

Decision Digest

Edition 149

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 1st to 24th October 2014.

EXPENSES AND ALLOWANCES POLICY

The Employment Panel has reviewed and endorsed the contents of a new Expenses and Allowances Policy for the organisation. The Policy has been developed to provide a transparent and consistent framework for allowances, to provide guidance and a process for employees to claim expenses and to recognise changes as a result of moves to share services with neighbouring authorities.

Following endorsement by the Employment Panel, the final policy will now be presented to the Corporate Management Team for approval in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation and then implemented at the start of the following calendar month.

JOB EVALUATION POLICY

The Employment Panel has endorsed for implementation the contents of a new Job Evaluation Policy. The Policy had been revised to draw on the experience obtained from the Pay Review, to clarify the job evaluation process and to provide an equitable framework for the Authority.

WORKFORCE REPORT 2014-15 (QUARTER 1)

The quarterly report on Human Resource matters impacting on the performance of the organisation during the period 1st April to 30th June 2014 has been

presented to the Employment Panel. A range of issues were discussed including employee numbers, salary costs, sickness absence and the HR caseload.

The Panel has noted that the average days sickness lost per FTE had increased to 8.2 days per annum from an average of 7.6 days in the preceding quarter. However this increase had occurred at a time of significant change for the organisation. Having noted that the Operations Division had experienced the highest increase in sickness since the previous quarter, Members were advised that work was ongoing to address this. The Panel has also discussed absences related to stress, anxiety, mental health and depression, together with the increase in long term sickness absence.

As the figures for sickness absence within the report related to the period to 30th June 2014, an update on the current position will be circulated to Panel Members.

LGSS PERFORMANCE REPORT AND LGSS MONITORING

The Employment Panel has considered the performance of the LGSS Human Resources, Payroll and Organisational Workforce Development Services during the period 1st April to 30th June 2014. Members noted that the majority of

service standards had been met or exceeded and that it was expected that the use of the strategic element of the contract would increase during the course of the year.

To assist the Panel in monitoring performance levels, feedback from the Council's Policy and Performance Manager and the views of District Council staff on each of the service areas was also provided. In recognition of the ongoing problems being experienced with the E-Recruitment system, the Panel has asked LGSS to prepare an action plan to address the issues which have been raised and to report back to the next meeting. A demonstration of the E-Recruitment system will also be provided at this time.

SHARED SERVICES

The Economic Well-Being Panel has received an update on the progress which has been made by Huntingdonshire District Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council to work in partnership to deliver shared services and develop a shared service arrangement for the delivery of ICT and Legal Services. Members have conveyed their appreciation to those Officers who had been involved with the successful bid to the Transformation Challenge Fund which would provide additional resources to fund interim and permanent support to ensure that the momentum of the partnership is maintained.

The Panel has welcomed the overall direction of travel and have endorsed the recommendations within the report. However Members sought clarification and asked questions on a number of matters, which were responded to by the Executive Leader and the Corporate Director (Services). Members also discussed the importance of engaging with staff and carrying them with the Council on this journey and have been

assured that communication planning is a key part of the development of shared services and that there was a detailed communications plan in place for this purpose.

Having been informed that the arrangements for scrutinising the shared services had yet to be established, Members have expressed a desire to be involved within the development of the Overview and Scrutiny arrangements.

The Cabinet has subsequently indicated its support for the recommendations and the general principles to be used in progressing the project in relation to the lead authority approach, location and cost sharing proposals.

BUDGET MONITORING 2014/15 (REVENUE & CAPITAL) AND UPDATE ON ZERO BASED BUDGETING

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has reviewed the variations to the approved 2014/15 revenue and capital budgets. The Head of Resources was asked to circulate details of the one off cost relating to the settlement of a legal dispute in the land charges service and the saving for Town and Parish Council support, which has been identified within Democratic Services and is yet to be resolved.

The Panel has also received an update on the arrangements for the Zero Based Budgeting process and Members were provided with an opportunity to ask questions on the operation of the process. Members have emphasised that the outcome of the process will only be as good as the managers' commitment to it and Members' appetite for changes to the way in which the Council currently does things. Panel Members will give

further consideration in advance of the next meeting as to whether it might be useful for the Panel to review one of the ZBB 'heavy' services in further detail.

Having discussed the methodology adopted for the ZBB exercise, the Cabinet has requested the Managing Director to expedite the process and after consultation with the Executive Leader and Executive Councillor for Resources to report back to them by March 2015 on a budgetary plan which would assign a timescale to the completion of the exercise.

OPTIONS FOR FRAUD INVESTIGATION POST SFIS

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) 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. The Panel has subsequently recommended that a smaller fraud team be retained which can work in partnership with neighbours and other agencies.

This conclusion was supported by the Cabinet but Officers were requested to continue to pursue consideration of shared service options for the function with partner authorities by 2016.

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP – ANNUAL REPORT

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Social Well Being) has received a presentation on the activities and outcomes of the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership in 2013/14. Detailed costs associated with support for the Partnership and those challenges presented by the new Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 also were discussed.

The Partnership had been established in accordance with Sections 5–7 and 11 of

the Crime & Disorder Act 1998 which required responsible authorities to work together to protect their local communities from crime and help people feel safe and do all that was reasonable to prevent crime and disorder in the area. The Partnership comprises representatives from the District and County Councils, Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Cambridgeshire Fire & Rescue Service, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough CCG and the Probation Service. Other organisations were invited to participate as appropriate.

