

Decision Digest

Edition 97

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 31st August – 2nd October 2009.

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Panels (Social Well-Being, Environmental Well-Being and Economic Well-Being) have considered the performance of the authority against the priority objectives identified in "Growing Success" - the Corporate Plan, in the quarter to 30th June 2009.

The Social Well-Being Panel endorsed the views of the Corporate Plan Working Group and was encouraged to note the work being undertaken by the Group on the priority objectives budgets.

The Environmental Well-Being Panel has been pleased to note that all but one of the indicators where statistics are available were positive whilst the Economic Well-Being Panel requested clarification of a number of points.

CARE QUALITY COMMISSION

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has endorsed the content of a letter to the Care Quality Commission requesting a response to the issues previously identified concerning the regulation of care services, the planned imposition of financial penalties on

failing care services and the Commission's relationship to the Local Involvement Network (LINK). Clarification has also been sought on the Commission's procedures for assessing health services and facilities.

NHS CONSTITUTION

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) was acquainted with the terms of the NHS Constitution, which sets out the principles and values that guide how the NHS should act and make decisions in the future. Comment was made on the Constitution's lack of flexibility and an apparent absence of receptiveness to change. Further comment was made that patients should be able to pay for their own treatment without compromising their right to receive treatment through the NHS. The Panel's comments will be drawn to the attention of the Secretary of State for Health and local Members of Parliament in advance of the Constitution gaining Parliamentary approval.

DISABILITY ACCESS STUDY - FOLLOW-UP

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has been

updated on actions previously identified for implementation on the Panel's study into disability access. A joint commissioning agreement with Cambridgeshire County Council and Disability Information Services Huntingdonshire (DISH) has been introduced, which the Panel has been encouraged to note. Additionally, the Panel has decided to lobby the Government expressing support for a campaign being led by SENSE, a charitable organisation for deaf people and carers of those with disabilities, to be provided with free bus travel.

PARKING AT HINCHINGBROOKE HOSPITAL

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has received background information relating to current parking provision on the Hinchingsbrooke Hospital site, the scope to increase the level of provision, other potential charging options, parking enforcement, the availability of public transport and the impact of parking on the surrounding area.

Further details on the Hospital's Green Transport Plan and the terms of the car parking management contract have been requested. Public views will be sought by the Panel at a later date and a representative of the Hospital will be invited to a future Panel meeting.

Details of a consultation exercise currently being undertaken by the British Parking Association on a draft Hospital Parking Charter have been received and a response submitted by the Panel.

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

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has been informed that Councillor S J Criswell has been appointed as the District Council representative on the Stakeholder Panel established to brief, involve and consult interested groups and parties on the future governance of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital.

FINANCIAL FORECAST

Members have been advised of the present position in relation to the Council's financial forecast for the period up to 2018/19. The Council has continued to spend carefully which has resulted in last year's projected outcome being £400k less than budgeted. In considering the new forecast, the Cabinet has been advised of potential variations in a number of sources of income and other factors that could affect the Council's projected financial position. Particular attention was drawn to the uncertainty created by the current economic climate and possible changes to Government funding in the next comprehensive spending review.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has been informed of potential variations in a number of sources of income and other factors which could affect the Council's financial position and acknowledged the uncertainty created by current economic and political conditions. The basis for

the Council's planned future levels of reserves has been interrogated as have projections for inflation, employer contributions to pension and council tax levels and Members stressed the importance of undertaking this work and of monitoring changes in these and other factors.

THE HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT CORE STRATEGY 2008 – DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT - THE INSPECTOR'S BINDING REPORT/ADOPTION PROCEDURES

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) and the Cabinet have been informed of the Inspector's considerations and conclusions regarding the soundness of the DPD, following his examination of the submitted Core Strategy. Having noted that the majority of changes to the Strategy had been proposed by the Council and that any changes imposed by the Inspector himself were negligible, the Cabinet has approved the adoption of the document as part of the Local Development Framework for the District.

