

Decision Digest

Edition 106

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period Monday, 28th June 2010 to Friday 6th August 2010.

FINAL ACCOUNTS 2009/10

The draft Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2010 has been approved by the Corporate Governance Panel. Specifically attention was drawn to a series of issues in the accounts relating to income, the treatment of capital, the collection fund and the pension fund. Other matters that were discussed included the claw back of claims / payments by the Council's previous insurers and the level of audit and inspection fees.

EXTERNAL AUDIT – PROGRESS REPORT

The Corporate Governance Panel has received a progress report from the Council's external auditor's explaining the current situation with regard to the Use of Resources Assessment and the audit of the Financial Statements for 2009/10.

INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE: TERMS OF REFERENCE AND INTERNAL AUDIT STRATEGY

Changes to the Internal Audit Terms of Reference and Strategy have been approved by the Corporate Governance Panel.

INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE: INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

The Corporate Governance Panel has approved the Internal Audit and Assurance Plan for the twelve months period commencing 1st August 2010.

MONEY LAUNDERING AVOIDANCE POLICY & PROCEDURE

Members of the Corporate Governance Panel have approved changes to the Money Laundering Avoidance Policy which will be incorporated within the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy.

ANTI-FRAUD AND CORRUPTION FRAMEWORK

The Corporate Governance Panel has noted the outcome of a review of the Council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Framework and endorsed the content of a revised Action Plan.

COMPLAINTS

The Corporate Governance Panel has received an analysis of the Council's internal complaints and a summary of complaints involving the District Council which have been

determined by the Local Government Ombudsman in 2009/10.

At the same time, Members of the Panel have noted details of a complaint against the Council by a member of the public and the terms of compensatory payment negotiated by way of a local settlement.

APPOINTMENT OF HEAD OF OPERATIONS

Having interviewed the short-listed candidates for the post, the Appointments Panel has appointed Mr E Kendall as Head of Operations.

In accordance with the requirements of the Officer procedure rules, the Cabinet has confirmed that they have no material or well founded objections to this appointment.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000: FORWARD PLAN

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has requested sight of items on Open Space Strategy and the Single Equality Scheme prior to their consideration by the Cabinet.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) has requested sight of the St. Neots Urban Design Framework prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

MONITORING OF SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS (PLANNING OBLIGATIONS)

The quarterly Section 106 Monitoring report has been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being). Additional information previously requested by Members has now been included within the report. Councillor P G Mitchell has suggested that further information is required and will meet with the Scrutiny and Review Manager to discuss this further. The Development Management Panel has asked that the information collated also be circulated to town and parish councils as they considered that it would be useful to them.

STRATEGIC/PARTNERSHIP SCRUTINY

(a) Scrutiny of Partnerships

The Overview & Scrutiny Panels have considered the way forward in terms of scrutinising the partnerships in which the Council is involved. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 placed a duty on the Council to scrutinise the Local Strategic Partnership. To assist them with this responsibility, the Social Well-Being Panel has requested further information in relation to the thematic groups within their remit.

The Economic Well-Being Panel has agreed to consider the Action Plan of the Economic Prosperity & Skills group and its regular

monitoring report at a future meeting.

(b) Joint Scrutiny

The Overview and Scrutiny Panels have been advised of recent developments concerning joint scrutiny between the Cambridgeshire Councils. Having been invited to comment upon the proposals presented to them, the Social Well-Being Panel has endorsed the principle of introducing joint scrutiny arrangements across the County. However the Panel has requested further background information in view of the complexity of the framework in which the Cambridgeshire Joint Accountability Committee (JAC) and the Cambridgeshire Together Board operates. The Panel has also questioned the future of JAC should joint scrutiny be adopted by all Cambridgeshire authorities.

The Economic Well-Being Panel also outlined their support for the principle of joint scrutiny and emphasised the need for any arrangements to operate efficiently. Members acknowledged that joint scrutiny was the only means by which some services could be effectively scrutinised.

The Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel have considered the

benefits that can be derived by focusing on geographic issues and the key outcomes of importance to local communities. The Panel has agreed that focusing on scrutiny of subject areas should be the way forward.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) have noted that the Working Group appointed by the Cambridgeshire Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee had changed its name to the Health and Well-Being Scrutiny Working Group. The Working Group has been tasked with assessing the quality of services at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital.

