

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 1st February to 26th February 2010.

PARKING AT HINCHINGBROOKE HOSPITAL

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has received a presentation from the Facilities Business Manager for Hinchingsbrooke Hospital on the operation of the hospital car parks and the action taken to review the parking policy. A number of proposals for change have been suggested, which include increasing the provision for employees, extending the current pick up/drop off point and disabled parking spaces. A change to the charge for the shortest period of stay is also being proposed of £2 for 2 hours with the charge rising by £1 for every hour thereafter. £500,000 revenue is generated by the Hospital each year, of which £30,000 is paid to a contractor to manage the car parks. The remaining funds are utilised by the Hospital for car parking maintenance and essential medical services.

A number of matters have been discussed by the Panel. It was concluded that the Hospital should

consider further reducing the length of the shortest stay and to explore more cost effective ways of enabling visitors to pay on leaving the Hospital. Alternative ways that a Shuttle Bus service to the Hospital might be achieved was also suggested by Members. A report by the Panel on these points and other findings in the course of the study will be sent to the Hospital's Senior Executive Group at the end of February for inclusion as part of their deliberations.

PETITION – HILL RISE PARK, ST IVES

A petition signed by 16 people was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) drawing attention to nuisance caused by anti-social drivers late at night in Hill Rise Park, St Ives. The petition was referred via the Community Safety Partnership to the St Ives Neighbourhood Forum which resulted in the area being adopted as a Policing Priority at the Neighbourhood Forum. A number of suggestions to resolve the nuisance caused was also proposed and endorsed by the Panel. A report on

progress has been requested for 6 months time.

MONITORING OF SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS (PLANNING OBLIGATIONS)

The receipt and expenditure by the Council of money negotiated under Section 106 Agreements has been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being). A detailed description of the progress of those schemes yet to be completed has been requested for inclusion in the next monitoring report.

PLAY FACILITIES WORKING GROUP

The Play Facilities Working Group has presented the findings of their latest investigation to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being). It was concluded that a funding arrangement should be offered to Parishes to assist with their facilities' revenue costs based on a 40-40-20% split between the District Council, Parish Council and users of the facilities respectively. Facilities that would qualify under the scheme are skateboard ramps and multi-use games areas. The proposal has already been discussed with the Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services.

With regard to the financial implications of the proposals it was suggested that only one Parish Council should be permitted to enter into this arrangement per year. Investigations also are being undertaken into whether the Council can co-ordinate insurance for Parishes wishing to insure their facilities under a group scheme. Councillors P G Mitchell and R J

West will present the findings of the study to the Cabinet.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 – FORWARD PLAN

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has requested sight of the Housing Enforcement Powers item prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

FINANCIAL STRATEGY, MEDIUM TERM PLAN 2011 - 2015 AND THE 2010/2011 BUDGET

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has reviewed the Financial Strategy, Medium Term Plan 2011 - 2015 and the Budget for 2010/2011 in advance of their consideration by Cabinet and final determination by the Council.

Members have been acquainted with the changes that have been made since they previously endorsed the draft strategy. Changes include the identification of £1.2million in savings which have been transferred into a Special Reserve in order to facilitate the achievement of future spending adjustments. The changes have brought about a reduction in the Council's budget deficit which will allow the future required spending adjustments to be phased in at a more regular rate. Overall spending will be significantly lower than previously assumed owing to lower pay and price provisions, lower assumptions relating to Government Grant and the proposed reduction in the level of Council Tax increase to 2.49%. The result will be that a reduced level of spending

adjustment will be needed in the Medium Term Plan period with the longer term requirement little changed. The Director of Commerce and Technology has informed Members that in his opinion the combination of a robust budget process and the current level of reserves should give Members no concerns over the Council's financial position for 2010/2011. He does however believe a significant level of work will be required to plan for the spending adjustments that will be required in future years as reserves are depleted.

The Panel has been reminded of the uncertainties and risks associated with the financial forecast and further discussion took place on investment interest and borrowing costs. Members have received assurances that the budget will enable the Council to achieve its objectives in the forthcoming financial year and outlined their support for an annual increase of 2.49% in Band D equivalent Council Tax and for the proposed Budget and Medium Term Plan.

Having noted the conclusions reached by the Panel, the Cabinet has recommended to Council that the proposed budget, MTP and Financial Strategy be approved along with a council tax increase of £3.02 (2.5%) representing a level of £124.17 for a band D property.

2010/2011 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being) Panel has considered proposed changes to the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2010/2011. New guidance has been published by the Audit Commission and a revised

Code of Practice has been received from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) as a result of the collapse of Icelandic banks in 2008. Revised guidance on local authority investments to apply from April 2010 is also expected from the Department for Communities and Local Government. The Panel has endorsed the Treasury Management Strategy for 2010/2011 and its submission to the Cabinet and Council.

