

Decision Digest

Edition 150

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 1st to 21st November 2014.

CORPORATE PLAN: PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Overview and Scrutiny Panels have been acquainted with progress on the key activities identified in the Corporate Plan during the period 1st July to 30th September 2014. Members have had the opportunity to ask questions of Cabinet Members on the progress which has been made within their specific areas of responsibility. These have been submitted to the Cabinet Meeting on 20th November 2014 for further consideration.

In general terms, Members of the Economic Well-Being Panel have welcomed the progress that has been made in developing the format of the report to incorporate the comments which have been made in the first quarter and have been informed that work is now being undertaken to develop a more rigorous internal quality assurance approach. Members have also been assured that identification of outcomes will be the next part of the development of the performance management process.

In terms of mechanisms for removing actions from the performance report once they have been completed, the Panel expressed the opinion that items should not be removed until it has been agreed with the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

In a very full discussion, the Social Well Being Panel raised fixed penalty notices

and litter nuisance and the Executive Councillor undertook to pursue the issue of litter around out of town stores and fast food outlets with the organisations themselves, to look at the possibility of litter control zones under the Environmental Protection Act and to engage local schools in litter prevention programmes.

To increase the take up of 'Action on Energy' grant highlighted by the Panel, the Managing Director undertook to produce a briefing note for Members and Parish Councils on the scheme.

Regarding refuse collection and street cleansing and having indicated his willingness to review performance indicators to seek to set targets to reduce the amount of refuse going to landfill, the Panel noted that the issue of contamination of waste needed to be overcome before any alternative approach could be considered. Responding to the suggestion that street cleansing was better in the towns than rural areas, the Executive Councillor undertook to raise this and the potential for service level agreements with his Cabinet colleagues.

Mention also was made of diversionary activities for young people, partnership arrangements, temporary housing, design of new properties for the elderly and the disabled, inspection of food establishments and disabled facilities grants.

The Environmental Well-Being Panel has been acquainted with ongoing negotiations on potential housing developments and has discussed the performance of the Planning section generally. With regard to the latter, Members have noted that the Planning Section has been operating significantly below establishment for some time but will be 'on-track' against its targets by the end of the year. There is now a full complement of staff and measures to improve the processing of planning applications will be introduced. It is expected that next year's target for processing planning applications will correspond with national levels of performance.

The Environmental Well-Being Panel has also been informed that analysis is being undertaken of demand and the location of temporary housing accommodation and, once this work is complete, development schemes will come forward.

The Cabinet, in noting the progress made against key activities and the observations made by the Overview & Scrutiny Panels, acknowledged that the performance management framework would continue to evolve over time and that indicators could be varied to reflect changes to corporate priorities and to achieve value for money objectives. Responding to specific comments raised, the Cabinet noted that an updated customer engagement/services strategy would be submitted to a future meeting, that managers would receive further training and support to ensure consistent implementation of the sickness absence policy and that Officers would look at ways under new and existing legislation to respond to fly tipping and litter nuisance.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT: REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE: 6 MONTHLY REVIEW

In order to fulfil its role of overseeing the management of the Council's financial

investments and borrowing, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has reviewed the Council's treasury management activity for the period 1st April to 30th September 2014. The Panel has recommended that the Cabinet should endorse the report for submission to the Council.

In recommending that the current position be noted, the Cabinet was pleased that, although operating in difficult market conditions, the Council had achieved a 0.43% return on short term investment against a national performance benchmark of 0.23%. The Cabinet also discussed an opportunity to vary governance arrangements to provide for the management of property and investment activity in the future.

GROWTH DEAL ROUND 2 (STRATEGIC ECONOMIC PLAN) UPDATE

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has received an update on the preparation of a response to the second round bidding process for Government Growth Deal funding.

Having congratulated District Council Officers on their achievements in preparing a bid in the timeframe which was available, Members noted the specific projects relating to Huntingdonshire and acknowledged the positive benefits which have been achieved from the collaborative approach to the preparation of the bid. Members have raised a number of questions regarding the accountability and transparency of the Local Enterprise Partnership and future development at the Ramsey Northern Gateway.

The Panel has requested a further update following the announcement on

the outcome of the bidding process in December 2014.

PROJECT CLOSURE REPORT

The Economic Well-Being Panel has reviewed the closedown report for the development of the Multi-Storey Car Park in Huntingdonshire and the One Leisure facility in St Ives. The report outlines the lessons which have been learnt from the roll-out of these schemes and also sets out a series of detailed recommendations to improve the Council's project management arrangements moving forward.

To enable Panel Members to give further consideration to the issues emerging from the report, to seek assurances that improvements have been made to Council processes moving forward and to test the robustness of the Council's approach, the Panel has agreed to establish a Select Committee in the New Year. It is envisaged that the Select Committee will report its findings, together with any proposed recommendations to the Cabinet and Council in April 2014.

