

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 1st to 27th January 2012.

VOLUNTARY SECTOR REVIEW

The Overview and Scrutiny Panels (Social Well-Being) and (Economic Well-Being) have discussed a proposal to establish an indicative voluntary sector budget for 2013/14 of £273,000 and to establish a mixed grant system for the allocation of future funds. This work has been undertaken in conjunction with the Social Well-Being Panel's Voluntary Sector Working Group.

The Social Well-Being Panel has endorsed the recommendations proposed within the report and received assurances that sound governance arrangements will be in place when determining applications for grant funding.

Although the majority of Members of the Panel for Economic Well-Being have endorsed the recommendations within the report, Members expressed a number of reservations as to how the indicative budget figure had been determined and where the alternative savings will now be made in the Council's Budget. Members have also queried whether any consideration had been given to a process for match funding and to what extent the voluntary sector themselves were responding to the changing economic climate and exploring opportunities for example to share services / facilities and raise additional sums.

The Panel has endorsed a proposal to adopt a mix of methods for allocating

funds and Members commented that as the Council is moving away from commissioning, a mix of distribution methods will not be used. Members have also queried the rationale behind the proposal to return to a grant process and how the Council will ensure that the organisation will meet the objectives for which the grant had been awarded. The Head of Environmental & Community Health Services has explained that grants will be awarded for a maximum of three years and any performance issues could be addressed in the indicative budget for the following year.

The Panel has also discussed in detail the proposal to establish a Community Chest to create a source of funds to help local community projects throughout the year. Whilst the majority of Members supported the proposal, the Panel agreed that in the absence of further information as to how the process might operate, it was difficult for them to give full support to it. Members have expressed differing views as to whether Towns and Parishes should be able to apply to the Community Chest and have suggested that, given the small sums involved, the administration of the process should be straightforward and flexible.

Subsequently, an indicative voluntary sector budget of £273,000 for 2013/14 has been approved by the Cabinet. Executive Councillors have also agreed that a mix of methods be used for the allocation of financial support to the voluntary sector. The method to be

used should be proportionate to the level of funding required.

The Cabinet has endorsed the Panel's sentiments that the application form for the community chest should be straightforward, be used as a way of helping very local projects and that funding should be made available throughout the year.

HOUSING BENEFIT CHANGES AND THE POTENTIAL IMPACT ON HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The effect of Government changes to the Housing Benefits system has been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) which results in a reduction in Benefit entitlement of between £3 and £70 per week by existing claimants. The Panel has asked about the impact of the changes in housing benefit locally and noted that it was difficult to assess this exactly at this stage. Members have also discussed the Council's use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation generally and the likely impact of the changes in this area.

Having been advised that there was currently no provision within the 2012/13 budget for an increase in homelessness families, the Panel has queried whether the Council should seek to increase the budget estimate for it at this stage. Members have noted that in the absence of an accurate estimate of the impact it was not practical, nor possible to do so.

Reports on the wider housing policy implications arising from further proposals in the Welfare Reform Bill and on rental levels and rent costs will be presented to future meetings of the Panel.

ONE LEISURE FINANCE – REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP

The outcome of the deliberations of the Working Group which had been established to review the financial performance of One Leisure and to make recommendations on the services' future direction has been reported to the Overview & Scrutiny Panels for Economic and Social Well-Being.

These conclusions have subsequently been referred to the Cabinet who have:

- approved performance targets for income, controllable costs and net controllable costs;
- requested the General Manager, One Leisure to draft a business plan for the start of 2012/13 through which performance targets are to be achieved and to produce separate accounts for account reporting purposes and for managing the controllable budget; This business plan is to be presented to the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) for review by June 2012;
- agreed that performance targets be reported to the Panel on a quarterly basis;
- agreed not to introduce a deferential pricing scheme for non-residents of the District;
- approved the retention of the One Leisure Working Group in its current form to investigate which business model One Leisure should employ; and
- requested the One Leisure Working Group to assist the Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities with the development of a methodology for the quantification of "social value".