GREAT FEN MASTER PLAN

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) has considered a report introducing the Master Plan for the Great Fen project. The document is a spatial plan which sets out where new physical features can be created and illustrates where existing features will be retained. It will form the basis of a new action plan with partners which will be developed

next year to guide the ongoing development of the project.

The Panel has welcomed the production of the Plan as the next stage in the planning process for the Great Fen project. Whilst reiterating its support for the Council's involvement in the venture, the Panel has recognised that further detailed work will be undertaken to produce an action plan and have questioned the absence of any reference to business planning and long term financial forecasting in the document. The Panel were concerned with the financial viability of the visitor centre given its location and the condition of the B660 access road which the Panel feel will need to be improved in light of the anticipated visitor numbers.

Subsequently and having regard to the views of the Panel, the Master Plan for the Great Fen Project has been approved by the Cabinet for public consultation.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS

Draft terms of reference for the new neighbourhood forums and panels have been approved by the Cabinet. The forums have been introduced as a means of improving community engagement, informing, consulting and involving local people in the exercise of the functions of the Council and its partners. At the same time, the Cabinet has appointed the following Members to serve as District Council representatives:-

- ◆ Huntingdon –
Cllr T D Sanderson
- ◆ North-West Huntingdon –

- ◆ Cllr E R Butler
- ◆ Ramsey –
Cllr A Monk
- ◆ St Ives -
Cllr Mrs J A Dew
- ◆ St Neots –
Cllr A N Gilbert.

It is envisaged that each Panel will comprise of up to ten representatives of local authority and other public and voluntary bodies from each forum area. Whilst the District Council's representation will be limited to one Ward Member, all Councillors within each neighbourhood area are encouraged to attend the meetings.

NEW HEADQUARTERS MEMORABILIA AND ENDOWMENTS

The Cabinet has approved a protocol for determining the future inclusion/display of civic memorabilia and endowments in the Council's new headquarters. The Cabinet has recognised that display space in the new building will be limited which will result in the Chairmen's portraits and group photographs of the Council being restricted to those that are the most recent.

Having discussed the display of the Council's Rolls of Honour in the new Civic Suite, Members felt that these should continue to be on view to the general public. With this in mind, the New Accommodation Project Co-ordinator and the Deputy Leader has been requested to consult Members regarding a possible alternative location for the boards

and the possibility of displaying a new board listing serving Leaders of the Council.

ADOPTION OF ROADS AND SEWERS

The findings of a study by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) regarding the process and procedures involved in the adoption of roads and sewers has been reported to the Cabinet. The report highlights the problems that can be encountered by house buyers in ensuring that the infrastructure will be maintained at the public's expense and the difficulties faced by the highways and water authorities in ensuring that roads and sewers are completed by developers to adoptable standards. In order to raise awareness of these issues among residents, the Cabinet has:-

- ◆ agreed to the implementation of a communications plan, subject to consultation with Anglian Water;
- ◆ requested the Scrutiny and Review Manager to formally write to the local branch of the Law Society to draw to their attention the issues identified by the Panel;
- ◆ requested that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) revisits the study once the extent of the sewers not under the responsibility of Anglian Water is known and following the transfer of responsibility for around

200,000 kilometres of privately owned sewers and drains in England to the water companies; and

- ◆ requested the Overview and Scrutiny Manager to lobby the Local Government Association to seek the strengthening of the powers of the Highways Authority with regard to the road adoption process.

SOUTH STREET PUBLIC CONVENIENCES, ST NEOTS

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) has considered a report on the South Street public conveniences in St Neots. It was the view of a local Member that the facility was well used by shoppers. Having supported the view that no further expenditure should be incurred in improving the facility the Panel has suggested that St Neots Town Council be offered the option of improving and maintaining this public convenience before any final decision and has recommended the Cabinet to endorse this.

Subsequently, the proposal has been endorsed by the Cabinet.