WORK PLAN STUDIES

In discussing their work plan, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has requested a scoping report on the Council's consultation process and background information on gypsy and traveller welfare to be submitted to them at their September meeting. The former intended to determine whether the Council's approach to consultation was consistent across the authority whilst the latter sought information on the existing gypsy and traveller sites established within the District.

The Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel have reviewed their programme of studies.

Councillor Davies has agreed to provide the Panel with sight of a letter that he has received from Anglian Water in response to his correspondence to them regarding St. Ives Residents' flooding issues taken up by the Panel in a previous study.

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

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has received updates on the future governance of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital and Provision of Play Facilities study. The Panel has also reiterated their wish for an update on town centre cleaning to be received at its September meeting.

The outcome of a meeting held between the Chairman and the Head of Facilities at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital has been reported to the Panel. Members have expressed their satisfaction with the new pricing structure proposed for the Hospital and car park concessions that were introduced with effect from 1st July 2010. A review of the new arrangements will be conducted by the Hospital in 6 months time and the Panel will be involved in this as part of the process.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE: REPORTS OF SUB-COMMITTEES

The Standards Committee has received reports from the Chairmen of its Sub-Committees and noted that the Referrals (Assessment) and Standards (Consideration and Hearing) Sub-Committees had met on six and two occasions

respectively. The Review Sub-Committee had not been required to meet.

APPOINTMENT OF PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES

The Standards Committee has agreed to seek nominations to the vacant Parish Council post on the Committee directly from the Town and Parish Councils themselves and has authorised the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Monitoring Officer and an existing Parish Council representative to make the final selection. The post has been vacant since November 2009 and two requests for nominations have been made to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils. Town and Parish Councillors wishing to express an interest in the post will be asked to do so in writing to the Monitoring Officer.

STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND – THE FUTURE?

The latest developments following the Government's announcement to "abolish the Standards Board" regime has been considered by the Standards Committee. This includes the cancellation of the Annual Assembly 2010 and the postponement of the quarterly monitoring return by the Monitoring Officer. A review of the activities undertaken by Standards for England is currently being undertaken and it was noted by the Committee that any proposed changes to legislation affecting the current regime will be subject to consultation by the Government.

DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2009/2010

The Standards Committee has commented upon the draft Standards Committee Annual Report 2009/10. Members have agreed that more detailed information on the true cost of dealing with Standards' matters should be included within the report. Once finalised, the report will be promoted via the District Council's website and District-wide and will also be circulated electronically to the Town and Parish Councils.

APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATION

Applications for dispensations from Great and Little Gidding and Southoe and Midloe Parish Councils have been approved by the Standards Committee. The former enables five Members of the Parish Council to speak and vote on the Village Hall and Recreation Field and the Great Gidding Charity whilst the latter enables four Members of the Parish Council to speak and vote on the provision of allotments within the Parish area.

TRAINING UPDATE 2010

An approach to training on the Code of Conduct has been endorsed by the Standards Committee. Four area based sessions will be held over the Autumn period in Huntingdon, St Ives, St Neots and Yaxley and have been designed to encourage both new and existing Councillors across the District to attend. Individual requests for training from Town and Parish

Councils will also be considered by the Monitoring Officer.

LOG OF CODE OF CONDUCT ENQUIRIES

The Standards Committee has noted the nature of the Code of Conduct enquiries recorded by the Monitoring Officer since the last meeting.

RECENT CASE SUMMARIES AND ADVICE

The content of a guide on "Blogging" and details of cases recently published by Standards for England following complaints considered by Fenland District Council have been noted by the Standards Committee.

CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS – YAXLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Members of the Standards Committee were acquainted with the latest conduct issues concerning Yaxley Parish Council. The views of the Committee on the possible ways forward were sought by the Monitoring Officer.

ANNUAL PAY AWARD 2010/11

Having regard to the Annual Pay Award for 2010/11 and the outcome of negotiations with Employee Side representatives, the Employment Panel has agreed the following should be awarded to Council employees for the year commencing 1st April 2010:-

- ◆ no pay increase for staff on Grades 1 – 9;

- ◆ a pay award of £91 for the year for staff on Grades 10 & 11; and
- ◆ a pay award of £182 for the year for staff on Grades 12 – 15.

