
Cabinet

Report of the meeting held on 19th July and 13th September 2012

Matter for Decision

5. FINANCIAL FORECAST

In conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) (Item No.13 of their Report refers) and by way of a report by the Head of Financial Services, reproduced separately on the Council agenda, the Cabinet has been acquainted with the present position in relation to the Council's financial forecast for the period up to 2016/17.

The Cabinet has been informed of potential variations in a number of sources of income and other factors that could affect the Council's financial position. Executive Councillors were advised that there remains a number of uncertainties which might impact upon the forecast including the level of Government base funding, the detail of the Localisation of the Business Rates and Council Tax Benefits, changes to Council Tax allowances and the New Homes Bonus for 2013/14.

In considering the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being), Executive Councillors noted that Working Groups had been established by the Panel to review the Council's current and future borrowing and examine the Council's level of reserves.

Having approved the annuity basis for the calculation of Minimum Revenue Provision and in requesting Officers to review the level and predictions for New Homes Bonus on a quarterly basis, the Cabinet

RECOMMEND

that the Council approves the contents of the report now submitted.

Matters for Information

**6. NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS –
PROPOSED ESTABLISHMENT OF LOCAL JOINT COMMITTEES
IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE – CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

The Cabinet has noted the conclusion of a review of the Neighbourhood Forums in Huntingdonshire by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) (Item No.11 of their Report refers).

In considering the content of the report, Executive Councillors have been reminded that the Panel had undertaken a comprehensive consultation on the proposed establishment of Local Joint Committees (LJC's) in Huntingdonshire. The Cabinet has considered the composition of the LJC's in the light of the issues raised by the respondents and the views of the Panel. In adopting a constitution proposed for the operation of the LJC's, the Cabinet has endorsed the suggestion of a pilot in the Norman Cross County division for a twelve month period. Executive Councillors felt that trialling in a small area rather than the suggested nine LJC's areas would be more manageable. Members have requested that the County Council and relevant Parish Councils involved in the Norman Cross Pilot Scheme be asked to adopt the proposed constitution as part of the pilot scheme.

In discussing arrangements for the existing Neighbourhood Forums, the Cabinet has authorised the Executive Deputy Leader to review their format as a matter of urgency with a view to them continuing during the trial in those areas that have expressed a wish that they remain.

Having thanked the Panel for their efforts in producing a thorough and comprehensive report, the Cabinet has requested them to undertake a review of the pilot scheme during its twelve months period of operation.

**7. NEW HUNTINGDONSHIRE LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION AND
ENGAGEMENT PROCESS**

In conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) (Item No.8 of their Report refers), the Cabinet has noted the progress made to date on preparing the new Huntingdonshire Local Plan, responses received to the initial non-statutory local plan issues and options consultation and the next steps in the consultation plan making process.

Whilst welcoming an extended strategy and policy consultation period, the Cabinet has authorised Officers to proceed to the Strategy and Consultation Stage, using appropriate material, the content of which will be agreed by the Head of Planning and Housing Strategy after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing.

8. VOLUNTARY SECTOR FUNDING 2013 – 2014 ONWARDS

Having regard to the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) (Item No.8 of their Report refers), the Cabinet has reviewed the allocation of funding to support the voluntary sector in Huntingdonshire.

In endorsing a new grant based system, rather than the old commissioning model, the Cabinet has supported a move to a three year period for funding of voluntary sector organisations.

The Cabinet also has supported the proposal that future financial support be tapered to ensure voluntary organisations find match funding for any grant that they receive from the Council in the final year of the three-year period. Furthermore, the Cabinet felt that match funding should be extended to applications to the Community Chest subject to the amount requested being of a value which would attract such funds.

At the same time, Executive Councillors have discussed the allocation of community chest funds. In that respect, they reiterated that the process should be straightforward and that the level of funding set at a maximum of £5,000 per application. Members noted that those in receipt of funding via the Community Chest and not be eligible for reconsideration for a period of two years.

With regard to the determination of grant applications, the Cabinet has confirmed that this responsibility will remain with the Executive Members for Healthy and Active Communities and Resources.

Having noted that the new funding process would be open to the whole voluntary sector, the Cabinet requested that provision be made to allow some applicants to make presentations in support of their submissions.

9. LOCALISATION OF BUSINESS RATES

In conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) (Item No.11 of their Report refers), the Cabinet has been acquainted with the background to the introduction of a rates retention scheme designed to encourage councils to be self-sufficient and to help them support local jobs, growth and protect the most vulnerable places. The proposals focus on the distribution of business rate income rather than changes to the system of business rate taxation. Members noted that it was not intended to change the resources available to authorities in 2013/14 but it would, over time, result in a higher proportion of resources going to growth areas.

