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## **Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being)**

**Report of the meeting held on 6th June 2013**

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### **Matters for Information**

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**1. HUNTINGDONSHIRE REGULATION 123 AND INFRASTRUCTURE BUSINESS PLAN 2013 /14 LIST**

Further to Item No.49 of their previous Report to Council, the Panel has received an update on the outcome of the public consultation on the Draft Huntingdonshire CIL Regulation 123 List. The List defines the types of infrastructure that the Council intends to fund from the levy. It ensures there is no duplication between contributions from CIL and Section 106 Agreements.

Members have been informed that the Government continues to change the Regulations surrounding the Levy. Specifically, it is considering proposals to exempt self-build properties. The Deputy Executive Leader has reported that he has responded to the consultation on this proposal on the basis that this should not be permitted because small sites constitute a significant proportion of development within the District. Furthermore, it could create a mechanism through which CIL might be avoided and could also affect the meaningful proportion which is allocated to town and parish councils.

The Planning Policy Manager has explained that the preparation of an Infrastructure Business Plan for 2013/14 is the first stage of a longer process. Work has already started on the next iteration of the Business Plan and one of the major challenges will be to find alternative sources of funding to address the gap in funding for strategic infrastructure.

The Panel has noted that work has now started with town and parish councils to develop the way in which the District Council works with them on how their contributions will be spent. As part of this process a series of briefings for parish and town councils have already been held and the Planning Policy Manager has attended a number of parish council meetings to talk about the way in which shared priorities might be achieved. Members have welcomed the dialogue which has been opened with town and parish councils, particularly in view of the concerns which they have previously expressed about the absence from the CIL governance structure of local community representatives.

In considering the contents of the report and having acknowledged that the District Council will be the collecting body for CIL expenditure, Members have stressed the need for there to be an audit trail for how CIL money is distributed and spent. The Panel has been assured that partner agencies will be required to provide details of how funds are spent.

In response to concerns that infrastructure negotiated by communities through already existing Urban Design Frameworks might not now be delivered, the Deputy Executive Leader has explained that it is not possible to give guarantees, but best endeavours will be made to meet the commitments already made.

Having been informed that developments of 200 dwellings or more will be liable to pay both S106 contributions and CIL, the Panel has drawn attention to the importance of ensuring that there are strict governance arrangements in place to avoid any inference of bribery.

At the conclusion of its deliberations, the Panel has recommended the Cabinet to approve the revised Regulation 123 list incorporating the Huntingdonshire Business Plan 2013/14.

## **2. COMMUNICATIONS**

Following a request at a previous meeting, the Panel has received a presentation by the Corporate Team Manager, Mrs H Donnellan on the Council's communications function. The aim of the function is to achieve a cross Council, unified approach to communications and secure value for money. As part of the presentation the Panel has been provided with details of work which is ongoing with regard to external and internal communications and how to develop these areas going forward. Information on the work undertaken by the Press Office has also been provided, together with details of the 'Team Brief' and 'Members Brief' newsletters which are produced on a regular basis.

The Panel has been advised of the work, which is being undertaken to develop an external communications strategy. A survey is being carried out by local consultants with residents and Councillors for this purpose. It has been suggested that local Members could be a useful communications tool for the Council and they should be utilised more than they presently are.

The Panel has discussed the use that is made of Twitter and Facebook. The Council primarily uses these facilities to communicate in an emergency. The Corporate Team has reviewed those organisations which represent best practice. Members' attention has been drawn to the successful use of Twitter by Coventry City Council whose approach focusses on the community. This has required a change in organisational culture. Members have expressed the opinion that a more strategic approach should be adopted towards the use of the facility. It has also been suggested that it may be useful to segment the twitter feeds for different groups of customers.

The Panel has examined in detail the Council's use of Twitter. Having established that tweets are 're-tweeted' in accordance with the guidelines contained in the Council's Social Media Policy, Members have discussed the Council's list of Twitter followers and the ways in which the Council intends to improve on the current number of them.

The Panel has asked for information on the budget for communications and comparable figures for the three previous years. Members have also expressed an interest in the outcome of efforts being taken to measure the benefits of the work which the communications team does. Although it is difficult to measure some areas of its activity, they have been informed that the Local Government Communications Group measures reputation and trust. Furthermore, the employee opinion survey undertaken by the Authority is able to provide an indication of the effectiveness of internal communications.

### **3. TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13**

In accordance with the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Best Practice and the Council's Treasury Management Strategy, the Panel has reviewed the Council's treasury management performance for the year ending 31st March 2013. Members have been pleased to note that the funds have performed well, significantly exceeding both the benchmark and the budgeted investment interest. The actual net investment interest is more than three times the estimated credit budget of £11,000, which is particularly noteworthy in the current economic climate.

The Panel has commented on a range of issues including current economic trends and the problems being experienced by the Co-operative Bank. With regard to the latter, the Panel has been advised that the Co-operative Bank is not one of the Council's counterparties and that the counterparty list is reviewed on a monthly basis with the assistance of the Council's advisors. The Accountancy Manager has then been asked to provide the Panel with further information on the estimated credit budget for the forthcoming year.

In terms of the management of VAT, the Panel has noted that the Council's liability is reviewed annually by HMRC. The Panel has discussed whether there might be a benefit for the Council of transferring the leisure centres to a trust. Given that the Council's VAT liability is not wholly attributable to the leisure centres there would not be a total saving of the VAT sum.

### **4. WORK PROGRAMME**

During a review of its programme of studies and work programme for the forthcoming year, the Panel has examined the membership of its existing working groups and endorsed a number of changes to their composition for the forthcoming Municipal Year. It has also agreed to establish a small team to follow-up on the recommendations arising from the review of the Document Centre.

The Panel has been provided with an update on the development of the new Council Customer Services Strategy and on the discussions which are taking place as a consequence of the review of the Document Centre. In addition, Members have been provided with details of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels and reminded of the opportunity that they have to participate in the investigations should they wish.

Following a review of the effectiveness of the overview and scrutiny function, the Panel has endorsed the contents of a protocol which is designed to put the Panel's operating practices on a more formal footing, provide a framework for the conduct of business and promote closer working with the Executive and senior management.

In considering potential areas for future investigation, the Panel has developed a draft list of ideas which will be discussed further at its next meeting. These include –

- ◆ communications and marketing;
- ◆ treasury management – shared services;
- ◆ the A14 (to include access from the development of the former RAF Wyton site);
- ◆ the Making Assets Count Programme;
- ◆ estates; and
- ◆ the Local Enterprise Partnership.

In response to a suggestion that the Panel should request a breakdown of statutory and non-statutory services, Members have expressed some doubts about the practicalities of achieving this. It has been suggested that there should be a pilot exercise on a small service area to establish the practicalities and value of the extent to which it exceeds the main statutory requirements.

In response to a question about the Council's performance in the collection of Council Tax receipts, the Panel has noted that there are plans to develop a range of indicators to illustrate the Council's performance in relation to this and a range of other areas.

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### **Other Matters of Interest**

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## **5. NOTICE OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS**

The Panel has been acquainted with details of the Notice of forthcoming Executive decisions prepared by the Executive Leader. In doing so, the Panel has received an update on the Social Well-Being Panel's discussions on the Home Improvement Agency Shared Service Review and the Budget for Disabled Facilities Grant.

**6. SCRUTINY**

The Panel has considered the latest edition of the Decision Digest and discussed matters contained therein.

T V Rogers  
Chairman