POLICY REVIEW

The Employment Panel has approved, for the purposes of consultation, a revised Redundancy Policy including compensatory payments for compulsory redundancy. The Panel has also endorsed the principles of a Voluntary Redundancy Scheme, excluding the level of compensatory payment that this would attract.

FORMER FIRE STATION SITE AND WASTE RECYCLING CENTRE, HUNTINDON STREET, ST NEOTS

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has endorsed proposals to develop the former fire station and waste recycling centre in Huntingdon Street, St Neots which were to be considered by the Cabinet at their meeting on 22nd July 2010. As part of which and having regard to the importance of achieving the objectives within the planning brief, the Panel suggested that additional terms and conditions be added to any future agreement.

In discussing the merits of the bids the Panel focussed on their financial terms, the potential benefits they would bring and the degree to which they complied with the planning brief. Members acknowledged that a balance had to be struck between these factors and that the Cabinet

should be provided with further information.

Subsequently the Cabinet has authorised the Director of Central Services after consultation with the Executive Councillors for Finance and Customer Services and for Leisure, Law, Property and Governance to approve the terms for the disposal of land at the former fire station site and waste recycling centre to the successful developer.

ANNUAL REPORT ON ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTED BY GRANTS VIA SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS

Details of the performance of voluntary organisations who receive their funding via service level agreements have been considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being).

As part of which, the Panel has been advised of the background to the establishment of the current commissioning process. Information was also provided with regards to the management of the grant process and the performance monitoring mechanisms in place.

The Panel raised a number of questions with regard to specific performance indicators within the report and were advised of the penalties for underperformance. Comment was also made about the success of some organisations in securing additional funding but Members were advised it was unlikely that such organisations would be able to attract additional funding should this be withdrawn.

Discussion also took place with regard to the term of the funding agreements offered by the District Council to these organisations.

CUSTOMER SERVICES

A presentation on the development of Customer Services has been received by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being). As part of which the Panel were advised of the background with regard to the establishment of the District Council's Contact and Customer Services Centres, the range of services currently provided and statistical information with regards to customer enquiries. Details of the additional work which had been absorbed at no extra cost and a series of options for future service provision together with the level of savings these might provide were also provided.

Having outlined their support for the Customer Services service, the Panel discussed the implications arising from the introduction of new legislation with regards to the security of data and the contingency arrangements which were in place to tackle sickness levels within the service. Questions were also raised about the potential to share back office services and the implications of impending changes to housing benefit legislation.

RISK REGISTER

Following a request for further information at a previous meeting, the Economic Well-Being Panel has received further information on the

Council's Risk Register and the number of new entries between the period 1st September 2009 to 28th February 2010 inclusive.

In doing so, the Panel has noted the process by which Risks are added to the Register and the reasons for the increase in entries in the previous quarter. The Panel has raised a number of questions with regard to the risks within the report, the method of assessment and classification and the cost of the commercial package for monitoring risk. The Scrutiny & Review Manager has been asked to provide details of the measures the Council took to protect the data it held on Council residents.

THE GREAT FEN

Having had a tour of the Great Fen, the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel have been advised that the Council is tied into a five-year agreement which amounts to a contribution of £20,000 per annum towards the project management costs, this agreement is renewable after five years. The income from the land owned by the project will assure the project's future should the agreement not be renewed. The Panel has been informed that the Council has a broader interest than other partners and as such will benefit from having influence over the projects future.

Members have been advised that a temporary visitor centre has been planned for the summer and plans for a permanent centre will be

developed as visitor numbers increase.

The Panel has been informed that Councillor T Orgee is the project's County Council representative and a report on the project co-ordinator's action plan is expected in six months time.

CIVIL PARKING ENFORCEMENT

The Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel has considered a report on the potential introduction of civil parking enforcement in Huntingdonshire. Members have acknowledged that there is little enforcement of on-street restrictions currently by the Police and there is little likelihood of any improvements unless CPE is introduced.

The Panel has welcomed the possibility of improved enforcement, however reservations have been expressed over the possible implications on the Council's own off-street parking enforcements and the outcome derived from this source.

Members have recognised the Department for Transport's preferred option of a co-ordinated approach to on and off-street parking enforcement, however the Panel feel that any change should not be to the detriment of the existing off-street arrangements. The Panel also recognise the potential impact on the street ranger service which combines parking enforcement with other frontline services and the cost-effectiveness of the latter if this is separated from parking enforcement.

