

Decision Digest

Edition 101

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 4th - 29th January 2010 (the Digest also includes Cabinet Items from the meeting held on 17th December).

RURAL SETTLEMENT LIST - LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE ACT 1988

The Cabinet has reviewed the boundaries of rural settlements for the purpose of the Local Government Rating Act 1997 and has approved a revised list for Huntingdonshire. The changes have been necessary because of the growth and expansion experienced in some rural areas.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

The Cabinet has reviewed the respective levels of performance achieved during the period April to September 2009 by external fund managers in their investment of the Council's capital receipts.

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Cabinet has considered the performance of the authority against its priority objectives in the quarter to 30th September 2009.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has noted the drop in Leisure Centre income, which reflected the economic climate and changes brought about by Cambridgeshire County Council in schools' sports funding provision. A situation the Panel acknowledged was unlikely to improve in the short term.

The Panel has requested a more detailed report on leisure centres' finances for a future meeting. The Panel has also been informed that the new leisure centre forums are advisory committees and any specific issues should be directed to centre Managers or the Executive Councillor for Leisure.

ST. NEOTS HEALTH CHECK

The Cabinet has noted the process involved in the St. Neots Health Check. Work undertaken to date has explored St. Neots holistically and identified what can be done to improve the town to meet the likely demands arising from its predicted growth.

REVIEW OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING PILOT PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The findings of two participatory budgeting pilots undertaken in the Huntingdon North and Eynesbury Wards have been noted by the Cabinet. The Government's Community Empowerment Directions, have encouraged authorities to undertake some form of participatory budgeting by 2012. The approach is believed to give people more of a direct stake in local governance and increase levels of civic and community participation and action.

Having considered the potential for expanding participatory budgeting in the future and in particular issues

relating to the role of the neighbourhood forum/panels, the Cabinet has requested Officers to undertake a further evaluation to include a breakdown of the costs involved to expand the pilots. In the meantime, investigations with partners will continue over the level of funding they are prepared to commit to such a project.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - "SHAPING PLACES, SHAPING SERVICES"

The contents of Cambridgeshire County Council's Community Engagement Strategy - "Shaping Places, Shaping Services" has been considered by the Cabinet. The strategy aims to increase the potential for local people to influence the development of their communities and the services provided.

AGEING WELL IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE - OLDER PEOPLE'S HOUSING STRATEGY

The contents of the draft Older People's Housing Strategy - "Ageing Well in Huntingdonshire Housing and Healthy Ageing for Older People" has been approved by the Cabinet. The Strategy has been produced to examine the issues and identify the housing related services that the District Council and partners will need to deliver to support NHS Cambridgeshire in promoting healthy ageing and to improve the quality of life for older people.

DRAFT SIDE ROAD ORDERS FOR A14

The Cabinet has been acquainted with the proposed response to the draft side road orders for the A14 Ellington to Fen Ditton Improvements Scheme published by the Highways Agency. In supporting the response, the Cabinet

have questioned levels of predicted pattern of traffic in and around Huntingdon Town Centre and have raised concerns over the proposed new interchanges at Brampton and Fen Ditton, the risk of flooding, the impact on adjoining villages and the level of mitigation for issues such as noise and landscape. This item has subsequently been considered by the Council.

PAXTON PITS NATURE RESERVE EDUCATION CENTRE

Details of a scheme to provide an education centre at Paxton Pits Nature Reserve have been reported to the Cabinet. The scheme will provide a class room and office for use by educational groups and local schools. Funding of £280,000 for the scheme has been secured by the Wildlife Trust from the Aggregate Levy Sustainability Fund. Countryside Services has obtained match funding of £70,000 from the Housing Growth Fund and a further £4,000 has been donated by the Friends of Paxton Pits. The building will be owned by the District Council and leased to the Wildlife Trust for a period of 30 years.

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. Members have noted that the expected outturn of revenue expenditure was £22.2m which represented a reduction in the budget deficit of £1.2m. Having discussed the use of savings and the advantages of being able to deal with "invest to save" requirements as and when necessary, Executive Councillors have endorsed a proposal to establish a "special reserve" in the current year for this purpose.

ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

In noting details of the Council's management of assets, the Cabinet has been advised that the registration of all land and property with the Land Registry was nearly completed and that work was continuing to incorporate all information relating to the Council's property ownership and asset management on a new computerised database.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has endorsed the Plan and noted the Council's performance compared favourably with other authorities. The Panel has been advised that increases in energy consumption are mainly attributable to leisure centres, however this was expected to decrease with improved building techniques and it was anticipated that the implementation of the Council's Energy Efficiency Strategy would produce improvements. Members have requested more information on further energy efficiency measures taking into account the environmental costs of construction and running costs. Members have been advised that achievements during 2008/09 have included Block D, Pathfinder House and the Creative Exchange.

The Panel has been informed that the Council has no suitable projects that would qualify for grant aid from the Community Assets fund at present however applications will be made to other sources to improve Council assets.

IMPROVEMENTS TO KERBSIDE RECYCLING SERVICES

From the 29th March 2010 the current kerbside recycling service will be extended to include the collection of glass bottles and containers. The Director of Environment & Community Services has been authorised to

determine the appropriate way forward for the scheme's delivery after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services. As part of the proposals existing mini glass recycling banks called "bring sites" will be replaced by new banks and the facility extended to include the collection of a different range of recyclable materials to be managed by either the private, public or third sectors such as voluntary organisations. It is hoped to have these arrangements in place by April 2011. In the meantime recycling credits for the bring sites will be paid at the current rate per tonne during the financial year 2010/11.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has not supported the proposal to charge residents for additional bins. Comments in respect of the health and safety and practical implications of introducing kerbside glass collections and the impact of the proposals on the general repair and maintenance costs associated with the Council's vehicles have been forwarded onto the Cabinet.

DEVELOPMENT BRIEF – THE OLD FIRE STATION, ST NEOTS

The Cabinet has approved the final version of a planning brief for the Old Fire Station and Depot site, Huntingdon Street, St Neots. The document has been through the public consultation process and will be used as Interim Planning Guidance to steer planning decisions.

SAPLEY EAST – PROPERTY TRANSACTIONS

The Director of Central Services, after consultation with the Executive Councillors for Resources and Policy and for Finance has been authorised by the Cabinet to approve terms for a series of property transactions required

to achieve the Master Plan for the development of land to the East of Sapley Square, Huntingdon. Although Hunts Forum have submitted a bid for grant funding towards the development of the proposed community enterprise centre referred to in the plan, there will be the need for some match funding to include the land value and possibly some S106 contributions. The Cabinet has emphasised the need to ensure that the proposals do not incur any additional costs to the Council. The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) have indicated their support for this proposal.

OVERVIEW OF NEW WEBSITE – FEATURES AND BENEFITS

The Overview and Scrutiny (Social, Economic and Environmental Well-Being) Panels have received a presentation highlighting the improvements and enhancements that have been made to the Council's website following the completion of phase I of the project to transfer the existing system onto a new technical infrastructure. A soft launch of the system will take place in January prior to the main launch in February. Initiation of Phase II of the upgrade to include more new features and personalisation would continue through to 2011.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) have questioned whether downloadable documents can be designed so that they are both brief and legible if printed in black and white. The IT Development Team Leader has undertaken to enquire whether margins on corporate documents can be altered, and agreed to report to Members on the cost of running both the old website and the setting up of the new site.

CARE QUALITY COMMISSION

The outcome of a recent meeting held with Councillor R J West and the Care Quality Commission has been received by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being). Members were reminded that the District Council was also subject to inspection via the County Council as contributions were made towards some of their services.

DISABILITY ACCESS STUDY – UPDATE

In pursuit of their previous study into disability access, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) was updated on progress with the actions that had arisen from the study. Brief updates were received on blue badge parking enforcement and the latest position in respect of civil parking enforcement. The next step is to advise the Town and Parish Councils of the outcome of the study and to remind the authorities of the role of the Neighbourhood Forums, who are now the most appropriate body to report such issues to.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor R J West has informed the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) that the Working Group appointed by the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee has met and has endorsed the principle that the contract for Hinchingbrooke Hospital's future governance should ensure that services were maintained at the same level as those provided in 2007. The lack of continuity in Officer attendance at meetings by the Strategic Health Authority was also noted by Members.