BROADBAND DELIVERY PROJECT

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has received a presentation on the Broadband Delivery Project. The Government's objective through the Project is to establish the best superfast network in Europe by 2015. This requires Local Enterprise Partnerships to draw up a Broadband Strategy for their geographical areas.

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Delivery Project has been allocated £6.75M from Broadband UK for this project and their objective is to enable 100% of businesses and 90% of homes to have access to superfast broadband by 2015. Members have also been provided with a definition of Superfast Broadband.

Arising from the presentation, the Panel has discussed and made a number of comments with regard to the project's objectives. Members have also noted that the Government's funding could only be used to provide broadband in areas not covered by commercial providers and that the District would be placed at a competitive disadvantage if they weren't involved with the initiative.

With regard to the Alconbury Enterprise Zone, the Panel has been informed that the Government had announced that all enterprise zones would have superfast broadband. Given the number of houses and businesses within the area it was expected that this would be commercially viable and, therefore demand would be met by the market.

NHS CONSULTATION – PROPOSED REDESIGN OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ACROSS CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH

Following a presentation by representatives of NHS Cambridgeshire and having received a number of

representations from service users, their carers and family members on proposals to redesign mental health services across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) agreed to submit a response to NHS Cambridgeshire's consultation. The Panel unanimously expressed the view that the mental health facility in Acer Ward at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital should not be closed.

In reaching its conclusions, the Panel questioned the clinical reasons for proposing the closure of the Ward, expressed concerns over the travel implications of the proposals and queried whether better outcomes are intended to be produced at the other sites proposed within the consultation. Members are not satisfied that sufficient evidence has been provided to justify the case for the closure of Acer Ward or that they have taken into account anticipated population growth projections in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The Panel also was of the view that the proposals will be detrimental to the health and well-being of both patients and their visitors, which could impact upon patient rehabilitation levels.

Given the strong views expressed, the Panel will be meeting with representatives of Circle Healthcare to discuss with them options for preserving the facility within Hinchingsbrooke Hospital.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE LOCAL INVESTMENT PLAN

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) was apprised with changes to the level of funding available to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and noted the implications of the Cambridgeshire Local Investment Plan (CLIP) upon the delivery of local housing. A reduction in

funding prompted the HCA to review the way in which funds would be allocated, which will now be delivered through Registered Providers (formerly known as Housing Associations). A new “Affordable Rent” scheme will be introduced as part of these changes.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS WORKING GROUP

A brief update on the outcome of a recent meeting of the Neighbourhood Forums Working Group was delivered to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being). This included an update on the proposed boundary areas for any alternative model which was based on responses received to consultation undertaken by the Panel in September 2011. Draft constitutional terms for the new forums and the electoral representation for each area are currently being reviewed by the Working Group.

Having considered a report of the Working Group on the development of a new web based site as a way of establishing dialogue with local residents, the Cabinet has agreed to adopt the “Shape Your Place!” initiative. The site was originally established by Cambridgeshire County Council to promote community engagement and has been successfully run as a pilot in Fenland.

DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

Over two meetings, the Development Management Panel has considered sixteen applications of which fourteen were approved and two refused.

The main application considered during this period was the proposed development of a cinema, restaurant buildings, car park and public plaza off Huntingdon Street, St Neots. District and Town Councillors and a local resident made representations to the

Panel both in support for and against the application. On balance and in approving the application, the Panel considered that the cinema would make a significant contribution to leisure facilities in, and the vitality of, the town. A Section 106 Agreement will secure funds towards the upgrading of the urban traffic control system in the town centre and conditions will secure, amongst other matters, the provision of a car park management plan.

IMPORTED FOOD CONTROL LEGISLATION - DELEGATIONS

Having considered a report covering the introduction of three new statutory instruments concerning the importation of food, feeds, animals and animal products from other EU states, the Licensing and Protection Panel has authorised the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services to appoint suitably qualified officers to enforce the Regulations and to initiate prosecutions after consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Licensing and Protection Panel.

LICENSING AND PROTECTION APPLICATIONS SUB-GROUP – MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the Licensing and Protection Applications Sub-Group will remain at four with a quorum of three.

