
Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being)

**Report of the meetings held on 4th June and 9th July
2015.**

Matters for Information

1. ECONOMIC GROWTH PLAN REVIEW

The Panel has reviewed the Economic Growth Plan and in so doing has questioned how the Council will manage the possibility of overheating in the demand for housing. The Panel has been informed that economic and market indicators are monitored in order to prevent this occurrence and that there is a requirement to attract new employees with relevant skills to the area. Members of the Panel have been reassured that this issue is not a cause for concern.

The Panel has raised the issue of affordable housing provision in the County and it has been explained by the Economic Development Manager that this topic has not been covered in the report presented. This would be dealt with by other Departments in the Council, although it may be beneficial to link this subject to economic growth in the future.

2. PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS INCLUDING FACING THE FUTURE

In conjunction with the Panels for Social and Environmental Well-Being, the Panel has received an update on changes to the way that projects are managed within the Council.

The report was intended as an update for Members on changes to the way projects are managed within the Council, including the new role of the Programme and Project Manager.

The Panel has been informed that all existing projects have been categorised by strategic priority and then allocated to the most appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Panels. The Facing the Future project has been closed and now features eight projects.

It has been explained to the Panel that project documents will now be held within the SharePoint site and Councillors can request documents from Officers.

Members have queried the Pre-Initiation Process Map and whether the scrutiny process should be included. The Panel has been

informed that the diagram concentrates on projects at the conception stage and that the Overview & Scrutiny Panels will feature later on in the process.

3. CORPORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT (Q4)

In conjunction with the Panels for Social and Environmental Well-Being, the Panel has received an update on progress achieved against the Key Activities and Corporate Indicators identified in the Council's Corporate Plan 2014/2015 for the period 1st January to 31st March 2015.

With regard to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), Members have been informed that discussions regarding major infrastructure are still ongoing. The Executive Leader has confirmed that this would not affect development. The Panel has enquired about the transparency of how CIL funds are spent by Town/Parish Councils. It has been noted that Town/Parish Councils are not required to justify how CIL money is spent but the Council is working with partners to agree priorities in local areas.

The Panel has commented that the targets included in the report on Council Tax and Business Rates collection were particularly high and enquired how the Council has performed against the national average. It has subsequently been confirmed that 2014/2015 national outturn figures are not currently available but details will be included in future reports.

The Panel has questioned staff sickness figures and references to staff satisfaction, commenting that the two matters did not appear to be reflective of one another. Members have noted that issues surrounding staff sickness and satisfaction were currently being addressed, with assurance that the Employment Panel were working to tackle these issues.

In conclusion, the Panel has agreed that the content of the report was an improvement on previous reporting and looked forward to receiving further updates at future meetings.

4. PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2014/15

The Panel has received the provisional outturn for 2014/15 and has been informed that money that has been saved within this timeframe will be invested back into the Council. Feedback on the report from the Panel has been positive, with discussion focussing on savings achieved. Members have recommended that the report be approved by Cabinet.

5. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY OUTTURN REPORT 2014/15

In accordance with the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Best Practice and the Council's Treasury Management Strategy, the Panel

has reviewed the Council's treasury management performance for the year ending 31st March 2015.

6. DISPOSAL AND ACQUISITIONS POLICY

Prior to its consideration by the Cabinet, the Panel has been presented with the Disposal and Acquisitions Policy, which will allow the Council to be able to manage its estate of land and buildings within a commercial environment. In so doing, Members have recommended that -

- where disposal and acquisition decisions are made, these are retrospectively reported to the Panel; and
- the new financial thresholds are reviewed 12 months following approval.

7. MARKETING STRATEGY AND BRANDING FOR HUNTINGDONSHIRE

Prior to its consideration by the Cabinet, the Panel has considered the Marketing Strategy and Branding for Huntingdonshire. The Panel has been informed that the Strategy document is a working document for the team rather than external-facing marketing material and is a follow-up to the recent report on the Economic Growth Plan.