AUDIT COMMISSION PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE OF EXTERNAL AUDITORS

The Corporate Governance Panel has noted the Audit Commission's proposal to change the Council's External Auditors. As a result all Cambridgeshire local authorities will be audited by the same company,

which will assist the Council in its move towards the Comprehensive Area Assessment process.

REVIEW OF HOUSING BENEFIT FRAUD INVESTIGATION ACTIVITY & THE COUNCIL'S WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

The Corporate Governance Panel has been acquainted with the work undertaken by the Benefits Fraud Investigation Team over the past three years and in particular, was encouraged to note that the Team had achieved a 69% success rate for all cases investigated over the 2008/09 financial year.

At the same time, the Panel has received details of the outcome of the annual review of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure and has been advised that no changes will be required. Additionally, it was reported that 7 incidents have been received through the various whistleblowing reporting channels.

REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PANEL

The Corporate Governance Panel has been acquainted with the progress made to date in respect of the Action Plan which had been compiled to review the Panel's own effectiveness. Members have been encouraged by progress made to deliver the plan and noted that with the exception of one area, all agreed actions have been implemented.

RISK REGISTER

The Corporate Governance Panel has received and noted details of new or changed entries to the Risk Register between the period March to August 2009 inclusive.

**INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE:
ANNUAL AUDIT REPORT**

The Corporate Governance Panel has been acquainted with progress made against the 2008/09 Annual Audit Plan, the performance standards achieved and the Audit and Risk Manager's opinion on the level of assurance provided by the Council's internal control environment, in terms of the effective exercise of its functions.

**ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE
EFFECTIVENESS OF THE
SYSTEM OF INTERNAL AUDIT**

The outcome of a review of the effectiveness of the system of internal audit has been presented to the Corporate Governance Panel. Members have expressed their satisfaction that the current risk management process is adequate and that the process by which assurance has been gained through appropriate controls is effective. Details of the review will be incorporated within the Annual Governance Statement.

GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Corporate Governance Panel has approved the Governance Statement for 2008/09, which reviews the Council's governance

arrangements and identifies matters to be addressed in the next year.

**APPROVAL FOR PUBLICATION
OF THE 2008/09 ACCOUNTS**

The Corporate Governance Panel has approved the accounts for the year 2008/09. Having endorsed the Council's Letter of Representation, the Panel has been informed by the Council's external auditors that an unqualified opinion will be provided on the accounts. Matters contained in the Action Plan to the Auditor's reports have also been noted.

**FORMER FIRE STATION AND
WASTE RECYCLING CENTRE,
HUNTINGDON STREET,
ST NEOTS**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has reviewed the Cabinet's decisions to support the preparation of a development brief for 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 which remains under the ownership of the Council.

The Panel agreed that the requirements of potential developers to provide the Council with details of their plans will demonstrate their commitment and would in any case be required as part of any necessary planning submission. Members concurred with the suggestion that leisure or retail uses should be sought for the site.

EXTENSION OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY POWERS

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has noted the introduction of new powers aimed at extending the scope of the overview and scrutiny function. Regulations enable the Council to widen the role of their Overview and Scrutiny Committees through scrutiny of Local Area Agreements and give the Committees the powers to obtain information from LAA partners.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panels now have the power to make reports and recommendations to Cabinet, the County Council or a Partner Authority on LAA matters. These bodies will be required to have regard to such reports and recommendations.

Crime and Disorder and Health will be excluded from the provisions,

LICENSING ACT 2003 REGULATORY REFORM

The Licensing Committee has approved the following delegations to relevant Officers arising from changes to the Licensing Act 2003. The changes have been brought about by three new Statutory Instruments and are designed to make the current requirements less onerous for both business and community groups include:-

- ◆ a simplified, less costly and time-consuming process for minor variations to premises licences and club premises certificates;

- ◆ the removal of the mandatory condition requiring a designated premises supervisor for community premises licensed for the sale of alcohol, to be replaced by a new condition requiring that every supplier of alcohol must be made or authorised by the Management Committee.