
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being)

Report of the meetings held on 6th March and 3rd April 2014

Matters for Information

34. TRANSFER OF CREATIVE EXCHANGE, LONGSANDS CAMPUS

(The following item was considered as a confidential item under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act).

The Panel has discussed the options for the future use and ownership of the Creativexchange at the Longsands Academy Campus. The previous arrangements for the management of the building have now expired, which means there is a need to reconsider its future use and ownership.

In reviewing the available options, the Panel has considered the original reasons for building the Creativexchange, occupancy levels and trends, potential terms for a new arrangement with the existing management company, other options for the building and the Council's land within which the car park is sited.

The Panel has made a recommendation to the Cabinet on a preferred option and suggested that the Council should seek to negotiate a lease for the land it owns, which includes car parking spaces. The Panel has also requested that a review is carried out of the lessons which can be learnt from the Creativexchange project including the expenditure which has been incurred to-date.

35. LOVES FARM COMMUNITY CENTRE – UPDATE

Councillor R B Howe, Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities, has provided the Panel with an update on the development of the Loves Farm Community Centre. An agreement has now been made with Cambridgeshire County Council for the provision of a combined Community Building and a pre-school playgroup facility. Councillor Howe has provided details of the site for the facility, the proposed elevations and floorplans, the timetable for the completion and the lessons which have been learnt from the exercise to-date.

The Panel has discussed the development of the initial scheme and the expenditure which has been incurred by the District Council on it. Having been reminded that the revised proposal would provide an

essential facility for the local community, the Panel has discussed a number of issues relating to the financing of the new scheme, the use of the facility and the design and location of the building. Members have suggested that the parking arrangements might be inadequate and result in parking problems on the estate. This could deter larger organisations from using the facility. However, the local Member is of the view that the Centre is located in a strategic position within the development and a majority of users will have access to it by foot.

Members have discussed the potential financial risk to the District Council if the local community group is unsuccessful in generating sufficient income from the facility. With this in mind, Members have discussed the financial resources available to the group, the opportunities available to it for securing grant funding and its operating structure. The Panel has suggested to the Executive Councillor, that the community group which will be responsible for the management of the Centre should be requested to prepare a Business Plan and submit it to the Council prior to any agreement being entered into. This should include reference to parking at the site.

Finally, in recognition of the need to learn lessons from this project, the Panel has suggested that a post event audit should be undertaken.

36. CUSTOMER SERVICES MONITORING

The Panel has reviewed the Customer Services monitoring report for the period June to December 2013 which sets out the standards of service that have been achieved. Members have been pleased to note that the Service is moving forward with the delivery of the new Customer Services Strategy and that efforts to migrate customers to alternative service options are starting to be successful.

The Panel has discussed waiting times at the Huntingdon Customer Services Centre and the Customer Services Manager has been asked to provide details of those occasions where customers have been required to wait up to 40 minutes for service. Members have discussed the impact of any future move by the Call Centre Team to Pathfinder House on staff retention. They have noted that the Pay Review Project should address salary differentials with other local authorities.

A further report will be provided in six months' time.

37. BRIEFING ON NATIONAL NON DOMESTIC RATES

Following a request from Members, the Panel has received a presentation from the Head of Customer Services on National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR or Business Rates) which are charged on all non-domestic properties according to the rateable value of the property. As part of the presentation, information has been provided on the operation of and recent changes to the NNDR scheme, together with the implications of changes to the finance regime in

April 2013 and the latest Autumn Statement. Having noted that the avoidance of payment of business rates is becoming a national issue, Members have had an opportunity to examine a number of detailed matters with the Head of Customer Services.

38. MEMBERS IT

The IMD Service Manager has acquainted the Panel with planned changes to IT provision for elected Members. Members have been advised of the issues that have arisen which have necessitated the changes, together with details of an intention to promote alternative ways of working. All Members of the Council had been invited to attend for the discussion on this item.

The Panel has discussed the proposal for Members to provide their own IT equipment to access Council papers and to have their own email addresses. Although the iPad is the recommended device because it is more secure, Members will be able to use other web enabled devices. Members have discussed a number of practical matters, including the need to stress test the WIFI facility within the Civic Suite, whether tablets have sufficient memory to access large agendas and the potential for additional costs to be incurred by Members who may exceed their personal data limits when downloading large documents. Concerns have been expressed that Members will incur costs by printing documents at home.

The Panel has considered whether the requirement that Members should provide their own devices will deter potential candidates from standing for election. Given that the basic allowance payable is currently in the region of £4k, it is not unreasonable to expect Members to purchase their own equipment. It has, however, been suggested that prospective candidates should be made aware of this requirement.

