

Decision Digest

Edition 137

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 1st to 25th September 2013.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP HEALTH AND WELL-BEING THEMATIC GROUP – ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT (FOR 2012-13)

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) received a presentation on the Huntingdonshire Health and Well-Being Group which referred to the Group's Action Plan, its membership and strategic links to other key groups such as the Cambridgeshire Health and Well-Being Board. The Group's priorities are based on evidence of need identified through the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and the Huntingdonshire Sustainable Community Strategy.

The Group's membership has changed considerably over the last year and now includes representatives from the local Clinical Commissioning Group, voluntary sector, Healthwatch and Age UK. The Panel has discussed how the Group's work will filter down to local communities, occupational therapy waiting times and the work being undertaken in respect of teenage conceptions and mental health services.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

Under the Police and Criminal Justice Act 2006, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has scrutinised the work of the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership and examined the Action

Plan for 2013-14, the performance information over the previous 12 months, details of the projects undertaken by the Partnership and the crime trends in Huntingdonshire since 2006.

The Police and Crime Commissioner now has responsibility to devolve funds down to all Cambridgeshire Partnerships. However, it is not likely that funding will be available next year. To ensure the future sustainability of the service, the Partnership will explore income generating opportunities through collaboration and partnership working with the private sector.

The Panel is pleased to see the downward trend of crime levels reported within the District but has noted an increase in the number of metal thefts over the last year. Changes to the way scrap metal dealers are licensed will take effect from October 2013 which will help to reduce this trend. Other matters discussed included the problems with anti-social behaviour of nuisance drivers in Riverside Park, St Neots and the successes of the Dodgems project in the prevention of crime amongst individuals identified as being at risk of offending.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE TOWN AND PARISH CHARTER

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) was provided with an opportunity to comment on the Huntingdonshire Town and Parish Charter. Members have suggested that

Appendix C of the Charter document should make reference to the District Council advising Town and Parish Councils of developments taking place through “permitted developments”. In addition, should the Cabinet be minded to support the proposals to establish Local Joint Committees (LJCs) in Huntingdonshire then reference should also be made to LJCs as an example of an appropriate forum in which to engage with communities.

When endorsing the contents of the Charter, the Cabinet has reiterated the Panel’s view that reference should be made within to LJC’s.

REPORT ON THE PERFORMANCE OF THE SHAPE YOUR PLACE HUNTINGDONSHIRE WEBSITE: 1ST JULY 2012 – 30TH JUNE 2013

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) have considered the performance of the Shape Your Place website over the 2012/13 year and received the first quarter’s performance for 2013/14. The site has attracted 15,707 individuals, 33,930 visits and 82,891 page views in its first year of operation. In total, 127 issues were raised of which 46 related to District Council matters largely in respect of planning, parking and the maintenance of grass verges and hedges.

The Panel has expressed the view that Members could do more to raise the profile of the website and encourage use of it as an effective tool for engaging with their constituents. Bring in mind the forthcoming proposals for the establishment of Local Joint Committees (LJC) in Huntingdonshire, the Panel has requested that where possible, the boundaries of Shape Your Place should be co-terminus with those proposed for the LJCs.

A report on the performance of Shape Your Place after its second year of operation will be submitted to the Panel in a year’s time.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE ADULTS, WELL-BEING AND HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

An update was delivered to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) on recent matters considered by the Cambridgeshire Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee which included the future commissioning of older people’s services, delayed discharge review and East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust – Performance and Plans.

STATEMENT OF CONSULTATION AND DRAFT REVISED SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT – LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY TO WIND TURBINE DEVELOPMENT – FEEDBACK

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) received a report from the Cabinet outlining their deliberations on the Landscape Sensitivity to Wind Turbine Development Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The Cabinet endorsed the Panel’s recommendations to review further the content of the SPD and to subject the Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impacts report to a separate public consultation exercise.