Executive Councillors' attention was drawn to an option in the scheme for local authorities to come together to form local pools for business rates income. In expressing an interest in forming a pool with the County Council and other Cambridgeshire Districts, the Cabinet stressed that any arrangements should be based on ensuring

that no authority loses out from pooling and to provide for the opportunity to review the decision later in the year.

Subsequently, an expression of interest on behalf of the Cambridgeshire authorities was submitted to the Government by Cambridgeshire County Council and work has progressed to agree management proposals for the scheme. In discussing the benefit sharing arrangement, Executive Councillors were advised that each authority will receive a sum equivalent to what they would have received if there had been no pooling. The residue will then be allocated with 50% to a Strategic Investment Fund to support future business rate growth and the remainder split between the authorities based on the size of the area's population. Having noted that all partners will be able to review the scheme annually, the Cabinet has endorsed a proposed scheme for Cambridgeshire and has requested the Managing Directors, after consultation with the Executive Leader, to make any minor consequential amendments to the scheme as necessary.

On this occasion, to assist Members with the debate on "Council tax and other welfare reform" referred to in Item No. 4 on the Council Agenda, a copy of the localisation of business rates report by the Head of Financial Services is appended as a background paper.

10. REVENUE MONITORING 2011/12 OUTTURN AND 2012/13 REVENUE BUDGET

The Cabinet has noted the final outturn of revenue expenditure for 2011/2012 and the variations already identified in the current year. Executive Councillors were advised that as a result of under-spending, the Council has been successful in saving an additional £2.5m in reserves. The reduction was mainly due to service managers implementing saving plans and holding posts wholly or partly vacant where feasible.

11. CAPITAL MONITORING: 2011/12 OUTTURN AND 2012/13 BUDGET

The Cabinet has been acquainted with variations in the Capital Programme in the current year.

12. WASTE COLLECTION POLICIES

Having regard to the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) (Item No.7 of their Report refers), the Cabinet has endorsed the content of the Waste Collection Policies document which brings together the Council's 29 policies relating to waste into a single document.

In discussing the document, the Cabinet has noted the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel particularly over the prohibition of stickers on bins and Executive Councillors have reiterated that they were not in favour of notices being attached to bins. On the issue of

purple stickers, the Cabinet was of the opinion that there was no evidence that this identifies vulnerable residents and referred to developments and technology which would soon enable collection crews to identify such properties using equipment in their cabs.

**13. GROWING AWARENESS –
A PLAN FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT TO 2011/12**

Along with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) (Item No.6 of their Report refers), the Cabinet has considered the annual review of the Council's Environment Strategy for Huntingdonshire – "Growing Awareness - A Plan for Our Environment" . The strategy sets out a framework for the Council to make continual, measurable progress in reducing its own resource use and in stimulating environmental improvements for the wider district.

Attention having been drawn to the impact the strategy has had in reducing energy usage across the Council's portfolio by 18%, the Cabinet supported the role of the strategy as the main means for the Council to monitor and improve its own environmental performance, whilst encouraging improved practice in the District.

14. RISK REGISTER

In considering the progress being made to identify and manage corporate risks, the Cabinet has approved the actions proposed to deal with six risks identified as very high or red in the risk register. In so doing, the Executive Councillors have stressed measures to be taken should be met from within existing resources.

15. POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

The Cabinet has supported the establishment of a Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Panel as a joint committee made up of representatives from the seven Cambridgeshire Local Authorities plus one co-optee. The Cabinet has appointed the Executive Leader as the District Council's representative on the Panel with the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) as his substitute. The Panel will have an important role in scrutinising the work of the new Police and Crime Commissioner.

With regard to the Panel arrangements and associated terms of reference, the Cabinet has endorsed their substance and have authorised the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to finalise the precise wording as necessary.

16. DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The Cabinet has considered the findings of a review by a Working Group appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) to examine concerns raised over the Loves Farm development in St Neots and to make recommendations to inform future developments. The Panel's interest in the subject had been

prompted by concerns of residents living on the development over access routes to and within the site, the density of housing and prevalence of affordable housing. Members were advised that as part of the review and in order to obtain an objective assessment from a planning perspective, the Working Group had completed a building for life assessment which rated the site as a silver standard.

In considering the contents of the report, Executive Councillors' attention was drawn to the steps being undertaken to deal with the residents' concerns. In that respect, Members have noted four principal actions that will be introduced as part of the next phase of the development including better co-operation with the Highways Authority and the Environment Agency, improved targeted design policies in the New Local Plan and extra engagement with residents in neighbouring areas. Members also have been informed that issues associated with the current Design Guide will be addressed in the new Local Plan.

17. THE TECHNICAL REFORM OF COUNCIL TAX

In conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) (Item No.14 of their Report refers), the Cabinet has noted the Government's proposals to reform Council Tax with effect from 1st April 2013 and the consequential implications for the District Council.

