with the servicing of meetings would be achieved.

The proposal to dispense with the current Management Committees and to replace them with an Active Leisure Forum has been noted. The proposed terms of reference for the Forum has been reviewed and suggestions for changes to the areas covered by the St Ives and Huntingdon Leisure Centres and on the notification period for meetings of the Forum were made.

At a subsequent meeting of the Cabinet, Members felt it would be appropriate to award forum meetings a notice period of 14 days. Particular attention was drawn to the existing lease between the Council and Huntingdon Town Council for the occupation of the sports hall at Huntingdon Leisure Centre and bearing in mind the views of the

Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Executive Councillors felt that a place on the forum should be made for them.

Having considered various issues surrounding the overall management of the proposed arrangements, the Cabinet has

- ◆ endorsed the proposals for the future management and funding arrangements for the leisure centres;
- ◆ agreed that responsibility for the leisure centres be undertaken by the District Council with effect from the new financial year;
- ◆ endorsed the establishment of an active leisure forum;
- ◆ agreed to substitute the existing management agreements with new agreements to be approved by the County Council and the individual school governing bodies; and
- ◆ requested that future levels of performance for the Centres be reported to Cabinet on a 6 monthly basis.

### **PROMOTING BETTER HEALTH IN OLDER PEOPLE THROUGH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has reviewed progress made in respect of their previous study into promoting better health in older people through physical activity. The Panel was encouraged by the progress made to enhance the services available for older people within Huntingdonshire, in particular, the “Active at 50” project.

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 has asked Officers to investigate ways in which this recommendation might be achieved.

### **ADOPTION OF ROADS AND SEWERS**

The Adoption of Roads and Sewers Working Group, which was established by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery), has submitted some of its preliminary findings to the Panel. 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 the statutory water and sewerage companies.

An update has also 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. The Panel has unanimously expressed the view that a more proactive approach should be taken by the responsible bodies to ensure that roads are adopted in a timely manner.

### FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Head of Financial Services has drawn to the Cabinet's attention variations to the approved Capital Programme and spending variations in the revenue budget for the current year.

### ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

In noting details of the Council's management of assets, the Cabinet has been advised that work to update the Council's land ownership records was continuing with a new computerised database being acquired to incorporate all information relating to property ownership and asset management.

### HOMELESSNESS AND THE HOUSING MARKET

The Cabinet has considered current national and local economic factors affecting the housing market and the associated level of demand for social rented housing. The Cabinet was advised that there had 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.

### DISABILITY ACCESS STUDY

The Cabinet has been briefed on 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, the Cabinet has 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, and -

- ◆ requested that representations be made to Cambridgeshire County Council to ensure that the enforcement of blue badge restrictions in any new arrangements for de-criminalised 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.

### SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF ALCOHOL ABUSE

The Cabinet has received the final report of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) Working Group on the problems of alcohol abuse and its social consequences 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.

With regard to 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 Democratic and Central Services to liaise formally with agencies to encourage them to use this power in a positive way to tackle alcohol related crime and disorder. The Cabinet has also 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.

#### **GRANT AID WORKING GROUP**

The Cabinet has noted the findings of a study by a Working Group of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) which reviewed capital and revenue grant aid schemes operating across the Council. In reviewing the issues involved, the Cabinet has requested that the Executive Councillors for Finance and Environment and for Housing and Public Health meet

with the Working Group to discuss the application process, Member/Officer involvement and external funding.

#### **ICT STRATEGY 2009 - 2011**

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

#### **URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK - LAND AT THE WHADDONS, MAYFIELD DRIVE, HUNTINGDON AND LAND SOUTH OF HIGH STREET, RAMSEY**

Following consultation, the Cabinet has considered responses and suggested amendments to the Urban Design Frameworks for land at the Whaddons, Mayfield Drive, Huntingdon and land south of the High Street, Ramsey. Members have approved the final version of the documents as material consideration in planning decisions and project work.

#### **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 the 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 Law, Property and Governance. The Cabinet also has agreed that the determination of any further proposed amendments to the Memorandum and Articles be delegated to the Head of Law, Property and Governance, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health.

which six were approved, five refused and one deferred.

### **TRANSFORMATION FROM DEVELOPMENT CONTROL TO DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT**

The national agenda for planning towards 'Place Shaping' has prompted a review of the role and emphasis of development control work. Typically, the development control function is seen as negative and reactive rather than enabling the delivery of development. The new Local Development Framework will shift the emphasis to the creation of a sustainable and deliverable vision for development in the District. To support this change, the Development Control Panel has endorsed a proposal to transform the Development Control function into Development Management. The Head of Planning Services also has been authorised to implement all the necessary administrative and procedural changes required to support the transformation.

### **DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS**

At their February meeting, the Development Control Panel determined twelve applications of

