

Decision Digest

Edition 130

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 26th November to 21st December 2012.

REVIEW OF EMPLOYEE CONSULTATION INFORMATION ARRANGEMENTS

Following a review of arrangements for consulting and informing staff on employment and service matters and for making employment related decisions the Employment Panel has expressed its support for proposals which will streamline the way in which these matters are currently dealt with.

The new arrangements will enable the Council to:-

- ◆ reflect best practice in governance arrangements and in setting Senior Management salaries;
- ◆ avoid the unnecessary duplication of business between Forums;
- ◆ clarify the responsibilities of Managers and clearly establish how they are to be held accountable;
- ◆ enhance the role of the staff counsel.

It has also been suggested that employment related matters be delegated at some stage to the Head of the Paid Service to enable these decisions to be consulted on and ratified locally and more expediently.

The Panel has been assured that the intention to establish an Employment Scrutiny Panel will not diminish the role of Members and will

offer an opportunity both to scrutinise the way in which decisions are reached and enable policy matters to be considered in more detail. The terms and conditions of Senior Officers will continue to be the responsibility of the Senior Officers' Panel whose terms of reference will be widened to consider the salaries for starting posts at Head of Service level and above.

As it is the role of the Corporate Governance Panel to consider proposed changes to the Constitution, the Panel also has had the opportunity to consider these proposals. Whilst indicating their support for them, in principle, and raising no objection to the suggested changes to ELAG and the Senior Officers' Panel, the Panel expressed concern at the extent of the authority to be delegated to the Head of Paid Service for employment issues and was of the view that to avoid confusion with the mechanisms for scrutiny that there was no sound reason to change the name of the Employment Panel. With this in mind, the Panel deferred the proposals to their next meeting to enable the terms of reference of the new Panel to be clarified and the precise parameters of the authority to be delegated to the Head of Paid Service to be better defined.

EMPLOYMENT REPORT

The Employment Panel has received a quarterly report on the Human Resource matters impacting on the

performance of the organisation. The report included the latest position and trends relating to:-

- ◆ employee numbers;
- ◆ salary costs;
- ◆ employee turnover;
- ◆ retention of new starters;
- ◆ sickness absence reporting; and
- ◆ the Human Resources caseload.

In terms of tackling sickness absence, the Panel has noted that a consistent use of return to work interviews and self-certification for all periods of absence will be introduced with effect from 1st January 2013.

A review of the Sickness Absence Policy and Procedures will be presented to the Panel's next meeting in February.

QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR HR, PAYROLL AND ORGANISATIONAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

The Employment Panel has considered the performance of LGSS Human Resources, Payroll and Organisational Workforce Development Services across the key service measures put in place at the start of the contract.

LGSS performance will be measured in three areas, namely:-

- ◆ HR Strategic and Advisory;
- ◆ Recruitment and Payroll;
- ◆ Organisational Workforce Development.

It is the intention to agree specific targets after the first full year of operation.

Having noted that performance standards had been achieved to-date and the priorities identified for the next quarter, the Panel were pleased to note

that, overall, the transition to LGSS had largely been a success and had provided benefits that had not originally been foreseen in terms of access to wider projects and expertise within their organisation. Further reports will be provided on a quarterly basis.

SAFEGUARDING

In order to comply with recent changes in legislation, both the Cabinet and Employment Panel have endorsed the a new policy and procedures for safeguarding vulnerable people, including children from abuse.

The Policy will apply to all District Council employees and is intended to promote the safety of those using Council services whilst at the same time protect employees and Councillors from false allegations.

As further changes will be required shortly and on a regular basis, the Panel has authorised the Chief Officers' Management Team and the Lead Safeguarding Officer to make the necessary adjustments to the Policy during the period until it is next reviewed in June 2014.

The Panel has also recommended that an implementation timetable and monitoring system should be developed to indicate the progress which has been made.

PAY REVIEW PROJECT

The Panel has received an update on the progress being made by the Council's Pay Review Project. Phase 2 of the Job Evaluation work stream has now begun and 57 posts (which equates to 208 staff) within the organisation have been evaluated. Phase 3 is expected to commence in December and be completed by the end of March 2013.

As part of the Job Evaluation process, work is also being undertaken to establish 'Job Families' for business support staff. A number of staff focus groups have been arranged for this purpose and it was anticipated that the criteria for these would be approved by the Pay Review Project Board and Employment Panel in February.