Members have acknowledged the continuing uncertainty about how best CPE could be delivered in Huntingdonshire but that its introduction is the only option if on-street enforcement is to improve. The Panel supports the recommendation for further negotiation with the County Council and other authorities but without commitment at this stage in the process.

The report has subsequently been considered by the Cabinet who agreed that further negotiations be held with Cambridgeshire County Council, the outcome of which are to be submitted to a future meeting.

PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

The Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel and the Cabinet has noted three petitions objecting to the closure of public conveniences in Huntingdon, Godmanchester and Ramsey. In doing so, the Environmental Well-Being Panel has been addressed by one of the Ward Councillors for Godmanchester about the impact of the closure of the facility in that town.

As part of the deliberations by the Environmental Well-Being Panel, Members have been reminded that the decision to offer the management of the public conveniences to the town councils had been made by the Council when the budget had been set for the current year and that no financial provision has therefore been made for their ongoing maintenance. The Panel did not

questioned this decision and maintain the view that provision of public conveniences is a matter for local decision by town and parish councils. The Panel has acknowledged that there are a number of facilities available in the towns where conveniences could be used by the public and that they offer a potentially more cost-effective level of provision than separately maintained units that are not supervised. In mind of the strength of public opinion expressed by way of the petitions, the Panel has suggested that a way forward might be for the District Council to use its influence and experience to assist town councils in negotiating access to other facilities, while stressing that any financial contribution towards maintaining access should be met by the relevant town councils themselves.

The Cabinet, having discussed the perceived difficulties of maintaining public conveniences have stressed that officers are available to offer advice and assistance to town councils on the matter. In the meantime, Executive Councillors have asked the Director of Environmental & Community Services to submit a further report on the future of the conveniences at Huntingdon bus station to their October meeting.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE STRATEGIC FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT

The Development Management Panel has endorsed the use of the 2010 updated Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for the determination of future developments. The Assessment which has already

been approved by the Environment Agency, provides an accurate assessment of all sources of flooding in the District and flood maps which are compliant with Planning Policy Statement No. 25.

DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

At the July meeting, the Development Management Panel considered 7 applications of which 3 were approved and 2 refused. Consent was given by the Panel to two applications requesting the extension of the timescale to 5 years for the commencement of the proposed rail facilities and rail link to the east coast mainline and for continuation of the temporary uses at Alconbury Airfield. Following representations from the Stukeleys Parish Council, the Panel has asked the Head of Planning Services to consider establishing in consultation with the developer, staged targets over a five year period to encourage submission of the proposals which would progress the development of the site.

REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING: 2009/10 OUTTURN AND 2010/11 BUDGET

The Cabinet has noted the final outturn for revenue and expenditure for 2009/10 and the variations already identified in the current year. Executive Councillors were advised that £1913,000 has been transferred to a Special Reserve to finance any "invest to save" proposals. In discussing the main variations to the programme, Executive Councillors referred to the reduction in income from schools using the leisure centre facilities and the impact of

the Government's announcement that a number of grants awarded for 2010/11 will now be withdrawn.

At the same time, the Cabinet's attention was drawn to an increase in the total amount of payments written off during April to June 2010 for Council Tax and National Non Domestic Rates, Executive Councillors were advised that this was a consequence of the downturn in the economic climate.

CAPITAL MONITORING: 2009/10 OUTURN AND 2010/11 BUDGET

The Cabinet has been acquainted with variations in the capital programme in the current year. Executive Councillors were advised that the level of Local Public Service Agreement performance reward grant was likely to be considerably less than has been budgeted. At the same time, Members have been apprised of plans announced by the Government to abolish Go-East and the possible implications for the authority.

2009/10 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Cabinet has noted the Council's performance against the targets within the Corporate Plan for the year ending 31st March 2010. The information will be reported to local residents via the District Wide newsletter and the Council's website.

RISK REGISTER

The Cabinet has noted progress being made to identify and manage corporate risks. In so doing,

Executive Councillors attention was drawn to the four risks which were identified as being very high or red. Having been advised of the options available to manage the risks to reduce their likelihood and severity, the Cabinet has approved the actions proposed within existing resources.