Subsequently, the Cabinet has recommended to Council the adoption of the Strategy and the Scrutiny of Treasury Management by the Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being) Panel in accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being) Panel has been apprised of the business support that is now provided to individuals following the loss of the Huntingdonshire Enterprise Agency. Having discussed the cost to the Council of business development, Members concluded that, through partnership working the budget available attracts a significant level of services including the Cambridge and Rural Enterprise and Mentoring (CREAM) project which gives business advice to individuals wishing to become self employed.

The Panel also has received a presentation on the Creativexchange in St. Neots. The project, which was developed in partnership with Longsands School, has had a total investment of £2m, has exceeded its operating targets to date and is well placed to meet its targets for 2010/2011. The Panel congratulated all those involved in

the project which has received a number of awards.

INDEPENDENT SCRUTINY MEMBERS

The following persons have been appointed as independent Members to the Overview and Scrutiny Panels:

Economic Well-Being – Mrs H Roberts and Mr R Hall;

Environmental Well-Being – Mr D Hopkins and Mr M Phillips; and

Social Well-Being – Mr R Coxhead and Mrs M Nicholas.

THE HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF THE NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

The Economic Well-Being Panel has followed-up work carried out by the former Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) during a study into the impact of excessive alcohol consumption on levels of anti-social behaviour and alcohol related crime within the District by receiving data on the effect of alcohol consumption on local health and health services. The data provided indicates that for all age bands Huntingdonshire has lower rates of admission to hospital than the national average. However, the Panel has requested further information on why the rate of alcohol specific hospital admissions for under 18s is higher than for other indicators and whether any qualitative analysis has been carried out on the effects of alcohol consumption in rural areas.

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

The Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being) Panel has requested reports on the cost

associated with Standards and on the Council's management of capital projects for submission to future meetings.

LICENSING COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT POLICY

Both the Licensing and Protection Panel and Licensing Committee have approved a draft licensing compliance and enforcement policy statement which has been revised in light of the Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Act 2008 and the new Regulators' Compliance Code. Licence holders and relevant responsible authorities will be consulted.

FEES AND CHARGES

The Licensing and Protection Panel has noted a 2.5% increase in fees and charges for licences administered by the Council for the period 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2011. Some further adjustments have also been made to reflect additional charges made by the Council's vehicle testing centre in respect of meter testing and wheelchair suitability.

SECRET GARDEN PARTY

The Licensing Committee has been acquainted with the extensive measures put in place by the licensing authority to minimise the impact of the Secret Garden Party on the area following the granting in perpetuity of a premises licence for this large annual outdoor event which attracts an attendance of approximately 26,000 people.

CHANGES TO LICENSING PROCESSES UNDER THE LICENSING ACT 2003

The Head of Democratic and Central Services has been authorised to respond to a Government consultation proposing to simplify requirements under the Licensing Act 2003 in respect of three processes recognised by stakeholders to be unduly restrictive and burdensome.

If approved, the proposals which include the removal of a requirement for licensing authorities to determine and publish a licensing statement every three years will simplify processes and reduce unnecessary work.

CHANGES TO THE POLICE AND CRIME ACT

The Licensing Committee has been acquainted with amendments to the Licensing Act that will allow members of licensing authorities to act as interested parties, allowing them to make representations in respect of applications for and variations to, premises licences and club premises certificates and to make applications for a review of such licences or certificates without the need to reside within the vicinity of the premises. The Committee have also been informed of changes which will make it an offence to persistently sell alcohol to children from the same premises on two or more occasions within 3 months. Under 18s can also now be prosecuted if found in possession of alcohol in a public place on three or more occasions within a twelve month period.

SMALL LIVE MUSIC EVENTS

The Licensing Committee has authorised a response to a consultation exercise being undertaken by the Department of Culture Media and Sport on a Government proposal to exempt small live music events from having to obtain a variation to an existing licence or certificate. The proposal has led to a number of local authorities and police raising concern over the impact of the exemption on the licensing objectives as a result of which residents, businesses and responsible authorities will be able to apply for specified premises to be excluded from the exemption.

CARBON FOOTPRINT REDUCTION

Following the discussion at the headline debate at the Council meeting held on 2nd December 2009, the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel has received an update from the Executive Councillor for Environment and Information Technology and the Head of Environmental Management on actions being undertaken by the Council to address the need to reduce carbon emissions.

As the Council's resources are limited and the widespread implementation of carbon reduction schemes costly, the Panel has been advised that the Council hope to access external funding to deliver projects. The Panel has requested that the Executive Councillor for Environment and Information Technology and the Head of Environmental Management attend the Panel meeting in June 2010 to provide a further update on progress

made on carbon reduction measures.

CAR PARKING REVIEW UPDATE

The Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel has considered the findings of a meeting of the Car Parking Review Working Group which was convened to discuss the operational issues of introducing 38 spaces for free car parking for 2 hours use at the Riverside Car Park, St. Neots for recreational use.