Executive Councillors were advised that the Government intends to give local authorities the discretion to set the level and period of charge for unfurnished domestic properties, second homes and uninhabitable properties. Furthermore, a billing authority will have the option to levy an empty premium on properties left vacant for over two years.

In discussing the financial implications of any change in policy in future years, Members recognised the importance of establishing a base to prepare financial forecasts and a draft budget. With this in mind and subject to the enactment of the relevant legislation the Cabinet has agreed, in principle, to the following changes to Council Tax Policy:

- ◆ unoccupied and unfurnished (Class C) properties be granted a 100% discount for one month and then 0% thereafter;
- ◆ second home discount be reduced to 0%;
- ◆ uninhabitable properties (Class A) be granted 100% discount for a maximum of twelve months (no change
- ◆ empty homes premium be levied after two years at 50% in addition to the 100% charge currently made; and
- ◆ monthly instalments continue to be due on the 15th day of each month (extended to those who request 12 monthly instalments) but Managers be permitted to include an additional later instalment date purely as an incentive for those opting to pay by direct debit.

At the same time, the Cabinet has supported the publication of a Cambridgeshire Council Tax booklet and the Council's continued involvement in this area of joint working.

18. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT FROM 1st APRIL 2013

In conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) (Item No.15 of their Report refers), the Cabinet has been acquainted with progress being made towards the implementation of a local Council Tax Support Scheme which will replace the current Council Tax Benefit Scheme from 1st April 2013.

Executive Councillors were advised that under the new arrangements the Council will be subjected to a reduction in funding of at least 10% which will have an impact on the £8.1m awarded in Council Tax Benefit per annum to around 9,400 claimants. Members were informed that pensioners and the most vulnerable claimants which includes those in receipt of the Severe Disability or Disabled Child Premium, must be protected from any changes and receive the same amount of support that they would under the current scheme. With this in mind, the Cabinet has concurred with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel that the funding shortfall should not be passed onto the remaining recipients of support and that the Council should make up part of the difference. Members noted that the Council will be in a position to offset some of the costs by generating extra income under the new Council Tax Support Scheme.

Attention has been drawn to a consultation exercise being undertaken on the new arrangements which has targeted those affected by the changes and stakeholders. In that respect, Executive Councillors have recognised that not all Council Tax payers will be consulted and have concurred with the Panel that this should be taken into account when all the responses are analysed.

19. JOINT STATEMENT ON THE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH BY THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Along with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) (Item No.12 of their Report refers), the Cabinet has endorsed the contents of a Joint Statement on the Development Strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The strategy will provide a basis for the authorities to continue to work together at a strategic level across administrative boundaries and to plan effectively for growth. The first Joint Statement was developed in 2010, this updated version reflects important changes to the planning system and now incorporates Peterborough Unitary Authority as well as the Cambridgeshire Authorities. Its development has been led by the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Joint Strategic Planning Unit whose work is overseen by a Member Group consisting of three members from each authority.

20. NEW GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES ON THE HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION ACT 1995 (HECA) AND DELIVERY OF THE GREEN DEAL IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

Further to Item No.11 of the Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being), the Cabinet has considered the content of guidance produced by the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. The guidance requires all local authorities with housing responsibility to prepare reports by 31st March 2013 setting out plans to implement practical, cost effective energy conservation measures to achieve significant improvements in the energy efficiency of residential accommodation in their areas.

In discussing energy efficiency measures, the Cabinet's attention has been drawn to the Government's flagship environmental initiative the "Green Deal". This new initiative will provide householders with up-front loan finance for installing cost effective energy efficiency measures in their homes and will be available for commercial and public buildings. Executive Councillors were advised that about 70% of Huntingdonshire's housing stock was likely to have some potential for green deal measures. In noting the benefits of working in partnership with commercial Green Deal providers and community partners to facilitate and deliver a local scheme, the Cabinet has authorised Officers to develop an outline business case for an action plan to deliver the procurement of a joint local authority Green Deal offering for Cambridgeshire. When completed the outline business case will be presented to Members for consideration including a full appraisal of the work streams and resources required to procure and deliver a Green Deal scheme for Cambridgeshire.

21. FIXED PENALTY NOTICES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

The Cabinet has approved a charge for fixed penalty notices of £80 reduced to £60 if paid within 10 days for Section 46 and 47 offences under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 relating to the failure to place waste in the prescribed receptacle for household and commercial waste.

22. DRAFT CAMBRIDGESHIRE HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY 2012-17 CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Further to Item No.10 of the Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well Being) the Cabinet has endorsed the contents of a suggested response on behalf of the Council to a consultation paper issued by NHS Cambridgeshire on the draft Cambridgeshire Health and Well-being Strategy 2012-17. The paper outlined the terms of the proposed priorities identified by the Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board and Network as being important for local people and summarised how Partners will work together effectively to address them.

J D Ablewhite
Chairman