The outcome of Phase 2 of the job evaluation work stream will enable work to start on the modelling of the new District Council pay structure early in the New Year, for implementation in October 2013.

NHS CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH: FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT

A representative of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group attended the Overview and Scrutiny Panel's (Social Well-Being) meeting to discuss concerns relating to the financial and operational performance of Hinchingbrooke Hospital. Areas of current concern include the recent norovirus outbreak and its impact upon the availability of bed space without resulting in delays in waiting times within the Accident and Emergency Department, performance against targets for treating cancer patients and the financial deficit expected at the end of the 2012/13 financial year.

Regular reports will continue to be provided on the Hospital. Councillors S J Criswell, P Kadewere, M Oliver and R J West, together with Mr R Coxhead, were appointed to a Joint Working Group with representatives of the County Council's Cambridgeshire Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to pursue these investigations further.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU (CAB)

An update was delivered to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) on recent developments relating to the CAB and the provision of advisory services in the District.

Rural Cambs CAB were announced as the successful bidders. A four day service in Huntingdon and a three day service in St Neots will be provided together with debt advisory services at both locations one day each week. Three hour outreach sessions will also be made available in Yaxley, St Neots and St Ives on a rotation basis with email, telephone and web advisory services also being provided alongside front line services.

Whilst there was concern over the process adopted to determine applications received under the new voluntary sector funding arrangements, assurances were delivered that due process was followed.

The Voluntary Sector Working Group, previously established by the Panel, will take part in regular review meetings with the successful bidder and the Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities to monitor the performance of the service.

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT FROM 1ST APRIL 2013

Both the Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well Being) have considered a proposal to adopt a new local Council Tax Support scheme for the District to supersede the current national Council Tax Benefit scheme on 1st April 2013.

The impact of the scheme upon Town and Parish precepts is dependent upon a Government announcement expected on 13th December. Town and Parishes

have been advised to defer setting their precepts until this announcement is made. A report outlining the impact of this process on Town and Parish Councils will be made available to Members in February 2013.

Other matters discussed include the group's who will no longer be affected by the new scheme and the recommendation contained within the Equality Impact Assessment.

Having been reminded that the scheme was subject to consultation over the summer, the Cabinet has recommended its approval to Council.

POTENTIAL MERGER BETWEEN CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND SUFFOLK FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

Further to their last meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has endorsed the content of a response to the current consultation being undertaken on proposals for further collaboration up to a full merger between Cambridgeshire and Suffolk Fire and Rescue Services.

DISPOSAL OF LAND, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has considered the details of an offer for the land fronting St Mary's Street in Huntingdon and whether this should be accepted by the Council.

Given that a significant upturn in the commercial property market is unlikely in the near term (planning permission for residential development has elapsed) the Panel is of the view that the Managing Director (Communities, Partnerships and Projects), after consultation with the Executive Member, should be authorised to accept an offer from the interested party. The Panel has made a

recommendation on the terms that should be negotiated and which would be acceptable.

Subsequently, the sale has been considered by the Cabinet and in noting the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Executive Councillors have authorised the Managing Director (Communities, Partnerships and Projects), to approve the terms for the sale of the land.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT – REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE: 6 MONTHLY REVIEW

In order to fulfil its role of overseeing the management of the Council's financial investments and borrowing, the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has reviewed the performance of the Council's Investments for the period 1st April to 30th September 2012. The Panel is of the view that the Cabinet should recommend the Council to note the contents of the report and approve the revised targets for interest rates exposure.

Subsequently the Cabinet has approved the contents of the report and the merging of the indicators.

UPDATE 2013/14 BUDGET & MTP

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has considered an update on the 2013/14 Budget and MTP. The Panel has previously held informal discussions on the Council's financial position. The Chairman has informed Members that he has advised the Cabinet of the options considered and recommendations that have been made. The Panel is reassured that the Cabinet is developing its own range of options for savings, many of which are similar to those identified by the Panel. The Panel looks forward to reviewing the Cabinet's plans in due course and

to discussing the way information is presented.

The Panel has discussed the report by the Head of Financial Services in detail. Members are generally of the view that the Council should seek to effect what savings it can make rather than run down reserves. In order to establish a complete picture, information on the savings that have been achieved to date has been requested. It is further felt that Members should be provided with ongoing monitoring data on progress against savings targets. At the same time, it is stressed that there is a need to protect services to customers.