The Panel has discussed the assistance the Council might provide to enable Members to acquire a device and has noted that the option of paying through Members allowances over their term of office is being considered. Members have discussed how this scheme will operate, including the arrangements which will be in place should Members wish to purchase a device with a higher specification or part way through their term of office. Given that only limited discounts can be achieved if the Council is to purchase devices, it has been suggested that Members will need to make their own decision on how to acquire one.

Members have emphasised the need for further consideration to be given to the details of the new arrangements, specifically the mechanisms for accessing Council information, such as the Address Book, from Members' own equipment. They have also questioned whether the transition period is realistic and have stressed the need to ensure that appropriate training and support is in place for Members before any changes are implemented.

Having noted that Members will have to provide their own e-mail addresses for Council business, the Panel has been advised that security and encryption arrangements for sending confidential emails and documents will need to be introduced. It will be possible to receive confidential committee papers and reports through the Modern.Gov committee management system.

Whilst the Panel has expressed support in principle for the proposals, a number of comments have been made for the Cabinet to consider as part of its deliberations on this matter. **(Item No. 48 of their Report refers).**

39. NATIONAL NON DOMESTIC RATING – CHANGES TO DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY FROM 1ST APRIL 2014

Providing that the cost of any relief awarded is fully reimbursed by the Government and that applicants satisfy all qualifying conditions, the Panel has recommended that the Council's existing Discretionary Relief Policy is amended to incorporate the new temporary reliefs announced in the Chancellor's 2013 Autumn Statement and to address issues relating to the recent flooding in some areas of the country. In doing so, the Panel has discussed the arrangements through which the Government intend to reimburse local authorities. It is accepted that the additional administrative and cost burden to the Council is not yet known.

40. INTERNAL AUDIT REVIEW – ELECTRONIC DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT

An Internal Audit of the management of the Electronic Document Management (EDM) system within six of the Council's services has been reviewed. The Panel has been awaiting the outcome of this review before making a decision on whether to investigate further the progress which has been made in implementing EDM within the organisation. The audit has concluded that the systems in place to manage EDM are adequate.

The Panel has discussed in general terms the need for Council schemes and projects to be subject to a process of independent post implementation review. This will enable the Authority to establish the benefits that have been realised compared with the original business plan and the forecast costs of schemes. The Council recently has spent significant sums of money on projects, including the installation of solar panels at Eastfield House, the launch of a new One Leisure website, development at One Leisure St Ives and the construction of the Huntingdon multi-storey car park. It is important for the Council to establish that it has realised benefits from its investments and has secured value for money.

A Corporate Project Board has been established to promote project management and governance within the Authority. The Governance Board reports directly to the Corporate Governance Panel. The Panel has discussed the role of Members in this area and the respective

responsibilities of the Overview and Scrutiny and the Corporate Governance Panels.

Overall, Members support the intention to strengthen the Council's approach to project management, including the way business cases for schemes are developed, managed and reviewed following implementation. They have suggested that, as part of the new arrangements, the Panel should receive follow-up reviews.

41. FACING THE FUTURE

To enable the Panel to commence its role monitoring the progress of the Facing the Future process and its impact on the Council, the Panel has received an update on the work that has been undertaken to implement the "Limited Service Impact" savings. Members have noted that those which are being taken forward immediately have been incorporated into the budget from 2014/15. This amounts to £378k in 2014/15, rising to £497k in 2015/16.

In terms of the delivery of the remaining suggestions, a Corporate Programme and Project Management Governance Group has been established to oversee their delivery. In recognition of the importance of keeping Members informed of progress, monitoring reports will be submitted to the Panel on a regular basis as part of the Council's usual budget management cycle. There will also be the opportunity to review individual savings proposals as they emerge at a later date.

Other Matters of Interest

38. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel has received current Notices of forthcoming Key Executive Decisions, which have been prepared by the Executive Leader. Members have been reminded that if they are interested in particular items they are able to attend the relevant meetings of the Social and Environment Well-Being Panels at which they are considered.

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

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies. In so doing, Members have received an update on the activities of the Working Group which has been established to review the Authority's gross expenditure. Councillor E R Butler has also provided an update on the work of the Council's Fraud Team and the introduction of the Single Fraud Investigation Service, which will go live from April 2016.

With regard to the Panel's interest in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), the Chairman has reported that his permission has been sought for its draft Strategic Enterprise Plan to be considered by the Cabinet at the meeting on

10th April 2014. In recognition of the Council's responsibility to scrutinise the partnerships with which it is involved, the Chairman and Chief Executive of the LEP have been invited to a future meeting of the Panel to give a presentation on its business plan.

40. SCRUTINY

The Panel has received the latest editions of the Decision Digest at each of its meetings.

T V Rogers
Chairman