Members raised concerns over the possible implications of introducing charging in the car park in view of a recent reduction in the footfall in St. Neots and problems of traffic congestion in the town. The Panel is of the opinion that the implementation of parking charges at the Riverside Park will further exacerbate these issues and increase air pollution in the Town Centre. The Panel invited the Cabinet to consider allowing three hours free parking in the whole of the Riverside Car Park which will benefit shoppers who wish to park there and those who want to use the park for leisure and recreational purposes. The Panel has suggested that an appropriate charge be set for those who park longer than three hours with payment on exit which may reduce enforcement costs.

Having been advised of the Panels views, the Cabinet has authorised the Director of Environment and Community Services to proceed to make and advertise the Revised Off-Street Parking Places order which will enable the Panel's comments to be considered with any other responses received during the statutory consultation period. The Cabinet is conscious that

provision has been made in the budget for increased income at several car parks commencing at the beginning of June and that any further delay in proceeding with the order will jeopardise the anticipated level of income.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

The Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel has endorsed a report on the changes proposed to the Local Development Scheme for Huntingdonshire. The changes have arisen as a result of new Regulations on development plan document production and the need to amend the anticipated timetable for the production of various elements of the Local Development Framework since adoption of the Core Strategy. Subsequently, the Cabinet has approved amendments to the Scheme prior to its submission to the Secretary of State.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT DPD - PROPOSED SUBMISSION

The Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel has considered the proposed submission document for the Development Management DPD which has been prepared following consultation on the development of options between 30th January and 30th March 2009. Key stakeholder consultation also has taken place between 18th December 2009 and 11th January 2010 on the draft proposed submission document.

When considering the development of options stage, the Panel has expressed concern over the adverse effects on carriageway congestion and parking on verges as a result of

car parking allocations on new developments as well as Policy E6 relating to the implementation of the Great Fen Project. At the same time, doubts have been expressed about the proposed withdrawal of permitted development rights for specific farming or operational purposes in the Great Fen area.

The Cabinet has recommended the adoption of the submission document to Council.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) PROGRESS

The Transportation Team Leader has updated the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel on the situation with regard to HCV parking in the District. The Panel has been advised that the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport has responded on behalf of the District Council to the HCV Advisory Route Network Public Consultation. The HCV parking facility at Alconbury has re-opened, and as part of the A14 proposals, the Council will continue to look for the provision of HCV parking facilities or the expansion of existing facilities within the District.

Having regard to a question raised by a member at an earlier meeting about the cost of the Council's website, a detailed answer has been provided to the Panel's satisfaction.

NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES – DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF UNDER LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE ACT 1988

As a result of a re-examination of the Council's policy for assessing

entitlement to discretionary rate relief for charities and kindred organisations the Cabinet has –

- ◆ agreed that the rateable value referred to in the policy be reviewed on the occasion of a new rating list (every five years);
- ◆ authorised the Head of Revenue Services and the Local Taxation Manager to grant relief under the new policy;
- ◆ agreed that "Part Occupation" relief be optimised in appropriate cases for a maximum of twelve months, subject to prevailing legislation on unoccupied rating;
- ◆ agreed that "Rural Rate Relief" continue to be granted in appropriate cases (subject to the Rural Settlement List) and with a provision of 100% relief for post offices;
- ◆ approved the determination of "Hardship Relief" by the Head of Customer Services, after consultation with the Executive Member for Finance, on the merits of individual cases; and
- ◆ authorised the Director of Commerce and Technology to deal with appeals from applicants dissatisfied with the determination made by the Head of Revenue Services and the Local Taxation Manager.

MINI-RECYCLING SITES – WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

Revised working arrangements put in place by the Head of Operations to ensure that 1,100 litre wheeled bins at bring sites are moved safely by employees have been noted by the Cabinet. The collections have been re-scheduled so that two employees attend known heavily used locations together. If an employee finds that a bin is too heavy to move when working alone, he should not attempt to move it. These changes meet the requirements for safe working practices outlined by the HSE Inspectorate.

ST NEOTS EASTERN EXPANSION

Governance arrangements required to support the master planning process for the St Neots Eastern Expansion have been reported to the Cabinet. A Members' Steering Group will be established with representatives from the County, District and Town Councils. The Group will receive input from the various stakeholder groups including the St Neots Town Centre Initiative and will report directly to a Delivery Board on which the Director of Environmental and Community Services will represent this authority.

DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

At its February meeting, the Development Management Panel approved eight and refused four applications for development.

In addition, the Panel has given early consideration, as a consultee, to an outline application, made to Peterborough City Council for the

development of a new township south of Hampton Vale between the A15 and A1, west of Yaxley.

Representations were made to the Panel on a number of issues by Parish and Ward Councillors, an objector and the agent. The Panel agreed that Officers should continue discussions with the City Council to address the issues raised in connection with the Master Plan and transport and the benefits likely to accrue to Yaxley and Huntingdonshire as a result of the application.