YAXLEY SEWERAGE

Recent developments in tackling sewerage problems in Yaxley was reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being). Anglian Water has already undertaken a number of improvement works locally and is currently liaising with affected residents to lay a new surface water sewer which will be completed by the

end of the financial year. This matter is being actively pursued by the Council. Residents of Yaxley have been encouraged to report any flooding to Anglian Water and the County Council's Flood Team so that incidents are recorded. This will strengthen the case for Anglian Water to carry out any works.

JOINT MATERIALS RECYCLING FACILITY PROCUREMENT

A proposal to jointly procure a material recycling facility operator to manage and process all the recycling materials across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has been supported by both the Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being). The proposal has been developed by the Recycling in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (RECAP) Waste Partnership. The Panel has recommended that the decision to award the contract is delegated to the Head of Operations following consultation with the Executive Councillor for Environment.

Matters discussed by the Panel include the "levelling" up of services, the impact that the proposals will have upon the "back office" functions, the risks associated with the proposals and the scrutiny of the new arrangements. The Panel has suggested that the Governance Agreement is amended to include provisions for scrutiny of the contract and its effect on the waste collection service.

In terms of the risk associated with the contract and given the lack of financial justifications the Cabinet has requested that the final Invitation to Tender document be considered at the Panel prior to final approval by the Cabinet. In the meantime, the Cabinet has:

- ◆ endorsed the Council's commitment to the

procurement and appointment of a Contractor to deliver Joint MRF services for all participating RECAP partners, unless all partners agree not to appoint;

- ◆ approved the RECAP Advance Partnership Working Charter and Governance Agreement;
- ◆ endorsed the nomination of a preferred supplier by Peterborough City Council, in collaboration with the participating partners, on behalf of the RECAP participating partners; and
- ◆ approved the RECAP approach to the Waste Framework Directive and Waste Regulations regarding the collection of recycle materials streams from 2015.

MAKING ASSETS COUNT – CAMBRIDESHIRE'S PROPOSED APPROACH TO STRATEGIC ASSET MANAGEMENT

An update on the ongoing work which is taking place between the Council, other Councils in Cambridgeshire and public sector organisations to try and re-shape and make more efficient use of, their property portfolios has been given to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) The Panel has welcomed the common sense approach which the District Council has taken to date to maximise the use of its assets and have endorsed the overarching principles of the Making Assets Count (MAC) Initiative and future partnership arrangements.

In terms of the proposal to establish a countywide publicly-owned joint

venture, Members have expressed some reservations about this type of approach. But having recognised the importance of not precluding the District Council from participating in any arrangements at a later date if it were deemed advantageous to do so, the Panel has recommended that the Cabinet should 'note' rather than 'endorse' the creation of a countywide joint venture.

Members were pleased to note that the District Council will continue to adopt a pragmatic approach with other organisations to explore further 'common sense' opportunities to share assets. Other matters discussed by the Panel included the progress which had been made on a countywide basis, the barriers which it faced and the nature of the costs incurred by the Authority to-date.

Subsequently, the Cabinet has endorsed the key principles of the project and the pragmatic approach being undertaken to maximise the use of the authority's assets. Executive Councillors reiterated the Panel's view that further "common sense" opportunities should be fully explored.

FINANCIAL FORECAST TO 2019

In conjunction with the Cabinet, the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has been acquainted with the Council's present financial forecast.

The Panel has discussed the outcome of the recent Government Spending Review and the Government proposal to require local authorities to pass on a percentage of their New Homes Bonus to their Local Enterprise Partnerships. Members have supported the intention of the Executive Leader and the Executive Councillor for Resources to lobby the Department for Communities and Local Government to get the level of loss reduced on the Council's behalf.

In recognition that little appears to be being done to scrutinise the Local Enterprise Partnership, it has been suggested that the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer should be invited to a future Council meeting to give a presentation on their business plan.

Members have also discussed and agreed that subject to there being no change in legislation which might require the Council to reconsider its position, the Council should not give a further grant to Town and Parish Councils to mitigate the impact of changes to the Council Tax support system.