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

It has been agreed that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) would submit a response to the current NHS consultation on proposed new patient rights being included within the NHS Constitution. It was felt that the proposed rights should have already formed an integral part of the service. Clarification on the processes to be implemented and the means of assessing and benchmarking them has been requested.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000: FORWARD PLAN

Councillor R J West has undertaken to investigate the background to the Rural Strategy Cambridgeshire ACRE and to determine whether the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) should have sight of it prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

STRATEGIC HOUSING LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT (SHLAA)

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) has been acquainted with the purpose and process of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. The exercise has identified and assessed potentially suitable sites for housing development as part of the Local Development Framework. The Panel was pleased to note that the process has shown that Huntingdonshire has sufficient land supply for fifteen years and can demonstrate the achievement of a sustainable strategy for growth.

In light of flooding problems encountered in St. Ives, the Panel was assured that Anglian Water will be consulted prior to the allocation of sites in that area.

Members have noted that public consultation on the strategic housing land availability assessment will be ongoing until spring 2010.

CARBON FOOTPRINT REDUCTION

Following the discussion at the headline debate at the Council meeting in December, Councillor Downes has addressed the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel on actions that had been taken by other local authorities in an effort to encourage residents and businesses to reduce their carbon footprint. The Panel acknowledged that the Council is actively involved in reducing its own carbon footprint, and suggested that it was the role of the Council to incentivise local residents. Members have noted that the Executive Councillor for Environment and Information Technology and Head of Environmental Management will be attending the next meeting of the Panel to provide an update on progress made since the Council debate and to answer questions from Members.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) PROGRESS

The Transportation Team Leader has updated the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel on progress towards the provision of cycling routes in Huntingdonshire. Members have been informed that the first stage of the Yaxley to Farcet route has been completed and design options are being considered for the next stage, although development will be dependant on sufficient funding being achieved.

With regard to the St. Ives to Huntingdon route, the Panel was informed that discussions are ongoing

with the County Council on the design, although funding again will be an issue.

It was reported that a meeting has been arranged to discuss options for the Perry Village Cycle route with the private landowners affected, following which consultation will be undertaken with residents and the Parish Council in order to inform the Area Joint Committee of the villagers' views on the preferred course of action. It was reiterated that the scheme will depend on the sufficiency of the available budget and the programming of work within the wider network programmes. Having been advised that progress also is constrained by a requirement to use contractors approved by the County Council, the Panel has undertaken to question the Head of Environmental Management on the possibility of contractors being engaged directly by the District Council. Members were informed that they will be consulted on the review of cycling priorities, although it is likely that the lack of funding will result in the existing list remaining largely unchanged.

SCRUTINY OF HUNTINGDONSHIRE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) Panel has been acquainted with the content of a draft protocol devised as guidance in order for the Council to fulfil its statutory duty to scrutinise the Strategic Partnership. The Panel has been reminded that the Council has allocated responsibility for scrutinising different aspects of the Strategic Partnership to the three Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) PROGRESS

Reports on both the effects of the night time economy on health services and

the costs associated with Standards and the Council's management of capital projects are expected at the Panel's February and April meetings respectively.

DRAFT PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT DPD

The Development Management Panel has considered the detailed policies which comprise the Draft Proposed Development Management DPD. This now contains 5 sections relating to climate change, the environment, delivering housing, supporting prosperous communities and contributing to successful development.

Having noted that the DPD document would also be considered by the Cabinet and Council in February, Panel Members preferred to submit their comments on the draft to the Planning Service Manager (Policy) by email by 31st January. It was understood that the final submission DPD would go forward for examination thereafter. To assist Members, it was agreed to produce an index to indicate how policies contained within HPPs 2007 had been replaced and in which documents they had been replicated.

ENFORCEMENT

The Development Management Panel has reviewed the activities of the Enforcement Team and progress achieved against those priorities identified for 2009. Priorities for 2010, which include reducing caseloads and introducing a process for monitoring the use of agricultural buildings, were endorsed together with the content of enforcement policy document.

In conveying their appreciation to the Team for their achievements in 2009, the Panel was concerned at the impact on the service and the burden placed on the remainder of a small team of 3

should any one officer be absent. The Panel recommended the Cabinet to review staffing levels in the Enforcement Team albeit in the light of advice from the Executive Councillor which suggested that the Head of Planning Services had been requested to monitor the situation.

On another enforcement matter, the Panel noted action taken to respond to a breach of conditions relating to the operation of a wood shavings line outside permitted hours at Sundown Straw Products, Station Road, Tilbrook.