

## Decision Digest

Edition 95

**Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 18th May and 3rd July 2009.**

### **ST NEOTS LEISURE CENTRE DEVELOPMENT**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has received detailed information relating to a proposal to extend and re-model the existing dry sports facility located at St Neots Leisure Centre, together with its financial implications. The proposal aims to secure the future viability of the Leisure Centre, promote the health of the population and take advantage of existing demand for leisure facilities which has been identified.

The Panel has discussed the level of car parking facilities available on the site and the impact that an increased number of users of the Centre would have upon them, the variation in demand for facilities during peak and off peak times and the adjacent Sydney Banks Playing Field, together with details of an associated contribution towards the cost of building changing rooms for users of the Playing Field. A suggestion also has been made that Officers should investigate whether a community hall facility could be incorporated within the plans and the feasibility of charging lower rates to users who are able to use the Centre during off peak times.

Having analysed the financial projections presented, the Panel has expressed their support for the proposals and has recommended the Cabinet to endorse them as submitted.

Subsequently, the proposals have been approved by the Cabinet.

### **CORPORATE EQUALITY POLICY: ACTION PLAN PROGRESS**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has reviewed the progress made in respect of the Council's Corporate Equality Policy Action Plan. Having noted the achievements under the Plan over the previous year, including the attainment of Level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government, the Panel has been advised that the Council will now be working towards achieving Level 3 of the Standard.

Resident perceptions of Council services, including their views on how the Council rates on equalities matters, have been sought via the Place Survey, which will be repeated every two years.

In terms of the Action Plan designed to promote equalities relating to race, disability and gender, it has

been suggested by the Panel that rurality and access to services should be made more overt, by incorporating it within the Action Plan. Finally, the Panel has discussed the training provided to employees on equality and diversity matters and received assurances that the 10% reduction in the budget set aside by the Council to deliver the Action Plan will not have an adverse effect upon the achievement of the Plan.

Subsequently the Action Plan and revised Equality Impact Assessment timetable has been approved by the Cabinet.

## **PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

The Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Panels have considered the performance of the authority against the priority objectives identified in "Growing Success", the Corporate Plan.

The Social Well-Being Panel has endorsed the views of the Corporate Plan Working Group and concurred with the suggestion that the Working Group should receive information on any of the Council and Community Aims which fail to achieve its targets.

The trend for demand in housing services in the District has been discussed by the Panel, which included the number of households living in temporary accommodation and the number of households prevented from becoming homeless. The Panel has also questioned the performance data reported under the key measure relating to the percentage of affordable housing (commitments) on qualifying sites and was advised that the decline in private housing had enabled the

construction of affordable housing to commence.

The Environmental Wellbeing Panel has noted that all of the wellbeing targets have been met or exceeded and subsequently questioned whether targets were sufficiently stretching.

The Economic Well-Being Panel has been informed that income from hospitality at leisure centres continues to decline as bar trade suffers. Given that Huntingdon Leisure Centre has seen an increase of 15% in this area, it has been suggested that similar techniques to those used at Huntingdon should be implemented at the other leisure centres.

The percentage of bids which have successfully attracted external funding has significantly exceeded the target of 60%, yet the target for producing an External Funding Strategy has only been partially met owing to redeployment of officer resources to work on a major funding bid.

## **NHS CAMBRIDGESHIRE STRATEGIC PLAN 2009 – 2014: CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has endorsed for submission to NHS Cambridgeshire a response to consultation on the content of its Strategic Plan for the period 2009 – 2014. The response incorporated a number of points that had been raised by Members at a Seminar that took place in May 2009.

## **CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has been informed of the introduction of legislative changes that place a requirement on the Council to scrutinise crime and disorder

matters. This new duty falls within the remit of the Panel. Guidance has lately been issued and proposals that reconcile provision for co-option are in the process of being produced. This, together with details of a scheme to enable the Panel to comply with this duty, will appear before the Panel at a future meeting.

### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – REMITS AND STUDIES**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panels have reviewed their programme of studies and considered their work programme for the forthcoming year. The Social Wellbeing Panel has been acquainted with the extent of its new responsibilities for scrutinising the Strategic Partnership and the Cambridgeshire Sustainable Community Strategy.

Owing to their interests in joining the study on the 'Provision of Leisure Facilities for Young People', Councillors Mrs P A Jordan and R J West have been appointed to the Working Group. In discussing potential future study areas, the Panel has made a request for a scoping report to be made available on parking at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital.

