

**Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 1st August to 23rd September 2011.**

### **CALL CENTRE OPTIONS BEYOND 2012**

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has considered a range of options for the management of the District Council's Call Centre when the main IT contracts and the lease for the current premises come to an end.

Overall the Panel is of the opinion that the Call Centre continues to provide an excellent service and has recommended that the Council should retain a District Council operated and staffed facility. The Panel has also agreed that the Call Centre should retain and extend the agreement for the use of the County Council's Automated Call Distributed telephony system.

The Panel has discussed the proposals for the future location of the Call Centre. Although the Panel is minded to support in principle an extension to the lease of space and facilities at Speke House, Members are of the opinion that in the current economic climate further consideration should be given to utilising the District Council's own property portfolio, or to secure a 12 month rolling lease for the County Council premises. As a result, the Panel has asked for a further report on the location of the Call Centre at their meeting in January 2012.

The Panel has also recognised that there is a need to replace the current Customer Relationship Management

System (CRM) and, and subject to a more rigorous approach being adopted for the financial proposal, have endorsed a number of recommendations regarding the procurement process.

Having been advised of the Panel's views, the Cabinet has decided that the Council should retain an HDC operated and staffed Call Centre beyond December 2012. The Cabinet also recognised the need to utilise the District Council's own property portfolio and has requested a further report on the location of the Call Centre to be submitted to them and the Panel in January 2012, this will include a more robust risk assessment and a detailed comparison of options available.

In considering options for the replacement of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System, the Cabinet has requested the Project Team to commence a formal procurement process for the system to include discussions with other neighbourhood authorities regarding the sharing of technology. With this in mind, the Cabinet has authorised the Managing Director (Resources), after consultation with the relevant Executive Councillor to approve the final decision on future CRM options.

The Cabinet has supported the Panel's view that the automated call distribution telephony system currently used by the Call Centre is a "best in class" solution and have agreed to negotiations

commencing with Cambridgeshire County Council to extend the current agreement.

### **DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT BUDGET**

Both the Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) have considered the implications for the Council's Budget of an increase in demand for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). In so doing, Members have noted that there were now insufficient funds to progress a number of cases in the current year.

Having reviewed the options which were available to address the problem and having recognised that any delay in providing DFGs could have a detrimental impact on the quality of life of those who require adaptations, both the Cabinet and the Panel were of the opinion that the Council should continue to deal with applications as expeditiously as possible. With this in mind, the Cabinet has approved the immediate release of a supplementary capital estimate to prevent any further delay in providing the grants.

### **FINANCIAL FORECAST**

In conjunction with the Cabinet, the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has been acquainted with the present position in relation to the Council's financial forecast for the period to 2024/25. To assist them in their deliberations, all Members of the Council were invited to attend and take part in the discussions.

The Panel has discussed a range of issues including the approach the Council might take to setting the Council Tax for 2012/13. Members are of the opinion that an analysis of the implications of not increasing the Council Tax next year should be

included in the options under consideration.

With regard to the options for securing savings over the financial period, the Panel has suggested that the Council should take into account whether front-line or support services are involved when planning to make savings. Members have reiterated their desire to retain front line services where possible and it has also been suggested that the Council should examine the opportunities to make savings amongst those functions which had not already had their budgets reduced.

The Panel has also discussed the Council's planned savings through pay and allowances, the future of the CCTV service and the use of the New Homes Bonus. Comment has been made that the Council should review its existing plans, adopt a flexible approach and be more rigorous in its identification and analysis of options for changes to the way services are delivered. Comments have also been made regarding the Leisure Centres and the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy.

Finally, the Panel has endorsed the continued use of the Annuity basis for the Council's Minimum Revenue

Subsequently and having considered the views of the Panel, the Cabinet has noted that a number of options are being investigated for preserving a CCTV service and that a report on the potential impact of grant reductions to the voluntary sector would be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) and Cabinet in October.

With regard to the setting of Council Tax for 2012/13, Executive Councillors were of the opinion that the implications of not increasing Council Tax next year should not be included in the options under consideration given the impact

on services of the additional budget cuts that would be necessary. With this proviso, the report was recommended to Council.

### **UPDATE ON 2011 PAY NEGOTIATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS**

The Employment Panel has considered the outcome of the consultation on a range of employee allowances and endorsed a number of amendments to employee mileage, subsistence and remuneration allowances. On the recommendation of the Managing Director, Resources, and as part of these changes, the Panel also has agreed that, with immediate effect, no further cars would be leased for staff, including Heads of Services and Directors, with immediate effect. Details of all changes can be viewed on the District Council Intranet site.