Members of the Panel have queried timescales for implementation of the Marketing Strategy and have been informed that the external work will be starting immediately, subject to approval from the Cabinet.

In endorsing the Strategy, the Panel has proposed the following additional recommendations -

- progress on the implementation of the Marketing Strategy to be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being) Panel at six monthly intervals; and
- an annual report on the impact of the Marketing Strategy work programme to be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being) Panel.

8. SHARED SERVICES

Prior to its consideration by the Cabinet, the Panel has endorsed a report on shared services. The primary subjects for discussions were as follows -

- Lead Authority Model;
- Head of Shared service position;
- robust governance; joint committee;
- business plan;
- Intelligent Client function;
- identity for Shared Services, including branding; and

- sovereignty guarantee

Members have raised questions regarding the effects of Shared Services on Councillors. In response, the Panel has been informed that shared services will lead to a more robust service and that these improvements will create more resilience for all three Councils involved (Huntingdonshire District Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council).

In terms of scrutiny, there may be instances where joint Scrutiny Panels are appropriate with each Council reporting their own findings on the Shared Service implementation.

The Panel has agreed that strong communication channels between Officers and Members need to be developed and upheld to maintain clarity and understanding of the areas for improvement within each separate Council.

9. LEGAL SHARED SERVICES BUSINESS CASE

The Panel has endorsed the business case for the proposed Legal shared service, including details of the financial savings expected.

The Corporate Director (Services) has explained the scope for the future legal service and Members have been informed of the following key points -

- there are expected disaggregation issues for participating Councils but these issues are in hand within the respective Councils;
- work relating to the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act, the Freedom of Information Act, the Data Protection Act, Assets of Community Value and similar areas will remain within the individual participating Councils who will commission legal advice and support as appropriate from the Practice;
- each authority will take a decision on its required Monitoring Officer arrangements separately from this project; and
- the Practice business case is based on the need to create resilience, improve the quality of service to clients, become more efficient and increase capacity in order to reduce expenditure on external legal support and increase external fee earning opportunities.

The Panel has concluded that the report has clearly shown the benefits of a shared Legal service between the three councils.

10. ICT SHARED SERVICES BUSINESS CASE

The Panel has endorsed the business case for the proposed ICT shared service, including details of the financial savings expected.

The Corporate Director (Services) has summarised the report and discussed benefits and outcomes of the proposed ICT shared service, including -

- an ICT service that has the capability and capacity to meet the future demands of the Councils;
- greater efficiency and reduced duplication in ICT services;
- better access to and sharing of information for performance management and benchmarking;
- increased customer self-service for straightforward interaction;
- continuity and resilience of service;
- raising quality and adding value to existing services;
- securing cost savings and sustainable efficiencies;
- releasing staff time for more customer facing activities;
- improving system scalability;
- ensuring improved and more up-to-date systems;
- ability to offer otherwise unsustainable services; and
- leveraging transformation.

The Panel has concluded that the report has clearly shown the benefits of a shared ICT service between the three Councils.

11. BUDGET MONITORING 2015/15 (REVENUE & CAPITAL)

The Panel has received the emerging variations to the 2015/16 approved revenue and capital budgets at its meeting in July. The report's key points concentrated on –

- Revenue Forecast Outturn;
- Capital Forecast Outturn;
- General Fund Reserve; and
- New Homes Bonus.

Feedback on the report has been positive, with discussion focusing on the progress made since the previous report received by the Panel in February 2015.

Other Matters of Interest

12. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel has been acquainted with the contents of the Notices of Key Executive Decisions which have been prepared by the Executive Leader.

13. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) – PROGRESS

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies at each of its meetings. In doing so, the Panel has noted the expected timescales

for the current Operations Review and it has been noted that the Review is anticipated to be completed during Autumn 2015.

14. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel has received details of the studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

15. SCRUTINY

The Panel has considered the latest editions of the Decision Digest and discussed matters contained therein.

G J Bull
Chairman