

Decision Digest

Edition 155

Monthly summary of the decisions taken at meetings of the Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and other Panels for the period 25th March to 28th April 2015.

EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2014/15

The content of the draft External Audit Plan for 2014/15 has been noted by the Corporate Governance Panel. Key audit risk areas for the year were identified and the approach undertaken to complete these audits was highlighted. The plan also took account of the zero based budgeting exercise for expenditure that the Authority has undertaken. The Panel's views on fraud and the triviality threshold of £90,000 were sought by the External Auditors. It was noted that the external audit function was to transfer to Ernst and Young from 2015/16, initially for two years.

EXTERNAL AUDIT GRANT CERTIFICATION 2013/14

The External Auditor's Grant Certification report 2013/14 has been noted by the Corporate Governance Panel. During 2013/14, the Council received significant central government grant for Housing Benefits and part of the control framework for such grants is that they are subject to external audit. During the audit some minor errors were identified resulting in the requirement for additional testing. The Panel expressed their concerns again as the rules issued for auditing benefit claims were too rigid meaning minor errors identified during sampling had significant cost implications for an authority.

EXTERNAL AUDITORS: ISA 260 REPORT - 2013/14: IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Governance Panel has noted the External Audit's ISA 260 report which is required to be issued following the external audit of the Annual Financial Report. The report made four recommendations in respect of the Annual Financial Report and the Panel were informed of the progress with implementing the recommendations. The External Auditors would undertake a review of all recommendations and report back to the Panel in September 2015.

FRAUD TEAM UPDATE

Having fulfilled its objectives and Terms of Reference, the Corporate Governance Panel has approved to disband the Fraud Working Group. The Cabinet previously endorsed the findings of the Corporate Governance Panel to retain an in-house Fraud Team and good progress was being made. The Council was likely to have an operational Fraud Team prepared for the transfer of responsibility of welfare fraud investigation to the Department for Work and Pensions in May 2015.

The Corporate Governance Panel agreed that a new Fraud Working Group should feature as an item on the Corporate Governance Panel's Progress Report, to enable the Panel to consider whether they wished to establish a new Fraud Working Group, and if so, to determine the Terms of Reference, once the in-house Fraud Team was operational.

CODE OF FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND CODE OF PROCUREMENT UPDATE FOR 2015/16

The Corporate Governance Panel considered the Code of Financial Management and the Code of Procurement. The documents are reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that they reflect current legislation and the changing needs of the Council, as the policies underpin financial governance in the Council and are Annexes to the Council's Constitution. Having made amendments specifically to the Code of Financial Management, the Corporate Governance Panel has recommended the policies to Council for adoption.

ACCOUNTING POLICIES FOR THE ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT 2014/15

The Corporate Governance Panel was apprised of the outcome of the annual review of accounting policies applied by the authority when producing the Annual Financial Report. Three policies require amendment of which two are considered significant. However, none have an impact on the Council's general fund balance. The amendments were for clarification, transparency and to ensure compliance with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) accounting arrangements. The Corporate Governance Panel has approved the amendments to the accounting policies noted within the Annex to the report.

INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE: INTERNAL ANNUAL PLAN

Under the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, the Corporate Governance Panel were apprised of the Internal Audit and Risk Manager's opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's internal control and governance processes.

Internal audit resources were currently insufficient to deliver the annual audit plan owing to a vacant post held within the team since October 2014. Efforts to recruit to the post had proved unsuccessful. However, it was expected that the vacant post would be filled during the year. The Corporate Governance Panel has approved the Internal Audit Plan 2015/16.

PROGRESS ON ISSUES ARISING FROM THE 2013/14 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Corporate Governance Panel were apprised of and noted the progress made to date in respect of the four areas for improvement identified in the 2013/14 Annual Governance Statement. Good progress had been made across all four improvement areas and it was considered that all would be achieved prior to the preparation of the 2014/15 Annual Governance Statement.

IMPLEMENTATION OF AUDIT ACTIONS

A report outlining performance in implementing agreed internal audit actions for the year ending 28th February 2015 has been presented to the Corporate Governance Panel. Eight actions have not been introduced of which two are red actions and six are amber actions. The Panel were informed that despite the targets not being achieved, performance continued to improve month on month.

The Panel have expressed concern and disappointment at the number of agreed internal audit actions that have not been implemented and resolved to call to account the Heads of Service to meetings of the Panel in order that they provide an explanation as to why the audit actions remain outstanding.

The Chief Finance Officer will be presenting a report to the next meeting

regarding the management of monitoring and implementing internal audit actions, which the Panel have welcomed.

The Panel have also indicated its concern at the loss of data within the Audit Action e-database following a software transfer and the resulting officer time this has incurred. The Panel requested that the Internal Audit and Risk Manager and IMD Operations Manager provide a report to the next meeting of the Panel on the current situation, remedies to resolve the issues and prevention of a future re-occurrence.