SHARED SERVICE – BUILDING CONTROL

The Environmental Well-Being Scrutiny Panel has reviewed a proposal to form a shared Building Control service. Members have received assurances that service standards will be maintained and that the evidence that supports the business plan to generate an additional £60,000 per annum in income is robust. It has further been clarified that the net benefit of the savings and additional income will be shared between the partners.

The option of adopting South Norfolk District Council's IT solution has been thoroughly investigated but will not be taken forward at the present time.

It has been recommended that, to promote good governance, scrutiny arrangements are developed for the shared service.

Following Scrutiny, the Cabinet also considered the progress achieved towards reaching an agreement with South Cambridgeshire District Council on the implementation of a shared service arrangement for the Building Control function. The potential to extend the shared service arrangement to Cambridge City Council also was considered.

Estimated savings of £100,000 could result by bringing the two services together and additional income of £60,000 per annum could be generated by strengthening the quality and resilience of the service. The Cabinet requested that a full business case for the proposal and that involving Cambridge City Council should be developed for their March 2015. The package should also include the detailed budgetary implications of the agreement.

Having noted the support of the Environmental Well Being Scrutiny Panel for the proposal, the Cabinet agreed the formation of a shared building control service between the two authorities with South Cambridgeshire acting as lead authority for the current phase of the project. The Corporate Director (Delivery) was authorised, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Planning & Housing Strategy to work on implementation of the agreement using the Transformation Challenge Award to fund the short term costs necessary. In the meantime, action will be taken to progress a business case with Cambridge City Council and an eventual shared Building Control Service involving all three partners with a view to reporting to all Councils in Spring 2015.

South Cambridgeshire District Council has been authorised to act as lead authority and attend the Shadow Regional Board for Building Control on behalf of the District and Cambridge City Council and to explore the potential for a regional partnership. Any future organisational arrangements will require to be agreed by all authorities before they proceed.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING WORKING GROUP

The Social Well Being Panel has received a report from its Working Group on affordable housing and noted their proposed study programme going forward. The Group has expressed its confidence in the ability of new local plan policies to deliver affordable housing and is satisfied that the policies will encourage innovative approaches to affordable housing by use, for example, of exception sites and Community Land Trust models. Further information on the Housing Waiting List has been requested by the Working Group for its next meeting.

LITTER POLICIES AND PRACTICES

The Environmental Well-Being Scrutiny Panel has received a scoping report on the Council's litter policies and practices, including graffiti removal. The report included reference to potential areas for savings.

The Panel has discussed waste collection from flats and a suggested way of responding to graffiti. It has been decided that more work was needed on the detail of how the Council's responsibilities in respect of graffiti are met.

On weed spraying and street sweeping, the Panel noted that the Council has a standards based contract with the County Council for this work but there is some disagreement on how the

standards are interpreted. There is a need for clarification and agreement to be reached between the two parties on the terms of the contract.

Discussion on enforcement of fly-tipping has also taken place.

The Panel has appointed a Working Group to consider and make recommendations on future litter and graffiti service scope and standards and on the public appetite for changes.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT APPLICATIONS

At its November meeting, the Development Management Panel considered eleven applications of which seven were approved and four refused. Reserved matter applications were considered for two sites – at the Brampton Hut Roadside Services at the junction of the A1 and A14 where a proposal to vary the site and car park layout to accommodate a larger unit and drive through was approved. The second application related to the residential phase of the Ramsey Gateway development and concerned the means of access, appearance, landscaping, layout and scale. Discussions with the Middle Level Commissioners on surface water drainage and reinforcement of High Lode continue. As consultation on ecology also is outstanding and layout adjustments have yet to be secured, the Head of Development was authorised to determine the application after consultation with the Chairman of the Panel, the Executive Councillor for Planning & Housing Strategy and a Ward Councillor for Ramsey.

UNAUTHORISED WORKS, MANOR FARMHOUSE, 15 HIGH STREET, SPALDWICK

The Development Management Panel noted that, in accordance with the

scheme of delegation and having consulted with the Vice Chairman, an injunction order had been secured under the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 to prevent any further works to a Grade II listed building known as the Manor Farmhouse, 15 High Street, Spaldwick. The building is on the Council's Buildings at Risk Register. The injunction prevents the owner from carrying out any works of extension or alteration to the building which would affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest without first obtaining listed building consent or prior written authorisation from the local planning authority.

EMPLOYEE OPINION SURVEY

The results of the 2014 Employee Opinion Survey have been presented to the Employment Panel. Members were reminded that the survey was undertaken during a period of significant change within the Council and that the period of transition in senior management and the outcome of the pay review had had an impact on the results.

Having noted that the results have been presented to staff, the Panel has welcomed the preparation of a comprehensive action plan to respond to the issues / areas of concern that have been identified and the intention to repeat the exercise in 2015.

In terms of specific actions within the action plan, Members have welcomed the commitment which has been made to fill vacant posts as soon as approval has been granted and the introduction of a 'back to the floor' programme to enable the Senior Management Team to spend time experiencing what teams do. Members have also expressed reservations with regard to the proposal to introduce an 'employee of the month' scheme and have suggested that the mechanisms for rewarding success should be given further consideration.

