

Decision Digest

Edition 153

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 1st February to 28th February 2015.

LOCAL PLAN TO 2036 – TARGETED CONSULTATION

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) has received an update on the current position with regards to the preparation of the draft Local Plan to 2036. The Stage 4 draft Plan has now been published for a targeted consultation with Town and Parish Council's, District and County Members, owners and agents for land proposed for development and key duty to co-operate stakeholders. The Panel has been reminded that there is an opportunity for any Member to submit individual representations during the consultation period and that they should also encourage Parish Councils to submit any comments which they might have by the deadline.

Having welcomed the decision by the Council to undertake additional targeted consultation at this stage, Panel Members have discussed a range of matters including provision for gypsy and traveller sites and the provision of affordable housing and rural exception sites. Whilst rural exception sites will not form part of the Local Plan, the need for affordable housing within the District was well recognised and a target of 35% for new development will be included with the Plan.

In response to a question as to whether there was a plan for the delivery of infrastructure within the Plan the Executive Councillor has outlined the difficulties in negotiating with the County Council under their new political

management arrangements and suggested that a mechanism would need to be found to drive this forward. Members have also suggested that the message should also be conveyed to the local Members of Parliament that financial assistance would be essential to the delivery of the Local Plan and that further effort is required to help to achieve this.

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE (QUARTER 3) – PLAN MANAGEMENT

The Overview and Scrutiny Panels have reviewed progress with the delivery of the key activities identified within the Council's Corporate Plan during the period 1st October to 31st December 2014.

In reviewing the action to invest in initiatives that will deliver affordable housing, the Environmental Well-Being Panel has sought clarification as to the levels of affordable housing that are provided within new developments and whether a minimum target should be incorporated into the Local Plan for both strategic and non-strategic development sites.

The Panel has also noted that vacancies within the Planning Policy Team have now been filled and the Executive Councillor is confident that the update to the 2011 Buildings at Risk Register would be started in Quarter 4. Members suggested that this should be treated as a priority for 2015. To clarify the enforcement actions which can be

undertaken by the Authority in relation to listed buildings, the Panel has requested that a report should be submitted to a future meeting.

In terms of the processing of planning applications, the Panel has noted that delays in validating applications and the issuing of older / out of time applications have continued to impact on performance figures in the quarter. However there are now plans in place to ensure that all applications will be validated within 1 week and older / out of time applications determined before the end of the financial year.

Having noted that the Executive Councillor is confident that the Authority will be able to get back to where it should be and meet nationally set performance targets from 1st April 2015, Members have also received an update on work which will be undertaken to improve the efficiency of the planning application process, to make planning officers more accountable and improve the operation of the Development Management Panel. Members have been advised that there will be an opportunity for them to consider the proposed changes to the delegation arrangements in the Spring.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has received an update on progress achieved against key activities identified in the Council's Corporate Plan in the period 1st October to 31st December 2014. Members have reviewed the key actions under the Working with Our Communities strategic theme.

The Panel has noted that the review of the Council's partnerships is likely to take longer than expected but has not otherwise identified any issues with performance that it considers need to be brought to the attention of the Cabinet. Members have, however, reiterated the point that the allocation of indicators between the Panels needs to be

reviewed to make them consistent with their remits. It has been suggested that the Corporate Plan Working Group should be involved in this process.

The Panel's attention has been drawn to the fact that recycling or composting rates have remained consistent despite a reduction in compostable waste being collected during winter months. This positive trend should be recognized.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has been acquainted with progress on the key activities identified in the Corporate Plan during the period 1st October to 31st December 2015. In so doing, Members have been provided with the opportunity to ask Cabinet Members questions on activities within their specific areas of responsibility.

The Panel has drawn attention to the Corporate Performance and Contextual Indicator for staff sickness (working days lost per FTE). Having noted that HR is carrying out a detailed analysis of the data, the Panel has asked the new Executive Councillor for Organisational Change and Development to a future meeting to discuss his plans generally for his Portfolio and, more specifically, staff sickness.

The Panel has discussed potential causes of a drop in customer satisfaction rates and, following confirmation that an assessment is being undertaken of the pool cars and whether payment of mileage to users would be more cost effective, the Panel has concluded that it is satisfied with the Council's direction of travel and with the way the performance management process is working.

Having considered the comments of the Overview & Scrutiny Panels on aspects of the performance report, which are relevant to their remits, the Cabinet has reviewed and noted progress achieved

against key activities and performance data contained in the Council's Corporate Plan over the period 1st October to 31st December 2014.