The Panel has discussed the consequences of not pooling business rates. Further work is to be undertaken before a decision is taken for next year. If it is decided not to proceed, it will be possible to pool business rates in future years.

Members have discussed predictions for future housing completions, the procurement of energy and projected borrowing trends. A Working Group currently is looking at the Council's policies and approach to the latter. Particular emphasis has been placed on the assumptions made for the pay award and performance pay. While the view has been expressed that performance pay should only be awarded for better than expected performance and that no provision should be made for it in the budget, the Executive Councillor for Resources has indicated that there should be a performance related element in employees' pay. Attention has also been drawn to the increase in income as a result of the rise in the population level of the District.

At the conclusion of its deliberations the Panel has resolved to ask the Cabinet to examine what additional savings can be made bearing in mind the need to

maintain those services that impact on the community whilst preserving if possible the Council's reserves.

CHARGING FOR A SECOND GREEN BIN – CALL IN

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) has called in the Cabinet's decision on charging for a second green bin on the grounds that their decision is "ambiguous" and "unclear" and that a formal assessment should be made of the environmental impacts of the proposals.

It was explained that the scheme will only proceed if savings cannot be identified from elsewhere within the Council. The Cabinet is currently reviewing a package of other savings measures, which will be decided upon no later than April 2013. It is for this reason that the Panel feel that the "in principle" decision to introduce charging is premature. The Panel has therefore referred the matter back to the Cabinet for further consideration, requesting the Executive to note the report and to consider the proposal to charge for collecting second green bins during its deliberations on all the Council's options for improving its financial position.

Subsequently, the Cabinet has considered the comments of the Panel and has reiterated that the proposal will be considered with all the Council's options for saving measures as part of the Medium Term Plan.

ROUND RESCHEDULING

An update on round rescheduling for refuse, recycling and garden waste collection services was reported to Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being). The review intends to provide a more effective and efficient service, whilst taking into account property growth

levels within the District and providing an opportunity for the Council to reiterate some of its key waste and recycling messages to its residents. Members have welcomed the Communications Plan developed to publicise the changes which will go live on 25th February 2013.

CARBON MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

The Council's progress towards the implementation of the Carbon Management Plan was noted by the both the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being). The Council is on target to achieve a 30% reduction in CO2 emission from the Council's estate by 2013/14. To date, a 20% reduction has been achieved. A saving of £300,000 has been realised and a further saving of £700,000 is expected to be made by 2013/14. Members have congratulated the Head of Environmental Management and his staff for the valuable contributions they have made in achieving the carbon reduction.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE ACT 1988 – PUBLICATION OF RURAL SETTLEMENT LIST

A rural settlement list for Huntingdonshire, which identifies the boundary of any settlement with no more than 3,000 residents has been approved by the Cabinet. The list is used to grant rural rate relief for local services such as post offices, village shops, public houses and petrol filling stations.

REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S LETTINGS POLICY

A new Lettings Policy has been endorsed by the Cabinet. The Policy is a requirement of the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Localism Act 2011 and sets out how the Council, in partnership

with Registered Providers will allocate their properties through the "Home Link Choice Based Lettings Scheme".

THE TECHNICAL REFORM OF COUNCIL TAX

The Cabinet has received an update on the Government's proposals to reform Council Tax from 1st April 2013 which will enable the Council to use certain discretionary powers.

Executive Councillors have reviewed proposals for a number of changes to Council Tax discounts and exemptions, which will generate extra income for the Council and will be used to reduce the impact on the Council of forthcoming changes to Council Tax Support. Having authorised the Head of Customer Services to calculate and award discounts under the Scheme, the Cabinet has agreed to the following changes to the Council Tax Policy:-

- unoccupied and unfurnished (Class C) properties be granted 100% discount for 1 month and then 0% thereafter;
- second home discount be reduced to 0%;
- uninhabitable properties (Class A) be granted 100% discount for a maximum of 12 months;
- empty homes premium be levied after two years at 50% in addition to the 100% charge currently made;
- monthly instalments continue to be due on the 15th day of each month but Managers be permitted to include an additional late instalment

date purely as an incentive for those opting to pay by direct debit.

RISK MANAGEMENT

The Cabinet has approved the actions proposed to deal with an emerging risk relating to affordable housing and homelessness.

The Corporate Governance Panel has undertaken its annual review of the Risk Management Strategy and has concluded that the authority has robust risk management policies in place to support the Council's annual governance and statutory reporting processes. The Panel is also satisfied that there should be no change to the Council's risk appetite either in general terms or in respect of health & safety.