Funding for the partnership was now allocated to the Partnership from the Safer, Stronger Community Fund by the Police & Crime Commissioner and in 2013/14 this amounted to £28,000. Details of the projects towards which funding had been allocated in 2013/14 also was noted together with the cost to the Council in taking the lead in supporting and chairing the Partnership. It was explained, however, that the latter had now transferred from the District Council to the Chief Inspector thus reducing the costs previously incurred by the Council.

Having discussed the delivery and cost effectiveness of the service and established that Community Service Grant of £24,000 had been allocated by the Police & Crime Commissioner for 2014/15, the Panel questioned whether any cost analysis of the service had been undertaken to demonstrate the value and cost effectiveness of the Partnership. The Executive Councillor and Communities Manager agreed to undertake this exercise in the future.

Through questions, it was understood that the priorities of the Partnership over the period 2014-17 reflected those set by the police. It was made clear that prevention of crime

generally was the overriding and continuing priority for the Partnership although not listed specifically as a priority.

Although not mentioned in great detail, the Panel recognised the valuable contribution made by the CCTV service as a deterrent to anti-social behaviour. As the service had transferred to Community Division, the impact of CCTV would be reflected in future reports.

Having been briefed on the implications for the Partnership of the new Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 and noted that the Partnership was currently seeking to secure efficiencies and savings, the Panel agreed to consider at its forthcoming away day whether it wished to have the opportunity to engage in the outcome of the review at a future meeting.

CUSTOMER SERVICES MONITORING

The Overview & Scrutiny (Social Well Being) Panel has received and noted the performance and activities of the Customer Services Team over the period January to June 2014.

Although the report had formerly been submitted to the Economic Panel, COMT had taken the view that it was more appropriate if performance monitoring of customer services was undertaken by the Social Panel. The timeliness of the management information presented would be adjusted to reflect the work programme of the Panel in future. It also was noted that a review of progress on the Customer Services Strategy would be submitted to the Panel shortly.

Looking at the detailed performance information, it was explained that key measures were speed of response and quality of service (based on feedback received) arising from day to day operation of the service.

In response to a question on the rationale for the potential transfer of the Call Centre to Pathfinder House which appeared to be contrary to the shared service approach currently favoured by the District Council, the Head of Customer Service confirmed that there were still opportunities to establish the Call Centre as part of the Strategic Partnership with South Cambridgeshire/Cambridge City but in the short term, the likelihood was that the service would be relocated to Pathfinder House. Regarding a suggestion for joint services with Town Councils, the Panel noted that there was little advantage in partnership of this nature with the towns and concern that it could duplicate the existing response offered by the County Council.

In terms of the future, the Panel understood that it was the Council's intention to encourage the public to make greater use of online services rather than rely on the telephone or face to face contact. It was reported that a smartphone app was already used extensively by visitors to One Leisure and it was hoped to extend the facility to other parts of the organisation.

Regarding speed of response to enquiries at the Call Centre, the Head of Customer Service accepted that resilience to sickness absence required improvement and that there might be an opportunity to call on Customer Services staff in these circumstances should the team be located on the same site. It was made clear that any temporary staff exchange would not be to the detriment of customer services. However, there was also an opportunity to call in additional staff as cover in the event of concern.

Regarding the transfer of the team to Pathfinder House, the Panel was

informed that staff had welcomed the opportunity to have closer contact with their colleagues and other services.

The Panel concluded their discussion by looking forward to future reports on the opportunity there might be to encourage increased visitors to the Council's website.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING – UPDATE ON STUDY

Councillor R Fuller updated the Social Well Being Panel on the progress of the study on affordable housing. The Working Group had had the opportunity to discuss that part of the new Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 relating to affordable housing provision at a meeting when the Executive Councillor for Planning and Housing Strategy also was present.

Councillor Fuller added that the Working Group was keen to examine opportunities to deliver additional affordable housing, reduce the number of families waiting for affordable housing and question why individuals appeared to remain on the waiting list without any potential to secure a housing offer. Brief mention also was made of current viability issues which severely impacted on the number of affordable units able to be offered by developers.

A written report on the most recent meeting would be submitted to the November Panel.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE HEALTH COMMITTEE

The Social Well Being Panel has received the Minutes of the meeting of the Cambridgeshire Health Community held on 11th September 2014.

Councillor Carter, the Panel's appointed representative, reported that Uniting Care Partnership had been selected as

the Preferred Bidder to improve older people's healthcare and adult community services across Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and parts of Northamptonshire and Hertfordshire. The services would provide urgent care for adults aged over 65 including inpatients as well as A&E services, Mental Health Services for people aged over 65, community health services for adults over 18 and other health services which support the care of people aged over 65. It was understood that the Partnership would spend the next six months preparing and putting everything in place to be able to start delivering services on 1 April 2015.

Members were hopeful that Uniting Care Partnership would be able to give a presentation to the Panel on how the new services would be delivered in Huntingdonshire.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PANEL

The Development Management Panel considered eighteen applications at its October meeting and of these fourteen were approved, three refused and one deferred. Following a number of representations, the Panel deferred an application for the development of 43 dwellings and associated requirements on a site between St Andrews Way and Chapel End, Sawtry. Given concern expressed about flooding and drainage issues, the application was deferred to enable the Head of Development to establish the definitive drainage position with the applicant, Anglian Water, Environment Agency and the Middle Level Commissioners and to clarify whether the site roads and drainage arrangements are to be adopted by the relevant authorities.