The Cabinet has discussed staff sickness trends. Analysis has been undertaken and it is now better understood. The Employment Panel is taking action, in particular, to reduce rates of long-term sickness. It is likely that this will take some time to achieve.

With regard to the format of the report, the Cabinet has been assured that performance management is being developed within the Council based on best practice. The aim will be to collect measures for publication that are valued by residents and which can be aggregated to show the Council's overall service capability.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP – GROWTH & INFRASTRUCTURE

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) has received an annual update on the work of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership – Growth & Infrastructure Thematic Group. An update on the implementation of the Community Infrastructure Levy was also provided.

In terms of the Community Infrastructure Levy, the Panel has discussed the requirement to transfer a proportion of CIL receipts to the Town or Parish council in the area of development. The Panel has emphasised the importance of obtaining feedback from those to which CIL receipts have been paid and has noted the intention of the Planning Policy Team to send out a reminder to Parish and Town Councils about the requirement to produce an annual report on expenditure.

Having noted that those Parish Councils who have a Neighbourhood

Development Plan in place are able to receive 25% of receipts, Members have expressed concerns that a number of parishes did not understand the neighbourhood planning process and the implications of producing one. In response to which the Corporate Director (Delivery) has undertaken to bring a paper to a future meeting outlining the current position.

In terms of the Growth and Infrastructure thematic group itself, Members have noted that the future role of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership is currently unknown and a review of external partnerships is being undertaken. The Panel is of the opinion that the operation of this Group does bring value to the District Council; however Members would welcome further information on its operation.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH CLINICAL COMMISSIONING GROUP.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has been acquainted with the way hospitals are held accountable for the services they provide. The general context is as follows:

- ◆ non-foundation trust hospitals are accountable to the Trust Development Authority;
- ◆ foundation trust hospitals are accountable to Monitor;
- ◆ the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) is accountable to NHS England, and
- ◆ the Care Quality Commission (CQC) is accountable to the Secretary of State for Health.

The Panel has paid particular attention to recent events at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital and whether evidence of the problems identified during the recent

inspection by the CQC should have been identified and reported earlier by the CCG. Deterioration in some areas was detected in spring/summer 2014. The CCG reported these trends upwards and to the CCG and it was these reports that partly prompted the CQC inspection. The Panel has questioned whether the CCG should have made elected Members aware of their concerns but it has been pointed out that the CQC has significantly more resources than the CCG and was able to undertake an intensive and detailed inspection. The CCG accepts the CQC's findings but has been surprised by the severity of them. The CCG has no evidence that contradicts the CQC's findings.

In considering the future of the Hospital, the Panel has been advised that the Hospital is now in special measures. It has been advised what steps it needs to take to improve services and it has been allocated significant extra resources and support from relevant organizations to do this. There is already evidence that improvements have been made and the CQC is due to carry out a re-inspection. The CCG has expressed the view that future growth in the local population is likely to mean that a hospital facility will continue to be provided on the Hinchingsbrooke site. This area is currently the 11th most challenged health system in the Country.

Having been acquainted with the way the CCG pays Hinchingsbrooke, the Panel has received a detailed explanation of the Hospital's performance against indicators collated by the CCG.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP GROUP

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has received an

update on the work of the Children and Young People Group. The County Council is under a statutory obligation to ensure work takes place but there are no detailed requirements in terms of creating structures. The Group reports to the Children's Trust, but the Trust currently is undergoing a review.

The Group does not have a budget and so operates through partnership working. Its approach is to undertake joint planning to add value to existing services and it endeavors to avoid duplication. The Group takes a pragmatic approach to selecting projects for inclusion in its plan. Projects are largely focused on the County Council but other suggestions are welcomed. The Panel will consider this at the Scrutiny Away Day.

The Group's priorities are:

- ◆ Promoting emotional wellbeing and supporting young people with emerging mental health problems
- ◆ Reduce the impact of Child Poverty in Hunts
- ◆ Increasing Employability of young people and reducing the number of young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training,
- ◆ Increasing Awareness of Child Sexual Exploitation, and
- ◆ Supporting New Communities.

The Panel has discussed in detail the Group's work on NEETs. Particular attention has been paid to the way NEETs are identified. Members will be provided with data on local trends in comparison with those at regional and national levels.

The Group finds its links with District Council representatives to be extremely valuable. Update reports will be submitted to the Panel following Group meetings on a quarterly basis and the Panel will consider how it might have

greater involvement in this area of work in the future.

