

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 1st to 25th February 2011.

SICKNESS ABSENCE POLICY

To provide guidelines for managing sickness absence and a clearer process for managers and employees to follow, the Employment Panel has adopted a revised policy for sickness absence which will replace the existing attendance policy and contain–

- ❖ a constructive framework within which sickness absence can be better managed;
- ❖ short term and long term sickness absence and relevant trigger points;
- ❖ guidelines and templates for managers to use at each stage of sickness absence;
- ❖ guidance for employees on the impact of the sickness policy.

Whilst the Panel has acknowledged that the number of sickness days within the Council per employee is lower than the national average, the aim of the revised policy is to reduce sickness absence still further by providing a more transparent process with improved monitoring mechanisms and a safeguard for both managers and employees.

The Panel has asked for an annual report on sickness absence to be submitted to a future meeting.

PAY AND ROLE PROFILE REVIEW OF ONE LEISURE CENTRE ASSISTANTS

As part of the process of identifying staffing efficiencies, the Employment Panel has endorsed a proposal to review the pay and role of One Leisure Centre Assistants for the purposes of consultation with staff affected.

Currently all employees classed as Centre Assistants are paid at the same hourly rate for undertaking a variety of roles. To reflect the varying levels of qualifications and responsibilities undertaken, it is proposed to introduce three new role profiles, each on a different hourly rate.

Subject to the outcome of the consultation and provided that no significant adverse comments are received, the Panel has authorised the General Manager, One Leisure to implement the proposals after consultation with the Chairman of the Panel, together with representatives of the Employees Side.

EMPLOYEES' CODE OF CONDUCT

Following a recent review, the Employment Panel has updated the Employees' Code of Conduct. The principal changes relate to–

- ❖ the declaration of criminal offences;
- ❖ development proposals submitted by officers; and

- ❖ use of the Council's internet, intranet and email facilities

The opportunity has also been taken to make amendments of a more minor nature to the document to reflect changes in job titles and to recognise other policies which are complementary to the code.

In advance of the implementation of the Bribery Act in April 2011, the Panel has also agreed an amendment to provide further clarification with regard to the acceptance of corporate hospitality.

VOLUNTARY RELEASE SCHEME: UPDATE

The Employment Panel has received an update on the rollout of the Voluntary Release Scheme across the Council. Having noted that the second stage had now concluded, the Panel was informed that a further 77 applications had been received. It is estimated that the second stage will generate savings in pay costs of around £1.7 million in a full year.

The Panel has also been advised of the mechanisms which will be used to communicate decisions to employees who have applied for voluntary release and to the remaining members of staff. The Panel has suggested that a media statement should be released drawing attention to the savings which have been achieved. It has also been suggested that a statement should be issued to staff thanking them for their continued efforts and contributions during a difficult time.

The Panel has also acknowledged the difficulties which could be encountered in the next stage of the savings process and noted that further work was now required on organisational change. Performance related pay will be considered as part of the review of pay,

pay structure and allowances later in the year.

BUDGET 2011/12 AND MEDIUM TERM PLAN 2012 TO 2016

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) and the Cabinet have reviewed the Financial Strategy, Medium Term Plan (MTP) 2012 - 2016 and the Budget and level of Council Tax for 2011/12. The Economic Well-Being Panel also has been addressed by Mr D Morgan, Treasurer of Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations. Mr Morgan informed the Panel of the value of the activities of voluntary organisations in terms of the income they generate for the District. The Panel has discussed the voluntary organisations' spending, the measures they are taking to reduce their own and staffing costs.

The changes made to the Budget and MTP since the draft Strategy was endorsed at the last meeting have been noted. The Budget takes into account lower than expected Government grant, which should be off-set by the New Homes Grant. A decision on the latter is expected in time for the Council meeting.

The Panel and the Cabinet discussed those matters about which Members previously had requested further work. Operating costs for CCTV have been reduced and now amount to £300k per annum for a basic service. Discussions with users will take place in the coming year on how the service will be funded in future years. While Members support the work of the District's voluntary organisations, they were content with proposals by the Social Well-Being Panel to investigate alternative ways of sustaining them once their existing commissioning agreements have expired. The Executive Councillor for Finance and Customer Services informed the Cabinet that he would also

be party to investigations in this respect.

With regard to the risks associated with various elements in the financial plan, the Economic Well-Being Panel accepted the need to be cautious about the extent of New Homes Grant likely to be received and similarly taken a prudent approach to providing for the Council's future pension liability. Having been apprised of the risks associated with the Government's plans to change the local authority grant formula, the pensions review, the savings that are still required and the challenge of delivering the savings already identified, the Panel has accepted the formal opinion that the Budget 2011/12 is robust.

An update has been delivered to the Panel on previous suggestions by the Liberal Democrat group for savings. A number of them are being pursued, including several areas where the Council is entering into agreements with other local authorities to share services.

Members of the Economic Well-Being Panel have commended the fact that £650k additional savings have been identified since December. A suggestion that an increase in income might be made by charging non-residents of the District a higher rate to use the Council's leisure centres has been referred to the Leisure Finance Working Group for further consideration.

On the understanding that the MTP can be revised as work on it proceeds, the Economic Well-Being Panel has endorsed the report to Cabinet. Subsequently, the Cabinet has recommended to Council that the proposed Budget, Medium Term Plan and Financial Plan be approved and that Council Tax for 2011/12 is not increased.

CUSTOMER SERVICES

Before a decision is taken on the future of customer services, the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has given consideration to the outcome of further investigations into the options that are available for the delivery of services through the Customer Service Centres. Analysis of service demand indicates that it will not be possible to reduce employee levels at Huntingdon Customer Service Centre. However, by transferring resources from St Neots during lower periods of demand, it will be possible to maintain a presence in Ramsey and Yaxley on two days per week. The Panel has recommended that this option is implemented and that a further review is carried out in a year's time.