Preliminary consideration also has been given to a review of the Council's pay structure. The proposals which are currently the subject of a 90 day consultation with employees are designed to make a substantial contribution to the Council's £2 million target for unidentified savings and potentially:

- ❖ maximise job security;
- ❖ protect existing salary levels;
- ❖ provide a financial incentive for on the job learning and development;
- ❖ reduce the bureaucracy of the current appraisal system;
- ❖ continue to provide an attractive proposition to prospective employees; and
- ❖ ensure fair rates of pay across the workforce.

Given the complexity of the proposals, the Panel has received a detailed briefing by the Managing Director (Resources) arising from which comment was made by Members on a range of issues including sanctionable pay and absence management, rewards for learning and development and matters relating to incremental points and salary scales. Members have been assured about the legality of the proposals and the undertaking of appropriate risk assessments and have sought clarification as to the relative and absolute savings which could be achieved from the proposals.

Having regard to the complex nature of the subject and the serious implications of the proposals, the Employment Panel has requested the opportunity to discuss all relevant issues in detail prior to making any formal resolutions on the matter. This will be accommodated via a Panel Briefing and a special meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2011.

The Panel has noted the contents of a cost of living pay claim which has been submitted by Employees Side representatives for 2011/12. However Members were of the opinion that it would not be appropriate to agree an award whilst the consultation on the pay structure was continuing. This will be discussed further at the Panel's next meeting.

### **EMPLOYMENT REPORT**

In response to a request at a previous meeting, the Employment Panel has considered a range of information relating to the management of the Council's workforce and the workload of the Human Resources Team. This has included the latest position and trends relating to:-

- ❖ Employee numbers;

- ❖ Retention of new starters;
- ❖ Performance Development Review scores;
- ❖ The impact of the Voluntary Release Scheme;
- ❖ Human Resources caseload; and
- ❖ Sickness absence reporting.

In considering the information which has been provided, the Panel has expressed concern about the increasing number of days lost to sickness per full time employee during the course of the previous year. Members have noted that that it was hoped that the situation would be improved following the implementation of a new Sickness Absence Policy which had been adopted by the Panel in February and further training for Managers which was expected to take place in October. The Panel has suggested that the Council should adopt a corporate target for sickness absence and that Heads of Service should be reminded to follow the process for managing absence consistently. In view of their continuing concerns, the Panel will discuss the issue further at a future meeting.

A copy of the full report is available from Democratic Services on request and has been published on the District Council's website.

### HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY

To reflect recent changes in the organisational configuration of the District Council and the roles and responsibilities of some employees, the Employment Panel has endorsed the contents of a new Health and Safety Policy for the Council.

The Policy sets out the District Council's core health and safety values and provides employees and Members with guidance on their health and safety roles and responsibilities. To reflect the pace of change in local government, the policy has been drafted in such a way to account for minor updates if necessary.

Having noted the details of the organisational chart for Health and Safety, the Panel has been reminded that all Members have a responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of the Council's employees and for ensuring that suitable resources are available to discharge these responsibilities.

### CCTV PETITIONS

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-being) has formally received two petitions in respect of CCTV. Both petitions had too few signatories to be submitted to Full Council.

The first petition, requesting a camera for the 'Chubb Stream' area of St Ives, was presented by Councillor Davies and had originated as a result of the strong views of nearby residents after a serious incident had taken place in the area which also attracts street drinkers and associated anti-social behaviour.

The second petition, presented by the Neighbourhood co-ordinator for the Ingram Street/ Ouse Walk area of Huntingdon, called for the reinstatement of the cover of a camera in Ingram Street car park. Residents expressed their disappointment at the decommissioning of the camera which had taken place without prior consultation, it was felt that had the cover remained in place it would have served as a deterrent while the wider

issue of CCTV remains under consideration.

### RESIDENTIAL TRAVEL PLAN

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-being) Panel have commented on the apparent inconsistency demonstrated by the County Council by introducing the requirement for developers to produce Residential Travel Plans (RTPs) when at the same time it was reducing its support for developers.

The comments followed the Panel's review of the draft Residential Travel Plan Guidance prior to its submission to Cabinet.