In response to Member concerns about communications with staff, the Panel has been assured that the Council is committed to improving the way in which the Authority communicates and to work with staff to come up with ideas for improvement. The Chairman has suggested that notwithstanding the responsibilities of District Council Managers, he would like to have sight of plans for engaging the Staff Council as a channel of communication in their own right.

In general discussion it was suggested that it was important not to draw too many hard conclusions from the survey results given that different questions and answers could be interpreted as meaning different things to different individuals. Given the challenging and volatile environment in which the District Council is currently operating it was no surprise that employees do not have a clear understanding of the Council's vision and objectives. Following the appointment of a new Senior Management Team, it was hoped that employee perceptions of the management of change will also improve.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Employment Panel has received an update on the progress to develop a Workforce Development Strategy for the District Council. The Panel has endorsed the contents of an outline project plan which sets out the stages of work for the development of the Strategy and a timetable for their completion. The draft Strategy will be presented to the next meeting of the Panel for their consideration.

WORKFORCE REPORT (QUARTER 2)

The quarterly report on Human Resource matters impacting on the

performance of the organisation during the period 1st July to 30th September 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 10.1 days per annum which is above the CIPD Public Sector Average and the EELGA Authority Average. Members have been assured that the HR Team are working with Managers and Heads of Service to manage sickness and progress cases of the formal stages of the sickness absence procedure as appropriate. To further support managers, additional training on managing sickness absence will shortly be provided.

Having noted that there has been a significant increase in sickness in the Operations Division, the Panel has noted that work is being undertaken within the Division to address this with the support of managers from other divisions and the occupational health service.

In reviewing the reasons for absence the Panel has noted that during the course of the last year there has been a marked shift between the numbers of long term and short term cases of sickness absence, such that the majority of cases are now of a long term nature. Members have been pleased to note that recent changes to sickness reporting categories have meant that there is no longer any sickness classified as 'other' which will provide the Authority with more meaningful information going forward.

Members have discussed absences relating to stress, anxiety, mental health and depression during the period. The Panel has been informed that work is ongoing with Managers to help support personal as well as work related stress within the Authority and has noted that

the Stress Management Toolkit and the First Contact Service are an integral part of the Council's absence management arrangements. In response to concerns raised by Staff Council representatives regarding the First Contact Service, the Managing Director undertook to give these matters further consideration outside the meeting.

LGSS PERFORMANCE REPORT AND MONITORING REPORT

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 July to 30th September 2014. To assist the Panel in monitoring performance levels, feedback from Council employees on the service delivered by LGSS has also been provided to Panel Members.

Members have been pleased to note that there are no issues to report for the Strategic and Advisory, Transactional Human Resources, Payroll or Organisational Workforce Development elements of the contract.

With regard to the recruitment element of the contract, the Panel has noted that problems continued with the E-Recruitment system. Following a request at their previous meeting, the Panel has reviewed the contents of an action plan which had been prepared to address the issues which have been raised by Council employees. Members have been pleased to note that all the issues within this log had now been addressed.

To assist Panel Members in understanding the system and to aid the discussions on the subject, the Panel has also received a presentation on the operation and functionality of the

LGSS E-Recruitment system. The Panel has also sought and obtained the views of those Managers who were in attendance at their meetings and had had cause to use the system.

Having noted that the Council will continue to utilise the issues log to bring service issues to the attention of LGSS, the Executive Leader has drawn attention to the absence of any formal mechanisms to scrutinise the Council's contract with LGSS to ensure that the Authority is receiving good value for money. This will be of particular importance as the Council begins to enter into shared service arrangements for the delivery of other Council services.

FOOD INFORMATION REGULATIONS 2014 - DELEGATIONS

The Licensing and Protection Panel has authorised the Head of Community after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Strategic Economic Development and Legal to create and maintain policies and procedures in line with the Food Information Regulations 2014.

The Regulations, which come into force on 13 December 2014, include a requirement for food business operators to provide allergen information to customers and provide their staff with associated training in order that they can advise customers when required.

To enable the Council to enforce certain provisions under the Regulations the Head of Community, after consultation with the Legal Service Manager, has been authorised to appoint appropriate Officers to initiate legal proceedings for such offences.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR CRIME AND POLICING ACT 2014 – PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDERS

The Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) is one of six new powers for

dealing with anti-social behaviour brought about by the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014. The Licensing and Protection Panel has approved the appropriate delegations for dealing with the policies and procedures arising from PSPOs which replace the Designated Public Places Order. The Panel also noted the requirement to adopt the new provisions in order to maintain the two existing DPPOs and implement new PSPOs.

LICENSING AND PROTECTION APPLICATIONS SUB-GROUP

The Licensing and Protection Panel has received a summary of the five meetings of the Applications Sub-Group which have taken place between 20th June and 8th October 2014.