In discussing the requirement to secure £3.7M in additional savings by 2018/19 the Panel has commented on the need to focus on the larger areas of Council expenditure and the importance of communication to ensure that Huntingdonshire residents are able to influence and remain informed of this process. Members have also suggested that the Council should take into account the degree to which the Council's activities are statutorily required and that this should be balanced against the interests of residents.

Having been informed that a report outlining generic options and areas for further consideration would be submitted to the Cabinet, the Panel has expressed an interest in being involved in this work and has suspended its other activities in order to undertake this task. The Panel will consider this further at the October meeting.

In recommending the Financial Forecast to Council, the Cabinet has acknowledged that the Government's Review has created additional major financial challenges for the Council and its ability to deliver its current portfolio of services. Members concurred with the Panel that the grant to Town and

Parish Councils to mitigate the impact of changes to the Council Tax support system should not be continued beyond the current financial year, subject to there being no change in Government legislation. Executive Councillors have also recognised the need to focus on the larger areas of the Council's expenditure and the importance of keeping residents informed of the process.

FIRST CONTACT SERVICE – UPDATE

The Employment Panel has received information on the use of the First Contact Service during the period January 2011 to August 2013.

Having noted that the service continues to be well used by employees and that it provides a valuable addition to the existing support services offered by the Council to its employees and Members during times of difficulty, the Panel has acknowledged the positive contribution and benefit that the First Contact service brings to the organisation and its employees' well-being. The Panel has also expressed their appreciation for the support provided and work undertaken by the First Contact team and would like to encourage more employees to get involved.

In terms of the future development of the First Contact Service, Members were pleased to note that work will continue over the next few months to further improve the service and promote it both to employees and managers. The Panel has asked the One Leisure Management Team to take steps to encourage more staff to volunteer in this area.

TRANSGENDER AND GENDER REASSIGNMENT – STATEMENT OF GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS AND EMPLOYEES

To fulfil an outstanding action within the Council's Single Equality Scheme and to support and protect employees who are proposing to undergo a process of gender reassignment, the Employment Panel has reviewed and endorsed the contents of a new Statement of Guidance for transgender and gender reassignment in the workplace. The guidance, which is based on best practice, provides practical steps and assistance for both managers and employees on issues relating to transgender, transexuality and gender reassignment.

USE OF CONSULTANTS, HIRED STAFF AND TEMPORARY STAFF

Having regard to the recent changes in their terms of reference, the Employment Panel has been provided with details of the Council's expenditure on consultants, hired and temporary staff during the period 2012/13, in comparison with the previous year. The information also was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) at their July meeting.

Having recognised that spending on these categories was not necessarily bad and that there are specific situations where there is a positive benefit for the Authority, the Panel has asked the Assistant Director, Finance & Resources to prepare a policy framework to define 'Consultants' 'Hired' and 'Temporary' Staff and to provide guidance on how and when these types of staff should be used. Members have suggested that this should be linked to the Authority's Redundancy Policy and should outline the procurement processes to ensure that value for money is obtained.

EMPLOYMENT REPORT

The Employment Panel has received a quarterly report on Human Resource

matters impacting on the performance of the organisation. On this occasion, the report has included the latest position and trends relating to:-

- ◆ employee numbers;
- ◆ employee turnover;
- ◆ sickness absence reporting; and
- ◆ the Human Resources caseload.

In terms of tackling sickness absence, the Panel has noted that the average days sickness per FTE employee had decreased in the last quarter to 8.7, although this remained higher than the corresponding period in the previous year and continued to be an area of focus for the Human Resources Team.

The highest cause of sickness absence continued to be stress, depression, mental health and fatigue and Members have been reminded that work is currently underway to investigate a work-based support service for staff who are experiencing stress at work. Further information is expected to be available for the next meeting.

In recognising that some of the highest levels of sickness absence were recorded in the Customer Services and Operations Divisions, Members have requested further information on the cost implications of this absence for the Authority. The Panel has also suggested that where there is a requirement for a member of staff to have a level of fitness to undertake a specific job role, consideration should be given to a process for ensuring that those returning from sickness are fit for work.