2011/12 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

In accordance with its responsibility for scrutinising Treasury Management, the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has reviewed the Treasury Management Strategy for 2011/12. Having noted that they will be provided with further training on this subject in the next Municipal Year, the Panel has endorsed the Strategy for submission to the Cabinet and Council.

Subsequently, the Cabinet has recommended the adoption of the Strategy to Council.

ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

Both the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) and Cabinet have received the annual report on the performance of the Council's assets against a range of criteria. As generally the Council's performance compares favourably with that of other authorities, the Cabinet has endorsed the content of the report.

DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

The Development Management Panel considered eight applications at its February meeting and of these, four were approved, two refused and one deferred for further information. The Head of Planning Services was authorised to determine an application for the formation of a new access and car parking area at 19 Nursery Road, Huntingdon as it was considered that the late receipt of amended plans had made the development acceptable.

SUMMARY OF ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITY 2010

The Development Management Panel has received a report on the enforcement activity undertaken in 2010. In reviewing the achievements of the team against the priorities which had been set for 2010, the Panel noted that despite significant staff changes and an overall reduction of 20% in hours, the team had increased the number of cases closed in comparison with the previous year and visited 69% of cases where site visits were required within 10 working days.

The introduction of an Enforcement Forum, meeting fortnightly has played a major part in ensuring cases are dealt with in a proportionate, consistent and expedient way and contributed to the number of cases which have been able to be closed during the year.

Given pressures on resources and the possible impact of the Localism Bill, the Panel has endorsed two objectives for the team in 2011. These are to

- focus on quality outcomes where unacceptable breaches are identified; and
- maximise the use of resources to provide an effective and efficient enforcement service.

**DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT
PROGRESS REPORT: 1ST OCTOBER
– 31ST DECEMBER 2010**

The Development Management Panel regularly reviews the performance of the development management division in terms of the applications determined within the target groups specified by government. Eighty five per cent of all applications have been determined within the time periods specified and income from planning fees is some £15,000 up on that anticipated in the budget.

ONE LEISURE PERFORMANCE

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has appointed Councillors B S Chapman and J J Dutton and Mr R Coxhead onto the One Leisure Working Group. The Working Group has been established jointly with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being).

VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) received a presentation from the Chief Executive of Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations on its work with the Voluntary Sector. Attention was drawn to the impact on third sector organisations of the Council's proposals in the future to reduce the level of community grants it awards. The Panel will be pursuing their full impact and alternative ways of supporting the voluntary sector at its March meeting.

**OPEN SPACE STRATEGY FOR
HUNTINGDONSHIRE 2011-16**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has considered the draft Open Space Strategy for Huntingdonshire which provides a vision of what the District's parks, open spaces and other public spaces might

look like over the next 10-15 years. Two main comments were made. The first concerned the suggestion that the Council will take responsibility for or assist with the maintenance or development of all the sites identified; and the second related to the need to analyse the implications of localism for the likely achievements of the Strategy's aims. The terminology used to classify the different types of open spaces that exist was also discussed and a suggestion was made about the need to differentiate between sites that the public can visit free of charge and those that require payment for use.

The Cabinet has subsequently endorsed the content of the Strategy.

MONITORING OF SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS (PLANNING OBLIGATIONS)

The receipt and expenditure by the Council of money negotiated under Section 106 Agreements has been noted by Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being). It was noted that the Section 106 Agreement Advisory Group had agreed the establishment of a database to assist with the monitoring process in response to the Panel's previous recommendations on the way monitoring is carried out. The database is likely to take a few months to set up before the system can go live on the Council's Intranet.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE ADULTS, WELL-BEING AND HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

An update on matters currently considered by the Cambridgeshire Adults, Well-Being and Health Scrutiny Committee has been noted by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being). These include the Adult Support Services Action Plan and Integrated Plan for 2011, NHS

Cambridgeshire's Plans for 2011/12, consultations on Improving Older People's Mental Health Services in Huntingdonshire and Fenland, Cambridgeshire Community Services' proposals to become a Foundation Trust and membership of the Neonatal Intensive Care Joint Scrutiny Committee.

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

Councillor S J Criswell has informed Members of the Panel that he will be attending a forthcoming meeting organised by the County Council for crime and disorder Scrutiny Chairmen to discuss opportunities for joint scrutiny working.

HUNTINGDON WEST AREA ACTION PLAN

Following the issue of the Planning Inspector's binding report regarding the soundness of the Huntingdon West Area Action Plan, the Cabinet has recommended to Council the approval of the Area Action Plan as part of the Development Plan for the District.

NEW LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) has supported the District Council's statement for inclusion in the County Council's third Local Transport Plan. However they have expressed concern over the need for investment in highway improvements to accommodate the anticipated growth in the District and to promote options in rural areas.

The Cabinet has subsequently approved the Huntingdonshire District Statement for inclusion within the Cambridgeshire Local Transport Plan (LTP). Concern was expressed, however, on the impact of reduced

funding for the proposed LTP, the County's ability to deliver an improved transport infrastructure and the need to pursue all possible alternative funding sources to include the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. The Head of Planning Services has been requested by the Executive to convey these concerns to the County Council.

PLANNING CONSERVATION

The Cabinet has endorsed the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) following its study into the performance of the Council's Planning Conservation Team. The Working Group appointed by the Panel has identified that the current service is working well. It was, acknowledged, however that improvements could be made in respect of communication and pro-active support and the role of Members and Town and Parish Councils in mediation and in alerting the Council of local circumstances.