

## Decision Digest

Edition 148

**Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 1st to 30th September 2014.**

### **GREEN HOUSE PROJECT – SALE OF HOUSES**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) has supported the sale of the Green Houses that the Council bought to demonstrate home energy saving measures and to provide a mechanism to deliver the Green Deal initiative. However, Members did question whether consideration was given to retaining the Green Houses as part of the Council's forthcoming strategy to invest in capital assets and have been informed that the rates of return on market housing are not comparable with those that can be obtained from commercial property.

Subsequently, the Cabinet approved the sale of the two properties. Executive Councillors have agreed that the St Neots property be sold as soon as possible and the St Ives property early next year, using a local agent to obtain the best possible price. This staged release of the properties will accommodate any visits already planned for the St Ives project as part of the DECC funding scheme. The Head of Operations has been authorised, after consultation with the Executive for Resources, to accept the best offers for the sale of the properties. Finally, the Cabinet has agreed that the capital receipts from the sale be allocated in accordance with the emerging Capital Strategy.

### **CORPORATE PLAN 2014-16 PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

Both the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Panels have been acquainted with progress on the key activities identified in the Corporate Plan during the period 1st April to 30th June 2014. Members have welcomed the receipt of performance information for the first quarter of the 2014/15 Municipal Year and noted that Executive Councillors will present reports and answer questions on performance within their areas of responsibility.

Having commended the format of the information which is easy to understand and can be readily traced back to the Corporate Plan, Members have noted that performance information will be published on the District Council's website.

In reviewing the information which has been provided, Members have asked a number of questions regarding specific actions within each Strategic theme, which have been responded to by Officers and Executive Councillors. The Panels are of the opinion that future reports should include comments where targets have not been achieved in the form of an additional action column.

Having examined the performance indicators presented, the Social Well-Being Panel has recommended that the report should incorporate information on waste minimisation and street

cleansing. The Panel is also of the view that the Council should monitor the performance of its shared services.

With regard to the performance indicator for measuring Disabled Facilities Grants the Cabinet has been advised of difficulties in quantifying the level of work due to the process being undertaken by the shared HIA service. With this in mind, the Cabinet has agreed to assess these grants by the average time (in weeks) between date of referral to practical completion for minor jobs up to £10,000. This will replace the current measure which examines the time taken from first visit to works completion.

### PROJECT MANAGEMENT UPDATE

An update on the progress made by the Council's Corporate Project and Programme Board in improving project management arrangements within the organisation has been presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being). Work will now be undertaken to consider the way in which programmes of work in the form of related projects can be better managed within the Authority.

The Panel intends to make Project Management one of the key areas to review during this municipal year and has discussed a range of issues during its deliberations on this matter. The Panel will revisit these discussions at its November meeting, prior to inviting the Corporate Team Manager to provide a further update in December 2014.

The Panel will trial the use of the Select Committee approach to challenge Cabinet Members on the Council's Project Management arrangements.

### FACING THE FUTURE – PROGRESS

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has received an update on the progress made to date

with the delivery of the Facing the Future programme and the measures that have been put in place to continue delivering the proposals within the programme. This forms the start of the Panel's work on Facing the Future during the current Municipal Year.

Members have been reminded that Facing the Future continues to be an important initiative as it is imperative that the Council delivers efficiencies across the Authority. To support their ability to monitor this programme, Members have requested access to the centrally maintained list of Facing the Future proposals. They have been assured that it will be possible to identify savings generated by the programme in the Medium Term Financial Strategy when it emerges in December 2014.

The Panel has discussed the additional information which may be required to challenge Cabinet Members when they receive the update in November and subsequently. This will include financial information, details of savings to-date, savings predicted and specific information relating to individual Cabinet Members' remits and outstanding proposals.

### SALE OF LAND – ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON

The Economic Well-Being Panel has supported a proposal to sell Council owned land at the front of the Pathfinder House site fronting St Mary's Street, Huntingdon. Members discussed other potential uses for the site and noted that work is being undertaken to prepare a capital investment strategy for the Authority.

Subsequently, the Cabinet has approved the terms for the disposal of the land and authorised the Head of Resources, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Resources, to

act in the best interest of the authority on the sale of the site.

### DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

At its September meeting, the Development Management Panel considered seven applications and of these, six were approved and one deferred.

Having heard strong representations from a local resident, the Panel requested further advice from the Environmental Protection and Community Safety teams on existing anti-social issues which appeared to be associated with a takeaway business on Longsands Parade, St Neots. With this in mind, the Panel deferred the application to vary the opening hours of the premises pending receipt of this advice and completion of an incident log by the objector.

In terms of significant applications, the Panel approved, subject to conditions and a section 106 obligation relating to transport and highway related matters, an outline application for a business park adjacent to the existing development at Ermine Business Park, Ermine Street in Great Stukeley.

### CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH CLINICAL COMMISSIONING GROUP; PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Social Well Being) received a presentation by representatives from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) on the work currently being undertaken by the Group and the content of the latest performance report. The Panel noted that the three current priorities of the CCG were Older People, Coronary Heart Disease and End of Life care. In terms of the older peoples programme, the Panel was advised that the CCG had

launched a procurement process to attract bidders to deliver integrated older peoples' and adult community services for those aged over 65. Three submissions had been shortlisted and these would be evaluated. The successful bidder would be announced at the end of September with a view to a start date for the contract of 1st April 2015.

The opportunity also was taken to brief the Panel on the 'Health Economy' and the shortfall in funding for Cambridgeshire. Members heard that options around clinical and design initiatives were being explored to seek to reduce expenditure and establish a sustainable service for the future. Updates on progress of this work will be reported to future meetings. It was made clear that at no stage would the quality of care and patient services be compromised.

In terms of the delivery report, the Panel understood that this reflected the performance of local hospitals against national standards and areas where the provider was under performing. Having been advised how providers would be made accountable should they fail to meet annual standards, the Panel was assured that serious failure would be likely to result in the requirement for a remedial action plan or financial penalty but would not impact on patient care.

Going forward, the Panel asked that, in future, they be provided with a glossary of terms/abbreviations to ease their understanding of the report. Members also welcomed the suggestion of a presentation to a future meeting on hospital accountability.

### SHAPE YOUR PLACE: ANNUAL REPORT

The Social Well Being Panel has considered the performance of the 'Shape Your Place' website in

Huntingdonshire over the period 1st July to 30th June 2014. Whilst acknowledging that the level of use was disappointing in some areas, the Panel was of the view that the six area sites should be retained and that more should be done to promote the system with town and parish councils and on the District Council's website. As there appeared to be some inconsistencies in the way ward councillors were notified of matters arising in their wards, the Head of Community undertook to look into the reasons for any discrepancies and measure, by simple survey, why users were visiting a site on a particular day.

It was agreed that, in future, the annual report on performance of the system will be circulated to Members but only placed on the Panel agenda if there were particular issues which needed to be addressed.

#### **REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PANEL**

The Corporate Governance Panel has received a report detailing the outcome of a review undertaken by the Councillors E R Butler, G Harlock and R West on the effectiveness of the Panel. Generally, the Panel operates effectively and fulfils its terms of reference. In discussing opportunities to improve its effectiveness, it was understood that Member effectiveness was not routinely appraised. The Panel was of the view that the performance of all Members of the Council should be evaluated and they supported a suggestion that the matter be referred to the Member Development Group.

The Panel has also discussed the advantages and disadvantages of receiving draft accounts prior to audit and whether receiving them in September was sufficient to allow the Panel to discharge their governance responsibilities. In that respect, the

Panel felt that it would be beneficial to receive the draft accounts during the course of the audit at an informal meeting and that further training on the accounts be arranged.

Finally the Panel has considered a number of changes to the Panel's terms of reference to reflect the suggested terms of reference for an audit committee produced by CIPFA. These changes will require amendments to be made to the Constitution and will be considered by the Council at their meeting on 17th December 2014.

#### **APPROVAL FOR PUBLICATION OF THE 2013/14 ACCOUNTS**

The Corporate Governance Panel has noted the process required to be undertaken prior to the publication of the 2013/14 final accounts. This includes receiving both the auditor's report on the audit of the accounts and their Letter of Representation, the production of the Annual Governance Statement and the draft Annual Financial Report for the year ended 31st March 2014. The Panel has authorised the Executive Leader and Managing Director to sign the Statement and Letter of Representation on behalf of the Council. The Panel has also authorised the Chairman of the Panel to sign the accounts on behalf of the Council.

#### **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PANEL**

The Corporate Governance Panel has endorsed the contents of the draft annual report of the Panel prior to the document's submission to Council in December.

#### **RISK REGISTER**

Changes made to the Risk Register between the period 12th March to 1st September have been noted by the Corporate Governance Panel. The

Panel has questioned their role in risk management given the level of detail presented to them and the recent appointment of a Risk Management Champion. Reference also was made of the involvement of the Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) on the issue. Having agreed that the Panel should be considering the effectiveness of arrangements around risk management Members requested that clarification over the responsibility for managing risk be referred to the Chief Officers Management Team.

## **TRAINING OF PANEL MEMBERS**

Suggestions of training for Members of the Corporate Governance Panel based on the anticipated work programme over the ensuing year have been noted.

## **OPTIONS FOR FRAUD INVESTIGATION POST SINGLE FRAUD INVESTIGATION SERVICE.**

The Corporate Governance Panel has considered various options available to the authority once its housing benefit fraud function has been transferred to a Single Fraud Investigation Service in May 2015.

In recognising the potential impact on fraud risk the transfer will have and the benefits of maintaining a level of fraud prevention and detection, the Panel has recommended to the Cabinet that a smaller fraud team be retained with the aim of being cost neutral.