The Environmental Wellbeing Panel has been advised that the Section 106 Working Group will be considering the implications of the community infrastructure levy when guidelines on its introduction become available. In discussing potential future study areas, the Panel has suggested the process for the determination of planning

applications, planning enforcement and waste disposal arrangements.

The Economic Well-Being Panel has reviewed its future programme of studies. Having noted that all of their ongoing studies have reached or are nearing completion Members have decided to undertake an exercise outside of the meeting to identify potential study areas. In the meantime they have decided to initiate a study on the economic and other impacts of tourism on Huntingdonshire and the wider area.

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

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has requested sight of items entitled St Ivo Leisure Centre - Proposals for Development and Leisure Centres Performance Monitoring Report prior to their consideration by the Cabinet.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Wellbeing) has requested sight of the Gypsy and Travellers Development Plan Document prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

### **SERVICE PLAN FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY ENFORCEMENT**

The Licensing and Protection Panel has endorsed the Service Plan for Health and Safety Enforcement for 2009/2010 which has been developed in accordance with guidance issued by the Health and Safety Executive. The Plan contains sections on the aims and objectives of the service and the resources available and reviews work undertaken in the previous year.

Members have been informed that a full programme of inspections of premises has been carried out in 2008/09 and a high customer satisfaction rating has been recorded.

### **SERVICE PLAN FOR FOOD LAW ENFORCEMENT 2009/2010**

Having considered an executive summary, the Licensing and Protection Panel has recommended that the Council should approve the Service Plan for Food Law Enforcement for 2009/2010. The Plan has been developed to comply with the requirements of the Food Standards Agency and incorporates the aims and objectives of the service, the resources available and reviews that were undertaken during the previous year.

### **PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE LICENSING - THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT**

Members have been advised of the potential implications for the Council's Licensing Section following recent changes to licensing conditions for private hire vehicles in Peterborough. These changes have resulted in enquiries by companies currently licensed by the City Court to transfer to Huntingdonshire, as cross border bookings are permissible as long as the business is based in the area that licenses it. As the situation has already resulted in further applications, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman are to be kept informed of developments and a further report submitted following any need for a change in working practices to enable more effective monitoring and enforcement.

### **LICENCE ENFORCEMENT: PENALTY POINTS SYSTEM**

The Licensing and Protection Panel has authorised Officers to consult with licensees regarding a proposed penalty points system to aid in Hackney carriage and private hire licensing enforcement. The current system is considered inappropriate for minor breaches of licensing legislation conditions. The outcome of the consultation will be considered by the Panel in due course.

### **BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM PLAN PROCESS 2010 - 2015**

The Cabinet has approved the process and timing for the review and approval of the Financial Strategy, the 2010/2011 budget and 2010/2015 Medium Term Plan. It was recognised that the Budget and Medium Term Plan will face increasing challenges, due to inflationary pressure, likely reductions in public expenditure and savings which need to be identified over the coming years. Having considered proposals to deal with urgent, short term pressures arising from the current economic climate, the Cabinet has -

- ◆ endorsed the temporary appointment of two posts in the Housing Services Division, to deal with homelessness, at a cost of £70,000 in 2009/2010 and £80,000 in 2010/2011 and in so doing have invited Officers to meet these additional costs from within existing approved budgets;
- ◆ approved a supplementary estimate of £25,000 to meet the costs of additional awards of discretionary hardship relief from business rates; and

- ◆ approved the transfer of unused capital leisure grants to the general revenue grants budget to enable additional grants of £20,000 in 2009/2010 and £14,000 in 2010/2011 to the Citizens Advice Bureaux to enable them to respond to increased service demands.

### **TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09**

The levels of performance of fund managers for the year ending 31st March 2009 in the investment of the Council's capital receipts has been noted by the Cabinet. The report revealed that the Authority has carried out its treasury management activities with due regard to minimising risk. External events linked to the collapse of the Icelandic banks led to a review of the strategy by the Capital Receipts Advisory Group. Whilst this Council did not have any investments with the banks affected, other local authorities had nearly one billion invested.

### **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ACT**

The Cabinet has been acquainted with the background to the introduction of legislation designed to enable the Council and other organisations to promote the sustainability of local communities. Under the Act, the Secretary of State will invite proposals/ideas to be generated, these will then be the subject of consultation with a representative sample of the local population and with affected agencies. Having noted proposals

for the upward transmission of suggestions to the Government and the criteria against which proposals will be assessed, the Cabinet has concurred with the suggestion that procedures should be developed in conjunction with the development of neighbourhood forums.