HEALTHWATCH UPDATE

Ruth Rogers, Chairman of Healthwatch Cambridgeshire addressed the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) to provide an update on its activities.

The Panel previously received a presentation two years ago when Healthwatch Cambridgeshire had recently been inaugurated and without a full complement of staff.

The role of Healthwatch Cambridgeshire was to ensure public voices are heard in all aspects of health and social care.

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire had played a significant role prior to the Care Quality Commission audit of Hinchingbrooke Hospital as it had facilitated public comments and complaints regarding Hinchingbrooke Hospital. These have included many positive views as well as negative. Overall a balanced view about the hospital and what could be improved was received.

The Chairman of Healthwatch had attended a meeting with the new Chairman and the two new Non-Executive Members for Hinchingbrooke Healthcare NHS Trust and had felt a strong commitment from the Board. It was noted that more Non-Executive Members are to be recruited.

It was noted that mental health service is problematic within Cambridgeshire and a local charity called 'Pinpoint' had assisted with the collection of evidence regarding problems faced by parents in the diagnosis and provision of care, especially for children with additional needs and disabilities. Healthwatch Cambridgeshire has been able to escalate these issues to Healthwatch England for national recognition.

Accessing GP appointments is a growing issue and it is NHS England that is the responsible authority for this matter. A lack of funding is a key issue in addressing this problem. The type of funding accessible when the new GP surgery in Cambourne was established was no longer available.

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire encouraged people to contact them with any concerns, compliments or complaints they had. District Councillors played an important role as they received contributions from constituents.

CLOSER WORKING WITH THE POLICE

The Panel has received a presentation from Chief Inspector Laura Hunt to inform the Panel on:

- ◆ Policing Priorities;
- ◆ Vision within Huntingdonshire for 2015/16;
- ◆ Control Strategy Priorities;
- ◆ Similarities between the Community Safety Priorities and Huntingdonshire District Council Corporate Plan.

The priorities for Huntingdonshire Police are:

- ◆ Responding to community concern;
- ◆ Investigating crime; protecting the vulnerable;

- ◆ Staff professionalism; and
- ◆ Keeping people safe.

There is now less focus on numbers and more on value-based outcomes and an explanation was provided on how the priorities are being achieved.

The Huntingdonshire Police Vision for 2015/16 is to be supporting, empowering and belonging. Putting the person at the heart of all that the Police do and aiming for a seamless service.

Special Constables are slowly being recruited and those that have completed the required number of hours each month, along with Police Community Support Officers, are issued with handheld devices to reduce the need to work out of the station and therefore create a greater street presence.

The Panel were informed that the Police previously had control strategy priorities such as dwelling burglaries and anti-social behaviour. These matters are still a priority but the following are now significant emerging issues:

- ◆ Cyber-crime;
- ◆ Modern-day slavery; and
- ◆ Child sexual exploitation.

Common ground and shared objectives exists between the Huntingdonshire Police priorities and Huntingdonshire District Council Corporate Plan.

The Chief Inspector wants a continued and meaningful dialogue with the Councillors and has enquired how best to achieve this. The Panel has noted that the Council has a Community Safety Partnership. However, the Chief Inspector has stated that there is no longer continued Councillor representation at the meeting and the issues considered are operational issues. The Panel's responsibility is a challenging role and therefore more appropriate to strategic issues.

The Panel agreed for the Managing Director and the Chief Inspector to meet to discuss the way forward regarding continued dialogue between District Councillors and the Police. One potential option has been suggested to have the Chief Inspector regularly attend and present to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being).

Concern was expressed by the Panel at the length of time calls to 101 were answered. The average current wait time for 101 calls to be answered was seven to eight minutes. However, it could be considerably longer.

It has been emphasised that depending on the crime experienced in a particular area will determine the weekly priorities for that area. An example was provided whereby there had been a number of tool thefts from vehicles in the Yaxley area over the previous week, which will therefore feature as a priority for that area.

Crimes such as child sexual exploitation or matters concerning vulnerable people are often complex the Panel has been made aware that any concerns can be reported via any methods, such as emailing the Chief Inspector, eCops or Crimestoppers.

PREPARING TOWN CENTRES AND HIGH STREETS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) Panel received a presentation from Mr W Grimsey on the subject of "Preparing Town Centres and High Streets for the 21st Century".

With less need for retailers in town centres, Mr Grimsey suggested that towns should consider other ways of attracting people in. This could be through offering a 'unique selling point' such as history or heritage or through

developing the towns as a 'community hub', with more residential property and health and education services provided in the centre.

Mr Grimsey was unable to give answers to specific questions about Huntingdonshire or our local towns and villages but encouraged each place to think about their area and consider having their own plans to provide an offer that would bring people in.

