
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being)

**Report of the meeting held on 16th July and
10th September 2009**

Matters for Information

7. LAND ADJACENT TO THE GRAND CINEMA, RAMSEY

The Panel has been acquainted with proposals for the sale of land adjacent to the Grand Cinema, Ramsey. The Council has previously been approached by Luminus regarding a scheme to redevelop the area. Members have been informed that negotiations are taking place and that the Council is seeking to include the relocation of the District Council's Community Information Centre alongside the redevelopment which will comprise a library, flats and new public conveniences. As the land in question includes a car parking area, which is owned by the District Council, the Panel has expressed concerns over the resulting decrease in the overall level car parking in the Town. A report on terms for the sale of the land will be submitted to Cabinet when the negotiations have been concluded.

8. TOURISM

The Panel has discussed the possible scope of a study on tourism. However, in current circumstances there is limited scope for the development of tourism initiatives. It has, therefore, been decided to explore whether an investigation might be undertaken into tourism in its wider context, possibly in relation to the vibrancy of the town centres.

9. SCRUTINY OF HUNTINGDONSHIRE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The Panel has received details of the areas for scrutiny that fall within its responsibility, particularly those in relation to Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership and its Thematic Groups for Economic Prosperity and Skills and for Equality and Inclusion, the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Cambridgeshire Vision.

Members have been acquainted with plans to hold a joint event involving representatives of Overview and Scrutiny and the Strategic Partnership and with a County-wide conference on the scrutiny of partnerships.

10. GRANT AID STUDY

The Panel has been acquainted with the Cabinet's response to the final report following completion of an extensive study on grant aid carried out by a Working Group of the former Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery). The Panel is pleased to note that the Cabinet has concurred with the view that the current process is working well, though some areas relating to service level agreements and external funding schemes might benefit from further attention. Having thanked the Working Group for the work carried out, the Panel has requested an annual report on organisations supported by grant through service level agreements.

11. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – REMIT AND STUDIES

The Panel, in reviewing its future programme of studies suggested it might be prudent to request sight of any financial reports prepared on behalf of the District Council Leisure Centres prior to their submission to Cabinet. A report would also be requested on the new HQ and accommodation project once completed, in order to learn from the experience.

It was also agreed that Councillor Shellens should be appointed to the Local Procurement Working Group.

12. FORMER FIRE STATION SITE AND WASTE RECYCLING CENTRE, HUNTINGDON STREET, ST NEOTS

The Panel has reviewed the Cabinet's decision to approve the preparation of a development brief for the site of the former fire station and waste recycling centre on Huntingdon Street, St Neots and to commence a marketing exercise for the disposal of the leasehold of the site. Having stressed that the Council will retain ownership of the site, the Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy has informed Members of the matters that the development brief will contain.

Members have discussed requirements placed on potential developers to provide the Council with details of their plans, but it has been concluded that such requirements will demonstrate developers' commitment and will, in any case, be required as part of any necessary planning submission. Discussion also has been held on the impact of the proposals on car parking generally in St Neots. In conclusion, Members have concurred with a suggestion that the Council should seek leisure or retail uses for the site.

13. FINANCIAL FORECAST

In conjunction with Item No. 28 of the Report of the Cabinet, the Panel has been acquainted with the present position in relation to the Council's financial forecast for the period to 2018/19. Members have been informed of potential variations in a number of sources of income and other factors that could affect the Council's financial position.

The Panel has acknowledged the uncertainty created by current economic and political conditions and Members have discussed the potential effects for the Council of a range of trends in these respects. The basis for the Council's planned future levels of reserves has been interrogated, as have projections for inflation, employer contributions to pensions and council tax levels. While there is a high level of uncertainty involved, Members have stressed the importance for the Council of undertaking this work and of monitoring changes in these and other factors.

14. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

In conjunction with the Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Environmental Well-Being and for Social Well-Being, the Panel for Economic Well-Being has reviewed the Council's performance against its priority objectives, which are contained in "Growing Success" - the Corporate Plan. Having endorsed the views of the Corporate Plan Working Group, Members have noted the responses by Officers to requests for clarification of a number of matters.

15. EXTENSION OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY POWERS

The Panel has received details of new powers designed to extend the scope of overview and scrutiny which have recently been introduced. Regulations enable the District Council to widen the role of their overview and scrutiny committees through scrutiny of local area agreements (LAA) and give overview and scrutiny committees the power to obtain information from LAA partners.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panels now have the power to make reports and recommendations to the District Council's Cabinet, the County Council or a partner authority on LAA matters. These bodies are required to have regard to such reports and recommendations.

Crime and disorder and health are specifically excluded from these provisions.

Other Matters of Interest

16. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SOCIAL WELL-BEING) - PROGRESS

The Panel has reviewed its ongoing studies at each of its meetings. In order to avoid duplication of effort and given that the external representatives who attend the Local Procurement Meeting are also on the Thematic Group, Members have decided to request the Economic Prosperity and Skills Thematic Group to assume responsibility for any further follow-up work on local procurement.

17. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel has reviewed its work plan and received details of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels. A number of potential study areas have been included in the plan.

18. FORWARD PLAN

The Panel has been acquainted with details of the current Forward Plan of Key Decisions, which has been prepared by the Leader of the Council.

19. SCRUTINY

The Panel has considered the latest edition of the Decision Digest and discussed matters contained therein.

J D Ablewhite
Chairman