LGSS PERFORMANCE

The Employment Panel has considered the performance of LGSS Human Resources, Payroll and Organisational

Workforce Development services across the key service measures agreed under the current contract during the period 1st April to 30th June 2013.

Whilst the majority of service standards had been met, the Panel discussed the concerns which had been raised by managers about some general aspects of the recruitment service and have been informed that work was ongoing to address these. It was anticipated that the introduction of a Recruitment solution in the Autumn will address a number of these areas of dissatisfaction. Members will continue to monitor the service issues raised by staff and the remedial measures taken by the District Council to resolve these.

In terms of LGSS' priorities for the next quarter, Members have been informed that these will include support for the ongoing pay review, delivery of the Workforce Development Strategy and preparations for the new requirement for automated pension enrolment. The Panel has requested further information on the proposals for the Workforce Development Strategy at a future meeting.

PAY REVIEW PROJECT

The Panel has received an update on the progress being made on the Council's Pay Review Project. Members were informed that Stage 1, the evaluation and moderation process had concluded at the end of August.

LGSS have now commenced work on the next stage of the project (Stage 2) which includes:-

- ◆ pay modelling and development of a new pay and grading framework;

- ◆ policy development; and
- ◆ the consultation process.

Having noted that it was proposed to consult with staff on the new pay and grading framework and the appeals process in October 2013 with a view to implementing the proposals in April 2014, the Panel has been advised that Management were currently in discussions with the Staff Council about the ways in which they could support the consultation process.

In recognition of the fact that it might be useful for all Councillors to have a better understanding of the pay review process and the potential impact on District Council employees, the Panel has suggested that a briefing for all Members might be useful and this will now be built into the Communications Strategy.

PROPOSED ESTABLISHMENT OF LOCAL JOINT COMMITTEES IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The Cabinet has been updated on progress to date on the establishment of Local Joint Committees (LJC's) in Huntingdonshire. Given that a pilot scheme in the Norman Cross County division had attracted little interest, Executive Councillors have considered a series of new principles for LJC's intended to promote local ownership of the scheme.

With regard to a proposed boundary map for the LJC's, Executive Councillors have expressed reservations over the prescriptive nature of the areas and suggested that they should be perceived as guidelines to allow some flexibility. With this proviso, the Cabinet has approved a revised Constitution for LJC's in Huntingdonshire and have requested

that Town and Parish Councils be notified of the opportunity to establish their own LJC's across the District. Furthermore, individual Ward Members have been requested to attend their respective joint committees if a meeting is called by the communities.

FACING THE FUTURE 2013

A process to review the future potential business options for the delivery of Council services has been agreed by the Cabinet. The procedure will be applied to all services currently provided by the Council. The proposals explore a range of options available to reform the way the authority delivers its services, with the aim of creating a sustainable solution to the stark financial difficulties facing the authority. These include generating additional income, smart investments, development of property or land assets, transfer of services, sharing services, outsourcing and possible salary reduction measures.

As part of the process, the Overview and Scrutiny Panels have been requested to prepare proposals for a delivery review programme for consideration at the next meeting of the Cabinet and to agree resourcing for that programme and a proposed governance structure. At the same time, the Panels will review all options in line with the programme and their conclusions will be considered by the Cabinet.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROGRESS REPORT: 1ST – 30TH JUNE 2013

On a regular basis, the Development Management Panel closely monitors the performance and activities of the Development Management Service in comparison with preceding quarters and the previous year.

In the current quarter, the Service has met its targets for the determination of major, minor and other applications within the prescribed timescales and fee income, although less than the previous quarter is generally buoyant.

Referring to responses to consultation on planning applications, the Panel understood that it was the intention of the Planning Service Manager to meet with the Middle Level Commissioners to discuss, principally, the timeliness of their contributions to the development management process.

DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

The Development Management Panel determined eight applications at its September meeting. Amongst their decisions was one to refuse consent for three wind turbines on land at Bicton Industrial Park, Kimbolton. Five other applications were approved and two refused.