REVIEW OF PLANNING ENFORCEMENT

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) received an update on Planning Enforcement and were informed that a more detailed review of the service will be completed for discussion at a future meeting in July or September 2015.

Members commented that complaints are still being received from Parish Councils regarding Planning Enforcement and this may be due to misunderstandings regarding the limitations of enforcement powers. The Panel were informed that work on the review must manage expectations of Parish Councils and be transparent regarding what can and cannot be achieved.

Members of the Panel requested clarification on timescales; it was noted that timescales often depend on the severity of the breach.

The Panel were informed that Planning Enforcement's discretionary powers are proportionate to any breach and any action is expedient and not based on costs or income.

Members questioned the fee regime utilised by Planning Enforcement and queried whether the Council could charge more for retrospective planning applications; whilst this has been

considered by Government, retrospective fees remain the same as standard application fees.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE LOCAL PLAN TO 2036: POSITION STATEMENT

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) received an update on the current position in relation to the preparation of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036. The Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing informed Members that a good response was received to the eight week consultation and that a more detailed report will be completed for the June/July Cabinet in 2015.

Members of the Panel were informed that the comments collated during the consultation will be analysed and details of the respondents will be made available. It was noted that a variety of Stakeholders responded to the consultation, including the Environment Agency, the Highways Agency, landowners and Town and Parish Councils. Details of the respondents to the consultation will be published on the Council's website.

Concern was expressed regarding timescales and the Panel was informed that the Local Plan is still expected to be submitted to the Government Inspector by the end of 2015. The Local Plan will be submitted to the Members of Council at the adoption stage.

Concerns were also raised by the Panel relating to the clarity of changes to the Local Plan and the level of printing. The Executive Councillor for Strategy, Planning and Housing endorsed the suggestion that any further changes are printed as a supplement to the existing document or any changes be clearly highlighted.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) received an update on the current position in relation to the preparation of the Neighbourhood Development Plans for Huntingdonshire.

Members were informed that the District Council has a duty to support Town and Parish Councils in a range of technical aspects of preparing and processing Neighbourhood Development Plans, for which it receives government funding. Neighbourhood Development Plans need to be prepared in conformity with the strategic policies of the local planning authority's Development Plan. However, the main principle is that the parish or town Council is the promotor and owner of the plan and takes responsibility for co-ordinating its preparation from beginning to end.

It was noted by the Panel that the Council's draft Corporate Plan for 2015/16 includes a 'Key Action' that the Council will set out community planning offers and support community planning, working with Parishes to complete Neighbourhood and Parish Plans.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2015/16

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) considered a report by the Head of Operations on the proposed 2015/16 Capital Programme.

Members expressed interest in seeing more detail on the proposed capital scoring system which the Finance Governance Board had used to assess the proposals, details of which will be provided via email. The Head of Resources confirmed that this scoring system was based on methodology from The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

The Cabinet has considered and approved the Capital Programme for

2015/2016, having been reviewed by the Finance Governance Board.

The bids submitted totalled £11.065m and the Finance Governance Board has recommended that £9.637m be approved. The 2016/2017 approved budget includes a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) of £1.905m and the recommended Capital Programme has reduced the amount to £1.776m. Therefore creating a budget saving.

There is a review scheduled of the constitution and financial governance provisions where it is to be proposed that a Member-led Treasury and Capital Management Group be established. In addition to approving the Capital Programme the Cabinet has agreed that until the Treasury and Capital Management Group is established that all business cases should be agreed by the relevant Executive Councillor prior to submission to the Finance Governance Board.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has considered the outcome of the Project Management Select Committee. The Select Committee was held in February 2015 and looked back at past projects, including the Huntingdon Multi-Storey Car Park and the redevelopment of One Leisure St. Ives. Members were given a range of information on how projects will now be managed and access to details of current and past projects.

The Panel received and noted a report on the findings and recommendations of the Select Committee, which were submitted to the Cabinet. It was agreed that the report reflects the actions and conclusions from the session held on 17th February 2015.

The Cabinet has received a report to present the findings of the Project Management Select Committee and has agreed the recommendations contained within the report regarding how project management could be further improved.

The Cabinet has commended the work of the Project Management Select Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being).

CORPORATE PLAN 2015/2016

The Cabinet has recommended the updated Corporate Plan for 2015/2016 to Council for adoption.

Following the introduction of the Corporate Plan in 2014 there has been some confusion about the meaning of Strategic Themes, Outcomes and Priorities contained within the Plan. The content of the 2015/2016 Corporate Plan is broadly similar to the original version and minor amendments have been suggested.

The Cabinet were pleased to note that those surveyed via the Halifax Report ranked Huntingdon as the ninth best place to live in the country and the improvement compared to four years previously where Huntingdon was ranked 64th.