The guidance which has been developed by the Council in discussion with the City and District Councils requires developers to introduce a package of measures that will promote sustainable travel within new residential developments by encouraging the use of more sustainable travel options, such as walking, cycling, public transport, car sharing and car clubs, thereby reducing the contribution of road transport air pollution and supporting reductions in greenhouse gases. The Panel is of the view that the RTP represents a significant burden for developers and has therefore agreed that the proposed threshold for this requirement in Huntingdonshire should be developments with 80 or more dwellings, in accordance with national guidance.

Subsequently, the guidance has been considered by the Cabinet and in noting the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Executive Councillors have endorsed the document as a basis for public consultation.

### OFFICER EMPLOYMENT PROCEDURE RULES

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Cabinet has confirmed that there was no material or well-founded objection to the proposals to establish a Corporate Support Office and the consequential impact on the People, Performance and Partnerships Division and Central Services Directorate.

### SHARED HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY SERVICES

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) have expressed their satisfaction with the Council's proposals to establish a shared Home Improvement Agency service with South Cambridgeshire District and Cambridge City Councils. Assurances have been delivered on a number of matters relating to service quality, human resources and the financial aspects of the proposals.

The Panel discussed a number of matters including the absence of East Cambridgeshire and Fenland District Councils from the proposals and the anticipated costs savings to the Council which were reported as being in the region of £25,000 to £30,000.

### NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS: SCOPING REPORT

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has discussed the terms of its review of Neighbourhood Forums in Huntingdonshire. The Panel has been tasked by the Cabinet to investigate alternative community engagement models, whilst being mindful of the Council's duties in respect of Localism and of the management of funds received through the Community Infrastructure Levy.



A number of matters have been discussed including the level of public attendance at meetings, the issues raised, the choice of venues, police boundaries and the lack of active engagement on the part of Town and Parish Councils. Attention has also been drawn to Cambridgeshire County Council's review of Area Joint Committees.

The Panel has formed the preliminary view that the Council should adopt a new model of community engagement, which places greater emphasis on the three tiers of local government. A letter has been sent out to County and District Council Members and Town and Parish Councils to elicit their views on the Neighbourhood Forums in Huntingdonshire. These views will be reported back to the Panel in November.

#### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SOCIAL WELL-BEING) - PROGRESS**

Background information on the health implications of the night time economy and on the implications for the Council in terms of homelessness that will arise as a result of changes to the Housing Benefit system has been requested for submission to future meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being).

#### **APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATION**

The Standards Committee has approved applications for dispensation received from Colne, Great Gransden, Folksworth & Washingley, St Ives, St Neots and Upwood & The Raveleys to allow Members on those Town & Parish Councils, who might otherwise be prohibited by the interests they hold, to discuss and vote on matters relating to community facilities in their parishes.

Once again, the Committee is uneasy at granting dispensations in situations where all Members on a Town and Parish Council serve as trustees to a community facility. Because of this, the Monitoring Officer has been requested to encourage Parish Councils to explore ways to review their trustee arrangements so that people other than Councillors become trustees. Given the potential changes to the standards regime, the Committee has granted all applications but the application for St Ives (til 2012) for a period ending May 2013.

#### **STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND – LATEST**

The Standards Committee has been kept abreast of the progress of the 'localism bill' through parliament and was pleased to hear that a cross party group of peers were lobbying for the retention of a national code of conduct and Standards Committees with an Independent Chairman and the removal of criminal sanctions for breaches of Members' interest provisions. The outcome of the House of Lords deliberations are expected shortly.

#### **ST IVES WEST: DRAFT URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK**

The Development Management Panel has noted that the draft Urban Design Framework for St Ives has been published for consultation. Once adopted the Framework will be a material planning consideration when determining future planning applications.

#### **DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROGRESS REPORT & APPLICATIONS**

In its review of the performance of the Development Management Division over the period 1st April – 30th June, 2011, the Development Management

Panel was pleased to note that there has been an increase in applications and income received in comparison with 2010. Members were hopeful that this demonstrated an increase in confidence in the economy locally and in development in the District generally.

At its September meeting, the Panel considered a reserved matters application for residential development at Ramsey which is part of the larger redevelopment of the Ramsey Northern Gateway. The development also comprised a new foodstore and community centre both of which have already been built.

The Panel deferred determination of the application to enable Officers to investigate land ownership issues. Members were anxious to establish whether the proposed new houses could be linked by condition to the delivery of the employment consents on the site north west of the corner of Stocking Fen and St Mary's Roads.