### **GRANT AID**

The findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) on the capital and revenue grants Scheme operated across the Council, following further discussions between the Lead Member of the Grant Aid Working Group and the Executive Councillors for Finance and for Housing and Public Health on the Council's grant process, has been reported to the Cabinet. Executive Members have concurred with the Panel that the current process is working well, although some areas relating to service level agreements and external funding schemes could benefit from further investigation. With this in mind, the Cabinet has -

- ◆ requested that the availability of all grants be published more extensively, particularly to all District Councillors, and a list be included on the Council's website and its content regularly updated;
- ◆ requested that the return submitted by organisations covered by service level agreements be reviewed by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panels to achieve greater transparency;
- ◆ agreed that the work with and the assistance to community groups/organisations to obtain

funding and community development work be co-ordinated by the Head of Community and Environmental Health;

- ◆ requested that further investigations be carried out into the availability of funding from the East of England Regional Assembly, for example, for housing and gypsy and traveller sites in the District; and
- ◆ agreed that the Council's various grant schemes be kept under review.

**REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY, SINGLE ISSUE REVIEW - ACCOMMODATION FOR GYPSIES, TRAVELLERS AND TRAVELLING SHOW PEOPLE IN THE EAST OF ENGLAND, THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S PROPOSED CHANGES MARCH 2009**

The Cabinet has endorsed the Council's response to the Secretary of State's proposed changes to the draft policy put forward by the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) for gypsy and traveller accommodation. Executive Councillors have raised concerns over the proposed introduction of County requirements for transit provision and pitches for travelling show people by 2011. Members concurred with the view that there is insufficient information or evidence to make specific District or County-based requirements and have therefore suggested that this should be the subject of further research. At the same time, the Cabinet has reiterated that the 3% annual compound increase in pitch provision up to 2021 appears to be based on inadequate evidence and that the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments will

be better placed to establish the level of longer term need.

This report has also been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Wellbeing) Panel.

**CARBON MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Wellbeing) has considered a report on the adoption by the Council of a Carbon Management Plan. The Panel has been advised that the wind power project is proceeding as 50% of the funding has been secured and it is hoped that further grants could also be obtained. The Panel has suggested that incentives could be offered to encourage employees to car share, and having noted that travel by Members is not included in emissions caused by staff travel, that this be included in future statistics.

The Panel has raised concerns that the Council's carbon emissions could be affected by external decisions beyond the Council's control and that there could be conflicts between the achievement of differing targets, where a saving in one service might increase carbon emissions elsewhere.

The contents of a five-year management plan for the Council has been approved by the Cabinet. The Plan identifies 39 carbon reduction projects which aim to reduce the Council's carbon dioxide emissions by 30% over the next five years and in so doing create an estimated net financial saving of almost £1.1m.

**TENDER FOR THE PROVISION OF TEMPORARY MANUAL EMPLOYEES**

The Cabinet has approved the acceptance of a quotation for the supply of temporary manual employees to the operations division for a period of 2 years.

### **CUSTOMER SERVICES MONITORING**

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has reviewed the Customer Service Quarterly Performance Report for the period January to March 2009, which outlines the levels of performance and standards achieved by the Service. The Panel has been informed of the effect of economic trends on the Customer Service Centres and the Call Centre in terms of an increase in enquiries particularly for benefits and housing services. Despite this customer satisfaction levels have remained extremely high, though achieving this has put pressure on employees. Additional resources have been received from the Government to meet the additional demand.

Members have discussed how it is intended to address an expected overspend. Virement will be used in the short term measure and the budget will be considered further in the next financial year.

The level of complaints received has been reported and is regarded as low. An update also has been received on the Customer Service Centres in St Ives and St Neots.

### **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ACT**

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has been acquainted with the background to legislation that empowers the Council to pursue local initiatives aimed at promoting the sustainability of local communities. At the invitation of the

Secretary of State, proposals may be made but must be the subject of consultation with a representative sample of the local population and with affected agencies.

Members have been informed of the process for the upward transmission of suggestions to the Government and the criteria against which proposals will be assessed. Only a limited number of Councils appear to be taking the opportunity to make suggestions following the first request for proposals by the Secretary of State. The Panel has concurred with a suggestion that procedures should be developed to generate and formulate ideas and proposals in conjunction with the implementation of neighbourhood panels.

### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BUDGET WORKING GROUP**

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has requested the Cabinet to take into account the final report of the Budget Working Group during the budget process.