
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being)

Report of the meeting held on 3rd October 2013

Matters for Information

16. REVIEW OF THE DOCUMENT CENTRE

The Panel has received the management responses to the findings and recommendations which had been made following the review of the Council's Document Centre. The review had been undertaken in 2012. Its purpose was to examine the costs of the Document Centre and to form a view on its efficiency and cost effectiveness.

Having examined the actions taken on each of their recommendations in turn, the Panel has endorsed the responses which have been made. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services has been asked to circulate further information on the savings which have been generated by the review.

In terms of the Panel's intention to undertake a separate review of Electronic Document Management (EDM) within the Authority, it has been noted that the Internal Audit Service is currently undertaking an audit of this area of activity. Members do not wish to duplicate this work so they have asked to see the outcome of this audit when it has been concluded.

17. CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY

The Panel endorsed the contents of a new Customer Services Strategy, which has been prepared for the Authority for the period 2013-18. The Strategy is a high level document that will enable and oversee positive change within the Authority by placing the customer at the heart of all Council activity and decisions. It has been developed in conjunction with a working party which had been established by the Panel to contribute to the Strategy's formation.

In considering the contents of the draft Strategy, Members have commented on a range of issues, including:-

- ◆ the need to be aware of the implications of transferring customer contact online on adult health, particularly on the District's elderly residents;
- ◆ the potential to make better use of the Town and Parish Councils to deliver District Council services in their areas;

- ◆ the opportunities which exist for working in partnership with other public sector organisations to deliver services for Huntingdonshire residents from the Customer Services Centre; and
- ◆ the scope for the Council to promote its own services on some of the more popular web pages.

The Panel has also indicated its support for the future co-location of the Council's Call-Centre with the Customer Services Centre. This is one of the options that will be considered when the current lease expires. Members have suggested that the project team that undertakes this work should include accommodating other local authorities' Call Centres within the District Council's facility in its enquiries.

Members have commented on the need to monitor satisfaction levels during the Strategy's implementation to ensure it does not have an adverse impact on customers. It has been suggested that the introduction of a series of milestones to 2018 will enable the Council to establish that the Strategy is on track. Members have been informed that an MTP bid has been developed to establish a new post which would act as a liaison officer between the Customer Services section and the web team.

The Panel has discussed the ways in which Members can help to support the change in culture which the new Strategy will require. There is a role for local councillors to encourage members of the public to use web services where they are able to do so. For the Strategy to succeed, the Council's management, Officers and Members must commit to delivering the changes it requires.

18. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY INVOLVEMENT IN IDENTIFYING PRIORITY AREAS FOR SAVINGS

(Part of the discussion on the following item was considered as a confidential item under paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.)

In conjunction with the Panels for Social and Environmental Well-Being and at the request of the Cabinet, the Panel has considered and endorsed a proposed process for undertaking reviews of Council services with a view to identifying opportunities for savings. These reviews will take place in November and December, with the intention that they will be completed in time to report the findings to the Cabinet in January 2014. The Cabinet will then determine an overall priority order for work to proceed.

In order to undertake the reviews a number of service areas have been allocated to each Panel so that the expertise of Members can be utilised. The distribution of services has been based on the responsibilities of Heads of Service and Executive Councillors. There is a mix of customer facing and support services.

In considering the process to be employed, the Panel has discussed the focus of the exercise and made a number of detailed comments on the overall approach. The Panels will focus on the options that achieve the greatest savings in the easiest ways. It has been suggested that it could be beneficial to involve partners in the exercise as they would provide a fresh perspective on services. These partners could include County Council Members and Officers or representatives from other District authorities in the County. Particular reference has been made to the Local Government Association peer review scheme.

The Panel has made a number of specific suggestions about the information which will be provided in a template for each particular service area. These include the need for an indication to be given of the relative value of potential savings and income and expenditure information. The Assistant Director, Finance and Resources will also consider whether it will be useful for a number of other suggestions to form part of the template.

The Panel has been keen to establish that mechanisms are in place to ensure service managers are sufficiently challenging and that their templates are accurate. All templates will be reviewed by the Chief Officers Management Team before they are published. This will also mean the suggested priority order for each proposal reflects the size of the saving and its ease of achievement.

All Members of the Council will receive an open invitation to attend and participate in any of the forthcoming meetings. Comments can also be submitted to Panel Chairmen by writing if necessary. If a Member has a particular concern or requires further information on any aspect of a service, this should be referred to the Service Manager in advance of the meeting. It has been suggested that at the conclusion of the process, the Chairmen should determine the overall priorities arising from the Panels' work.

To enable the Panel to complete this work two additional meetings have been arranged. A process has also been agreed for dealing with on-going business during this period. The Panel will consider the draft Budget and MTP at its meeting on 5th December 2013 as planned.

Other Matters of Interest

19. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel has received the Notice of forthcoming Key Executive decisions, which have been prepared by the Executive Leader. The Scrutiny and Review Manager has been asked to circulate copies of the Consultation and Engagement Strategy and of the Huntingdon West Masterplan to interested Members when they become available.

**20. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) –
PROGRESS**

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies. In so doing, Members have discussed the approval process for offering loans to other organisations.

21. SCRUTINY

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

T V Rogers
Chairman