

Decision Digest

Edition 116

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 24th June to 29th July 2011.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2010/11

In accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice, the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has considered the Council's performance for the year ending 31st March 2011 in the investment of its capital receipts. As part of this, the Panel has also been acquainted with the Council's Strategies for both borrowing and investing funds in the current year.

The Panel was pleased to note that the performance of the funds in a year when rates have stayed low has been very good, with both the benchmark and the budgeted investment interest having been significantly exceeded.

Members discussed a number of issues including the management of the Council's cash flow, the potential to lend monies to other authorities and the reduction in the average interest rates that have been paid on investments during the year.

The Panel has also discussed the Authority's Strategy for long-term borrowing and noted that the capital programme for the next 5 years assumes expenditure of approximately £23M plus any slippages from individual years. Following the reduction of the Council's reserves over the last few years, all investments are now being managed in-house.

Subsequently, the Cabinet has noted the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel and recommended the report to Council.

ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER FOR RESIDENTS

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has received a presentation on future proposals for communicating with residents in Huntingdonshire. These include the production of an electronic newsletter on a quarterly basis at a cost of £1095 per annum.

Having indicated their support in principle to the electronic proposal for a twelve month trial period, Members queried whether it would be possible to reproduce the electronic version within other parish magazines. It has also been suggested that the Council could utilise Parish Council websites to signpost residents to relevant information.

Discussion has ensued on a number of issues including the use of an externally managed database to store the email addresses of residents who had registered their interest in receiving council information and whether e-communication would disadvantage a particular section of society. Members were keen to ensure that a thorough risk assessment had been undertaken of the company involved to ensure that the Council did not fall foul of any anti-discrimination legislation.

Lastly, Members were of the opinion that it would be unnecessary to produce a supplementary printed version of the newsletter.

CUSTOMER SERVICES QUARTERLY REPORT

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has considered the quarterly performance report for Customer Services. As changes to the opening hours at the Ramsey and Yaxley Centres had not yet come into effect, Members noted that it would not be possible to review the impact of these changes until June 2012.

Customer satisfaction levels continued to be maintained despite a reduction in staffing levels. Members discussed a number of issues including the business continuity arrangements for the Call Centre, the opening hours of the Yaxley Customer Service Centre and whether any consideration had been given to providing a service for other authorities.

Having regard to the increasing number of benefit enquiries being received in the current economic climate, the Panel has noted that it was uncertain at this stage as to whether the subsidy from the Department for Work and Pensions for housing benefit would continue after April 2012. With this in mind, the Panel has asked the Executive Councillor to give further consideration to the actions which could be taken in the absence of the receipt of any further funding.

ONE LEISURE FINANCE

In conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for Social Well-Being, the Economic Well-Being Panel has received an update on the work of the Group which had been established to review the performance of One Leisure

and to make recommendations on the service's future strategic direction.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2010/11

The Overview & Scrutiny Panels have reviewed the contents of their draft Annual Report for 2010/11. The Report summarises the Panels' activities over the past year and contains illustrations of their impact and the results that they have achieved.

SHARED HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY SERVICES

Details of a proposal to establish a shared Home Improvement Agency Service with Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Councils was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being).

Owing to a number of concerns raised by Members, the Panel has requested the attendance of the Managing Director (Communities, Partnerships and Projects), the Head of Housing Services and the Executive Councillor for Resources and Customer Services to attend the Panel's September 2011 meeting. Concerns related to the potential redundancies which might result, the impact of an increased travel requirement on staff, the effect of a merger on the ability to deliver a consistent service using best practice.

ANNUAL REPORT ON ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTED BY GRANTS VIA SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS 2010-11

The performance of voluntary organisations in receipt of funding from the Council through service level agreements was received and noted by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being). All organisations are monitored against a set of agreed

performance indicators and other organisational criteria on a quarterly basis.

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

It was reported to Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) that Circle had not yet assumed responsibility for the management of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital. Circle's intention to report to the Panel in September will therefore be deferred to another meeting.

REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL MONITORING: 2010/11 OUTTURN AND 2011/12 BUDGET

The Cabinet has noted the final outturn for revenue and expenditure in 2010/11 and variations already identified in the current year. Executive Councillors were pleased to note that as a result of under spending the Council has been successful in saving an additional £1 million in reserves.

Executive Councillors also have been apprised of variations in the capital programme in the current year and adjustments in the 2011/12 budget.