The Group makes available a small amount of money to fund independent groups. Information on how to apply has been circulated to Members.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING PARTNERSHIP

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has been informed of recent changes in the way the Health and Well-Being Thematic Group is organized and operates. The District Council's Head of Leisure and Health now is the Chairman of the Group. She has overseen a change to the Group's structure and to the way it works. Analysis has been undertaken of the issues facing the District and priority areas have been identified, as follows:

- ◆ Excess Weight (including Obesity) – Children and Adults;
- ◆ Mental Health – Children and Adults, and
- ◆ Delivering Services for Older people to enable them to live independently, safely and well.

A Working Group has been established to progress this work. Like the Children and Young People Group, the intention is to add value to existing services and to avoid duplication. Work is co-ordinated by the Head of Leisure and Health.

The Panel has suggested that the Group should take care to ensure all local voluntary groups are factored into the services to be provided by the Uniting Care Partnership. Although the Chief Executive of the Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organizations is the Vice-Chairman of the Group, it has been pointed out that not all voluntary organizations are affiliated to the Forum.

Generally, the Council is reviewing its involvement in Partnership working. Once this work is complete, a report will be submitted to the Panel.

REVIEW OF SAFER HOMES SCHEME FUNDING

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) has reviewed the Council's options for the Safer Homes Scheme. The Safer Homes Scheme may well have an important role in reducing demand for Disabled Facilities Grants, which can be significantly more costly and so could have a beneficial effect on the Council's overall budget position. Members have questioned whether this effect might be extended by at least maintaining the current level of funding but it is accepted that there currently is no evidence to support this. The Panel has, therefore, recommended the Cabinet to commission jointly with partners a new countywide service and to review the District Council's funding position during 2016/17 to consider whether to continue with the funding after the end of the contract. The District Council's investment in 2015/16 would be £25k and £10.4k from 2016/17 onwards. The timing of the review will give the Council the opportunity to collate the necessary evidence and to identify alternatives.

The Cabinet has approved the proposal to improve the Safer Homes Scheme and, at the same time, reduce its cost to the Council. This will be achieved because a range of other organisations benefit from the scheme and they will in future be making a greater contribution on a Countywide basis. It is clear that the scheme has positive benefits in terms of preventing injuries and

reducing the need for Disabled Facilities Grants but these effects have not yet been quantified. It is intended to start collecting this information over the next two years.

It has been suggested that eligibility for the service is means tested. Having been advised that contributions are sought but that a more formal system is under consideration, the Cabinet has approved the basis for:

- ◆ investment by the Council of £25k in 2015/16 and £10.4k from 2016/17 - 2018/19;
- ◆ a new countywide service jointly commissioned with partners, and
- ◆ a review the Council's funding position during 2016/17 to consider whether to fund after the end of the contract.

BUDGET 2015/16 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2016/17 to 2019/20)

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has supported the decision to "front load" ZBB heavy savings to be achieved in the forthcoming year by making further savings amounting to £653K in 2015/16. These savings largely represent real terms reductions in spending without sacrificing services. It is acknowledged that there is still more to do but there is some confidence that, regardless of the outcome of the election, the Council will be in a strong financial position next year. Overall, approximately £2.5m has been taken out of the budget to date.

The Panel has established a working group to look into a selection of lines in the budget to examine how they are constructed and to report back. On the question of interest rate predictions, it has been confirmed that the figures are based on information received from the Council's advisors.

On the draft Budget, MTFs and Council Tax, the Panel has:

- ◆ supported the general intention not to use reserves. Given future uncertainty, it is recommended that the position should be reviewed next year but that reserves should not fall below £3m. Their use should be justified by the value they achieve for the Council;
- ◆ recommended that the work to be undertaken over the coming year to define service levels and standards is subject to an assessment of the impact of any changes on the public.
- ◆ expressed support for the additional savings, which are being made at the right pace and with due regard to the impact on services;
- ◆ supported the Council Tax freeze for 2015/16;
- ◆ supported to intention to freeze Council Tax for the life of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (Councillor M F Shellens did not support this recommendation);
- ◆ endorsed the Capital Programme but registered concerns about the capital project appraisal, which Members will look at in due course, and
- ◆ endorsed the Fees and Charges schedule.

At the end of their deliberations, Members have expressed their gratitude to the Cabinet and Officers for the high quality of information presented and for their cooperation with the Panel.

Having done so at its January meeting, in February the Cabinet has again been acquainted with details of the draft budget for 2015/16 and have been advised of its significance in that it shows a net saving of £944k (5%) from the 2014/15 forecast outturn budget.