The Licensing and Protection Panel arrived at this decision following consideration of a report suggesting that the Sub-Group, which is established on an ad-hoc basis to deal with applications for licences which cannot be delegated to officers, should be reduced to three members with a quorum of three. The Panel agreed that continuing the present procedure would both avoid the possibility of non quorate meetings and would provide an opportunity for more members of the

Panel to gain experience of the procedure.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) has considered the terms of a revised Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy which is intended to be used as supporting evidence for planning purposes. The strategy has been supported by the Green Infrastructure Forum and, in light of the demise of Cambridgeshire Horizons, the Panel has suggested that the accountability and reporting lines of the Green Infrastructure Forum should be clarified.

The Chairman has raised concerns over the Strategy's lack of reference to the local agricultural industry and has suggested that food security is of local, national and international concern and as such ought to be given higher priority and reflected to a greater extent in the Council's policy framework. The Panel has decided that a Working Group should be convened to investigate land use for agricultural purposes in the context of planning policy and its contribution to the local economy. With this in mind the Panel has recommended the Strategy to Cabinet for endorsement.

Having supported the Panel's views regarding local agriculture, the Cabinet has agreed to adopt the contents of the Strategy as supporting evidence for planning purposes.

ADVANCED WASTE PARTNERSHIP

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) approved for submission to Cabinet a report on moving the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Waste Partnership (RECAP) to the next level of partnership working in order to gain the

maximum advantage collectively for the partner authorities. The Panel has acknowledged that the work of RECAP represents an excellent example of county-wide partnership working which delivers significant benefits to Cambridgeshire. Members have supported the proposals to formalise relationships with neighbouring authorities in order to deliver further benefits to residents. The Panel has been assured that before any costs are incurred by the Council individual business cases will be brought to the Panel for comment. Having questioned whether the Council's performance levels would be compromised by the proposal for greater joint working, Members have been advised that joint working would lead to greater savings and improve the trade waste function which would be of benefit to the business community. Subsequently, the contents of the charter have been adopted by the Cabinet who agreed that any outline business cases for any advance waste projects be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) prior to any decision being made to proceed.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY DRAFT CHARGING SCHEDULE

Having considered the comments received on the Huntingdonshire Community Infrastructure Levy – Charging Schedule, during the final round of consultations, the Cabinet has approved the Schedule's content and that of a Statement of Modification for submission for examination. The modification has arisen as a result of comments made on the healthy levy rate which has now been reduced from £140 to £65 per square metre. The Cabinet was made aware of the timetable for submission and authorised the Head of Planning Services, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and

Housing, to make any minor amendments to the final document.

FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Head of Financial Services has drawn the Cabinet's attention to spending variations in the revenue budget for the current year and modifications to the approved capital programme. It was noted that the expected outturn of revenue expenditure was now £21.4m which was £1.2m less than assumed in the 2011/2012 budget. The reduction was mainly due to one-off items and the implementation of service plans.

EU PROJECT – MOBILISING LOCAL ENERGY INVESTMENTS

The Cabinet has approved in principle, the Council's participation in Cambridgeshire's Intelligent Energy Europe (IEE) Project which has been awarded funding totalling €1.2m for the delivery of energy efficiency and energy generation schemes across Cambridgeshire. The application was made jointly by five Cambridgeshire local authorities and Cambridge University to the European Commission's Executive Agency for Competitiveness and Innovation.

Having been advised that the project provides an opportunity for the District Council to receive €157,000 towards the cost of developing two significant – business driven energy infrastructure projects in the District, the Cabinet has authorised officers to proceed with the documentation required. However, given the current economic climate and many unknown factors, it has been recommended that a decision to draw down the European funding will only be taken when the Council is certain that the two projects will deliver.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE HORIZONS – PROPOSED CHANGES TO COMPANY ARTICLES AND MEMORANDUM

Proposed amendments to the Articles of Memorandum of Cambridgeshire Horizons have been approved by the Cabinet. The Company is currently winding down its operations and the changes are necessary to deal with the repayment of monies previously advanced by them. In that respect, the Cabinet has authorised the Council to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding. This will outline the basis on which returning monies are apportioned and the priority in which they are paid.