UPDATE ON SURFACE WATER FLOODING ISSUES

The Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-being) Panel has again requested a response from Anglian Water to long term surface water flooding issues in St Ives.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE FUTURE TRANSPORT "TRANSPORT FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE"

Having considered a report outlining plans for a collaborative approach to future countywide transport provision

through the Cambridgeshire Future Transport Initiative, the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-being) Panel has highlighted to Cabinet the importance of safeguarding the Council's interests in community transport.

The Panel has in principle supported a suggestion that the District Council's rural transport budget is aligned with other Cambridgeshire partners in order to provide a more efficient and cost effective service. However Members do not want to see Council funds committed without the service being protected, or replaced as part of the project, as these often provide a lifeline to rural communities.

Subsequently, the Cabinet has supported the on-going development of the Initiative and the work of a cross authority Member led Governance and Solutions Group as they support the Council's objectives.

CCTV PROVISION

The Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel has been acquainted with progress of negotiations to secure financial support for the Council's CCTV service.

The Panel has taken into account the views of fellow Councillors on the value of CCTV. A petition from residents in St Ives requesting the installation of an additional camera in the Town will be considered at the next meeting.

The Panel had been disappointed to hear that, despite the considerable use made of the service by them, the Police have declined to contribute to the running costs of CCTV. Whilst acknowledging the need for the Council to make savings, the Panel has requested that all avenues are explored in order to maintain the service.

MONITORING OF SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS

Having been provided with an update on the receipt and expenditure by the Council of money negotiated under Section 106 Agreements, the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel has been given assurance that there is no possibility of payments being allowed to expire.

REPRESENTATION ON ORGANISATIONS.

The Cabinet has appointed Councillor P L E Bucknell to serve on the Nene & Ouse Community Transport Board of Trustees and Councillors S Cawley, J J Dutton and T D Sanderson to the One Leisure Huntingdon Sports Centre Joint Committee.

LEISURE CENTRE MANAGEMENT AGREEMENTS

The Cabinet has been advised that the five secondary schools linked to the leisure centres sites have committed themselves to achieving Academy status. As a consequence the ownership of the school sites will transfer from the County to the appropriate schools/colleges and the associated management agreements will need to be renegotiated. With this in mind, the Cabinet has authorised the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Health and Active Communities, to negotiate and finalise the draft heads of terms for the leisure centres and to enter into lease and new management agreements as necessary.

DEVELOPMENT OF ONE LEISURE, ST IVES

The Cabinet has considered four potential options to re-model the St Ives

Leisure Centre. The proposals have been designed to reduce One Leisure's net operating costs and to increase admissions and participation levels to meet both Government and Council health agenda targets.

Executive Councillors were conscious that the current rifle range facility had not been incorporated into the remodelling proposals. In that respect, the Cabinet has noted that the range returns a minimal amount of income and that the Rifle and Pistol Club was not in a position to make a significant contribution to the cost of providing a smaller facility within the development.

Having considered the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels (Economic Well Being and Social Well Being) the Cabinet has supported Option B for the redevelopment of the Centre and has requested the Leisure Centres General Manager to issue tenders in respect of this. Following the final tender evaluation a further report will be submitted to Cabinet to include an assessment of the business case for the proposal.

PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY – HUNTINGDON

Part of Public Footpath No 9 crosses the proposed development site for the new food store, petrol filling station and other retail and residential units on land between John Street and George Street in Huntingdon. The Development Management Panel has agreed that an order be made under Section 257 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 to stop up that part of the footpath which will be obstructed by the new development on the understanding that an alternative footway will be created as part of the development of Huntingdon West and in place before the existing route is stopped up.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT APPLICATIONS

At its July meeting, the Development Management Panel determined eight applications and of these seven were approved and one refused. An application for a new dwelling off the Great Whyte in Ramsey was deferred to enable further consultation with the applicant to secure an amended scheme which preferably could comprise a single storey dwelling using materials which would reflect the location of the development in a conservation area.

An application resulting in the permanent use of land as a residential caravan site for gypsy families at 5 Acres Field, St Ives Road, Woodhurst also was approved.

APPLICATION FOR DISPENSATION

The Standards Committee has approved an application for dispensation received from St Ives Town Council which would enable four newly elected Councillors to speak and vote on matters relating to the Corn Exchange should these arise at meetings of the Town Council. The remaining Members of the Council had previously been granted dispensation for the same purpose. The Town Council would be unable to deal with business relating to the Corn Exchange unless these dispensations were in place because of the interests that Members would be required to declare.