The Cabinet had drawn attention to further proposed reductions of £653k in the budget and Officers' contributions in achieving this result have been

recognised. Reductions in the budget have resulted from the deletion of vacant posts and reduction in management costs. The areas that need further investigation have been discussed.

The Cabinet has also been acquainted with the terms of a project to replace the 3G Sport Pitch at One Leisure St Neots. The project will be part funded through a bid to Sport England. The business case shows that the Council's contribution will be paid back in four years. The facility will have a minimum life of seven years. In the circumstances that Cabinet has approved:

- the submission of a bid to Sports England for the One Leisure St Neots - 3G Sport Pitch (Replacement) Project, and
- a capital financial contribution to the One Leisure St Neots - 3G Sport Pitch (Replacement) Project of £117,600 subject to the successful approval of the bid noted above (to a maximum of £125,734 reflecting a 10% contingency increase in the total cost of the project).

The Cabinet has noted the comments arising from consultation with the business community on future service levels and on the Council tax freeze and following consideration of the observations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) at the January and February meetings, the Cabinet has recommended to Council that the proposed Budget, as modified by the 3G Sport Pitch (Replacement) Project, and Medium Term Financial Strategy be approved, including

- ◆ the additional savings that have been achieved (as shown on Table C in Appendix 1);

- ◆ the level of reserves currently modelled.
- ◆ a freeze in Council Tax for:
 - 2015/16, and
 - over the period covered by the Medium Term Financial Strategy (2016/17 to 2019/20).
- ◆ the capital programme and the Fees and Charges Schedule.

BUDGET MONITORING 2014/15 (REVENUE AND CAPITAL)

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has reviewed the forecast outturn for 2014/15 for revenue and capital budgets. An assurance has been received that the Council will in future monitor capital spending more closely. With regard to the sale of the greenhouse in St Ives, it has also been reported that larger scale investments in the housing market will be one of the options considered to generate income. Having been advised that the Council takes into account the economic impact on an area of its investment decisions, the Panel has endorsed the monitoring report for submission to the Cabinet.

The Cabinet has noted the expected revenue and capital budget variations identified in the current year. Both budgets are likely to be underspent and emphasis has been placed on the Council Tax Support Scheme, which appears to have been set at the right level. Positive trends have been found in delivering units, which will increase the level of income through the New Homes Bonus.

Executive Councillors are aware that decisions are due to be made on the Alconbury and Molesworth airbases. They have decided to establish a fund using savings in the current year to support these communities when the

decisions are announced. The intention is to have a range of options ready on which these communities can be consulted. The Cabinet has, therefore, agreed the:

- ◆ forecast Revenue Budget of £20.012m, giving a forecast outturn underspend of £0.858m.
- ◆ forecast Capital Budget of £3.693m
- ◆ allocation of £100,000 of the forecast outturn underspend to a new Earmarked Reserve, entitled "Alconbury and Molesworth Support and Challenge Fund".

TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2015/16

In accordance with its responsibility for scrutinising the management of the Council's financial investments and borrowing, The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has advised the Cabinet to recommend to Council the approval of:

- ◆ the Treasury Management Policy;
- ◆ the Treasury Management Strategy, and
- ◆ the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision Policy 2015/16.

Having been satisfied that the documents meet the requirements of the Code of Practice and Government guidance, the Cabinet has recommended the Council to approve the Treasury Management Policies and Strategy.

DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

The Development Management Panel has considered nine applications of which eight have been approved and one refused. Following strong representations from local Councillors and objectors, the decision to refuse an application for the installation of a wakeboarding cable and changing rooms

at Long Lane Lake, Long Lane, Hemingford Grey was made contrary to Officers' recommendation. Members formed the view that it is not an appropriate location as the noise effects would have a significantly adverse impact on the amenities of the residents of nearby residential properties.

The Panel has approved an application relating to gypsy and traveller sites. In reaching the decision, the Panel has had regard to the five years' supply of such sites.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROGRESS REPORT: 1ST OCTOBER TO 31ST DECEMBER 2014

The Development Management Panel has been acquainted with the performance and activities of the Development Management Service in the period 1st October to 31st December 2014. The lower levels of performance reported reflect the fact that the section has not been operating with a full complement of staff. It is now at full strength and an action plan has been developed to meet the section's targets. It is expected that this will be achieved by the end of the year.

APPEAL DECISIONS

The Development Management Panel has been apprised of two recent decisions by the Planning Inspector. One decision, relating to a decision made by the Panel and determined in accordance with the recommendation, was dismissed and the other, taken under delegated powers, was allowed.

