
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)

Report of the meeting held on 11th June 2013

Matters for Information

1. REVIEW OF GROUNDS MAINTENANCE – SERVICE STANDARDS

The Panel has considered the first stage of a review of grounds maintenance service standards. The Council has to identify £2 million of savings and this is one area which has been identified where savings might be achieved.

Background information on the range of work undertaken by the Grounds Maintenance Team and the current service standards provided have been reported to Members. Service changes and a reduction in service standards were introduced in 2011 following an earlier review undertaken at the time to streamline the service. The purpose of bringing the report before Members was to gain agreement on the service standards to be achieved. Once standards are agreed, then work will commence on service delivery options.

Owing to the complexity of the way in which the service operates a reduction in cost will not necessarily be achieved as a result of reducing service standards. Service reductions relating to grass cutting could potentially result in an increased level of spend elsewhere within the service and an increase in the risk of claims being made against the Council. Members have concurred with the view that the standards in respect of grass cutting should be retained at the current levels.

An explanation has been received of the duties placed upon the Council to maintain open spaces and, in particular, closed churchyards. With regard to the latter, town and parish councils can serve statutory notices upon the District Council to undertake this work. However, attempts are being made to work with the town and parish councils to rationalise all grounds maintenance. The Panel has also been acquainted with the latest position with regard to the County Council and Luminus contracts.

The Panel has indicated there is a need to educate residents on the effects of littering. On this subject it has been suggested that the Council could work with local "Friends of the Park" groups to discourage littering in their areas.

During discussion on the Council's strategic approach to the service, it was suggested that the opportunities presented by outsourcing the service or, alternatively, undertaking more work on behalf of town and parish councils or other local authority areas should be investigated.

The District is likely to continue to obtain open space in developments through S106 Agreements. However, Members have been informed that the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy raises doubts about whether funding will be available for their maintenance. Even if it is, it is usually time limited and the Council eventually becomes responsible for its maintenance. This will put further pressure on the service.

An opportunity exists to achieve savings in respect of litter picking. A report to this effect will be submitted to the Panel in the autumn. Other suggestions for savings made by the Panel include the use of growth inhibitors and the introduction of a single grounds maintenance service for town parks, small areas of amenity land, the leisure centres and the country parks. The latter could result in efficiencies through joint working such as the effective utilisation of equipment. The Executive Councillor for Environment has undertaken to investigate these matters once senior management's plans for savings have been published.

2. MEETING OUR OBJECTIVELY ASSESSED NEED FOR HOUSING: MEMORANDUM OF CO OPERATION – SUPPORTING THE SPATIAL APPROACH 2011-2031

In conjunction with the Cabinet, the Panel has been acquainted with the content of a Memorandum of Co-operation on the assessment of future housing needs. The Memorandum refers to the Council's joint working with other partner authorities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The Council can now set its own future housing targets, which is a requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework. This work has been undertaken to comply with the Duty to Co-operate contained in the Localism Act 2011.

There will be a need for 93,000 homes across the Cambridge Sub-Region Housing Market Area between 2011 and 2031. Peterborough's housing market area overlaps into Cambridgeshire, and as Peterborough has already accommodated a proportion of the housing need, its contribution is assumed to amount to approximately 2,500 homes. This means that 90,500 dwellings are required in the Cambridge Sub-Region Housing Market Area, with Huntingdonshire contributing 17,000 homes by 2031 and 21,000 homes by 2036. In Huntingdonshire, 10,000 of these homes will roll forward from the former Core Strategy and there are currently planning applications for around 11,000 dwellings within the planning system. It is, therefore, expected that the allocation for Huntingdonshire will be achieved by 2036. It has been confirmed that the future growth proposals contained within the emerging Local Plan are in accordance with the Memorandum of Co-operation.

Huntingdonshire is the only authority to identify housing allocations up to 2036 because, unlike the other authorities, it already had a Local Plan in place to 2026 and there is a requirement that the new Plan will last for at least a further 15 years. The District's housing needs have, therefore, been forecast for the period to 2036.

Having been advised of the methodology employed to determine allocations across each local authority area and of the factors that are likely to produce an increase in demand for housing including fluctuations in birth rates, the ageing population and local economic pressures, the Panel has noted that the Council collaborates with partner authorities on other infrastructure issues such as local bus services and the rail network.

3. WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel has been provided with an opportunity to establish its work priorities for 2013/14 and to review its current work programme. As part of this process the functions and responsibilities of the Corporate Governance and Employment Panels have been taken into account.

The Panel has reviewed the membership of each of its Working Groups and appointed Councillor Mrs L Kadić to the Cambridgeshire Future Transport Initiative. It might be necessary to reconvene the Waste Collection Working Group when consideration is given to an item on the Whole Waste System Approach at the Panel's October meeting.

The Panel has considered the addition of new subject areas to the work programme. Car parking management, the impact of large scale housing developments upon the A428, local bus services within Towns and recycling in flats have been suggested as study areas. Members will discuss how this work will proceed at their next meeting.

Members have noted the outcome of the recent review of the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny and endorsed the content of an Overview and Scrutiny Protocol. The Protocol provides a framework for Council's Overview and Scrutiny function.

Other Matters of Interest

4. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) - PROGRESS

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies. Members have noted that a site visit to the Great Fen will take place on 17th September 2013 and that work to finalise the Tree Strategy and Design Guide is being undertaken but owing to resource constraints within the Planning Service it is taking longer than anticipated.

5. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel has received details of the studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

6. NOTICE OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel has been acquainted with the current Notice of Executive Decisions. The report on the Whole Waste System Approach will be considered by the Panel at its October 2013 meeting.

7. SCRUTINY

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

G J Bull
Chairman