CORPORATE CONTINUITY PLANNING – ANNUAL REPORT 2012

The Corporate Governance Panel has considered progress made towards the preparation of a new Business Continuity Plan and Business Continuity Management System and has been assured that the arrangements now in place are sufficiently robust to enable the Council to respond to 'notable' incidents should they occur. More importantly there is now sufficient momentum in the process to ensure that the Plan continues to evolve and improve over time. The Panel will continue to monitor the arrangements and will receive the next report on progress in 12 months time.

FRAUD INVESTIGATION

A report on the activities of the Fraud Team, the potential for fraud across the Council's service and the planned response to risk particularly following the introduction of a Single Fraud

Investigation Service (SFIS) in 2015 has been considered by the Corporate Governance Panel. Given the potential income which could be derived, the Panel has agreed with a suggestion that new work streams should be developed to uncover fraudulent activity and non welfare fraud areas further investigated. This additional workload will be managed by transferring a proportion of the welfare fraud tasks to the Department of Work & Pensions from 2013 and allow the Team to take advantage of Government funding which is available at the moment to develop a new Fraud Service. Given the importance of this work, the Panel has asked that their Fraud Working Group should continue to meet and report regularly to the Panel.

REVIEW OF HOUSING BENEFIT FRAUD INVESTIGATION ACTIVITY & THE COUNCIL'S WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Having conducted its annual review of the Whistleblowing Policy, the Corporate Governance Panel has concluded that no changes are required to either the policy or guidance. However, the Panel considered it essential to continue to publicise, cost effectively, the opportunity that existed to report, without fear, any potential fraud or act which might endanger health and safety or mistreatment or abuse of customers. Having also received a report on the work undertaken by the Benefits Fraud Investigation Team in 2011/12, the Panel thought that the subject would be of interest to all Members and therefore requested that arrangements be made for a Seminar on the subject in the new year.

FINAL AUDITORS REPORTS ON THE 2011/12 ACCOUNTS AND ANNUAL AUDIT LETTERS 2010/11 AND 2011/12

The report of the Auditor on the 2011/12 statement of accounts and the content of an Action Plan dealing with recommendations arising there from has been approved by the Corporate Governance Panel. Most of the actions required are routine but the two particular items drawn to the Panel's attention relating to the valuation of inventories and provision for bad debt should not prevent closure of the 2012/13 accounts to the required timescale. The Panel also received the Annual Audit letters from the Council's external auditors for the 2010/11 and 2011/12 audits.

PROVIDING ASSURANCE FOR THE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Corporate Governance Panel has indicated its support for the introduction of an assurance mapping process which will act as a framework against which the Panel can check whether internal controls are operating effectively and objectives set are being achieved. The assurance map will plan for and receive assurance on key areas over the year. The Annual Governance Statement will also be simplified to try and make it a more meaningful document for both Members and the public.

INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE AND PLANNING

The content of both the internal audit computer plan for the period to March 2014 and amendments to the general audit plan (relating to the 2010/11 final accounts process, redevelopment of One Leisure, St Ives and investigations involving employees) have been noted by the Corporate Governance Panel prior to their approval by the Managing Director (Resources).

TRAINING FOR CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PANEL

In their review of the programme of their activities in 2013, the Corporate Governance Panel has expressed concern that there is insufficient meeting time to be able to give the necessary attention to the workload envisaged. The Panel requested that two extra dates be included in the 2013/14 calendar of meetings for this purpose but with the proviso that these may be cancelled should it transpire that the meetings are not required.

LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY TO WIND TURBINE DEVELOPMENT – DRAFT REVISION TO WIND POWER SPD 2006

As part of the consultation process, the Development Management Panel has had the opportunity to consider the draft revision to the Wind Power SPD which was first adopted in February 2006. Given the various views held by Panel Members, all were encouraged to make individual representations to respond to the consultation. Notwithstanding, the Panel indicated their support for the issue of the draft SPD for consultation, accepted that it required updating and indicated their intention to work with the new SPD when it emerged.

At the same meeting, the Panel indicated that they would have been minded to refuse an application for the erection of three wind turbines and associated development on land north west of Church Farm, Rectory Lane, Southoe. The final decision on this application will be made by an Inspector following an appeal against non determination by the applicant.

Fifteen applications were approved and three refused by the Panel at the same meeting.