STAFF COUNCIL

The Chairman of Staff Council introduced a proposal to review the Terms of Reference for Staff Council to the Employment Panel. The Panel indicated its support of the proposal

and agreed to delegate the review and agreed amendments to the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Employment Panel, Executive Councillor for Organisational Change and Development and the Managing Director to the Staff Council's Terms of Reference after consultation with Staff Council.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Employment Panel received and endorsed the Workforce Development Strategy which is an overarching document that sets out the type of organisation the Council wants to become by taking forward the strategic aims as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2014 -2016. The Panel noted that the Strategy will be made available to employees of the Council and implementation will begin. Progress on the Strategy will be reported back to a future meeting.

NEW APPRAISAL PROCESS

The Employment Panel reviewed and endorsed the contents of a new appraisal process. As a result of the introduction of a new pay and grading model from 1st April 2014 it has been necessary to ensure that progression relating to performance is aligned to the new pay scales. In response to Members concerns about the lack of opportunity for employees to feedback on their manager's performance during the appraisal process, the Panel was assured that there will be an opportunity for the employees to feedback during the process.

SOCIAL MEDIA, NETWORKING AND BLOG POLICY

The Employment Panel endorsed the contents of a Social Media, Networking and Blog Policy for the Council which details the procedures for employees to ensure that the content of blogs and

social networking sites do not bring the Council into disrepute or breach their obligations under the Code of Conduct.

Arising from a Members' concern regarding the enforcement of the policy, the Panel was assured that the ground rules for employees are explicit enough to ensure that a breach of policy is easier to recognise. Furthermore the Policy informs the employees how to use social media thereby making a breach less likely to happen.

PAY POLICY STATEMENT

With the assistance of a report by LGSS the Employment Panel endorsed for submission to the Council, the content of a proposed Statement of Pay Policy for 2015/16. The Pay Policy Statement provides information about the Council's policies relating to the pay and reward of Chief Officers and other employees, as required by Sections 38-43 of the Localism Act. The Statement will be published on the Council's website together with data on senior salaries required by the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency.

WORKFORCE REPORT (QUARTER 3)

The Employment Panel received a quarterly report on Human Resource matters impacting on the performance of the organisation during the period of 1st October to 31st December 2014. The report included the latest position and trends relating to:-

- ◆ employee numbers;
- ◆ salary costs; and
- ◆ sickness absence reporting.

In reviewing the workforce information, Members have been informed that the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) posts within the establishment has continued to decrease and that the

monthly salary cost has decreased by £25k in the third quarter. Members were also informed of the omission of the breakdown of reasons for voluntary resignations and further information on this will be presented with the next quarter report.

In terms of sickness absence, the Panel noted that the annual average days sickness per FTE has increased to 11.1 days in the third quarter. The breakdown of Long Term Sickness and Short Term Sickness is 61% compared to 39% and Members have been reassured that the HR Team will work towards bringing all long term sickness cases to resolution.

Finally, the Panel has placed on record its recognition of, and gratitude for the excellent contributions made by Sharyn McNalty, Frederick Goodship, Ronald Jeakins and Martyn Sturgess during their employment in the local government service and has conveyed its best wishes to them for a long and happy retirement.

LGSS MONITORING REPORT

The Employment Panel 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 October to 31st December 2014. LGSS performance is measured in four areas namely:

- ◆ General Service Standards;
- ◆ HR Strategic and Advisory;
- ◆ Recruitment and Payroll; and
- ◆ Organisational workforce development.

Members were pleased to note that there are no issues to report for the Strategic and Advisory, Transactional Human Resources and Payroll elements of the contract.

With regard to the organisational workforce and development element of the contract, the Panel was informed that the Council have yet to use the full allocation of training places provided by LGSS. There was concern that if the 500 places provided are not utilised then the Council will not be receiving value for money. Members were assured that the Council have been working hard to ensure that all the training places provided by LGSS were allocated by the end of the financial year.

EMPLOYEE OPINION SURVEY PROGRESS REPORT

The Employment Panel were updated on progress with the action plan developed in response to the results of the Employee Opinion Survey. In noting the actions that are on track for delivery, the Panel endorsed the proposed amendment to remove the reference to an achievement or employee of the month scheme. In response to Members comments on the unsuitability of the employee of the month scheme and suggestions for replacement with a performance recognition scheme, the Managing Director assured Members that employees are recognised for their efforts through the allocation of appropriate training and project management courses.