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# **Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)**

**Report of the meetings held on 9th June, 16 June and  
14th July 2015.**

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## **Matters for Information**

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### **1. CORPORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT (Q4)**

In conjunction with the Panels for Economic and Social 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.

The Panel has discussed targets contained in the report and it has been suggested that all information should be presented as a percentage. Members of the Panel have been informed that targets were quantified in various ways in order to make the information clear and simple to understand. For instance, the figure relating to sickness is presented as an average number of days lost rather than a percentage to provide a more meaningful figure that can be compared with others.

Members have queried targets relating to planning applications, suggesting that the target might not be high enough. The Panel has noted that the targets presented were in line with those set by central Government and have been agreed with the relevant Executive Councillor.

The Panel has questioned the time taken to process planning applications and whether this could be improved. Members have been informed that following changes made by the Department for Communities and Local Government, applications will now be determined on time, with extensions being agreed with the applicant. The Panel has noted that a new Planning Service Manager (Development Management) will be commencing employment with the Council in August 2015, which will reduce the pressure on the Department.

Regarding the cause of delays in processing planning applications it has been explained to Members that issues such as staffing pressures and applicant mistakes or omissions have affected the rate at which applications were considered. Members have been assured that pressures were being reduced with a scope to deal with applications in a different way.

The Panel has expressed concern about planning enforcement due to a lack of resources and the need for greater funding. Members have agreed that the Council was delivering strong economic growth and the Panel has noted that the Executive Leader of the Council has been lobbying Central Government for further funding.

The Panel has concluded that a firm message needs to be sent to Central Government that funding is required to consistently reach the targets that they have set.

## **2. A14 CAMBRIDGE TO HUNTINGDON IMPROVEMENT SCHEME**

The Panel has been updated on progress with the development of the A14 on matters surrounding the Examination in Public and documentation that the Council will submit to the Examination.

The Panel has been informed that there are no further 'Borrow Pits' planned following questions on potential changes and it has been confirmed that no changes are imminent with any discrepancies occurring to be resolved before the end of the Examination period. Members have noted that there was a legacy meeting scheduled on 11th June 2015 to further discuss Borrow Pits, to ensure that maintenance would be upheld after the obligatory 10 year period.

The Panel has queried the routes for the aggregate deliveries during the A14 development and access issues that might arise from the work. It has been explained to Members that Highways England (HE) has indicated that the route of the new roads would bear the majority of the construction traffic, including a new 'Haul Route' between Ellington and Swavesey. Contractors appointed to carry out the works might suggest an alternative solution although the Council would continue to press for the 'Haul Route' as currently proposed. The Panel has suggested that this information should be provided to local Parish Councils to avoid further confusion.

The Panel has been informed that Borrow Pits were utilised in a variety of ways such as landfill sites or the preferred option of filling them with water, creating uses within that new environment. It has been noted by the Panel that after the Compulsory Purchase of the land it then had to be offered back to the original landowner. If that offer is declined then HE has a statutory obligation to maintain the land for a 10 year period and the Panel has been informed that the Council has been working to have a greater say on how the sites are used in the long-term future beyond that period.

In conclusion, the Panel has endorsed the report and remarked on the usefulness of the document as an update. All recommendations to the Cabinet have been endorsed by the Panel.

## **3. PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS INCLUDING FACING THE FUTURE**

In conjunction with the Panels for Economic and Social Well-Being, the Panel has received a report updating 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.

Members have been made aware that project documents will now be held within the SharePoint site and Councillors can request documents from Officers.

In querying whether business cases are considered when new projects are approved, the Panel has been informed that business cases appear later in the authorisation process and that the pre-initiation process map is a work flow of the initial steps involved in the first formal stages of approval.

In response to a query regarding support for Project Managers to assist them in carrying out the work required, it has been explained that they have support from both the Programme Office and their Project Boards, alongside 40 further staff who are now trained in project management. Experienced staff will also act as mentors for the new recruits.

The Panel has noted that some ideas for projects originate from new legislation where this requires the Council to introduce a clear change or improvement. The pre-proposition form is now in use and any new ideas require the approval of Directors and Heads of Service before they can proceed.

#### **4. OPERATIONS REVIEW**

The interim Head of Operations has been introduced to Members of the Panel and was accompanied by the Corporate Director (Services) in presenting details of a review of the Operations Division. The presentation has highlighted the current strengths within the Council identified throughout the review and then focused further on specific points of interest including -

- formal consultation starting on 16th June 2015;
- individual meetings with those whose posts within the Council may be affected by the review have already been held;
- the Council is now looking to understand the service required rather than investing further money on areas that are not as effective;
- there is a strong core of highly valued members within the current workforce;
- avoidance of false economy; key roles should remain in place, particularly front-line members of staff; and
- changes in Terms and Conditions will address Bank Holiday waste collection issues and shortfalls in car park staffing.

It has been made clear to the Panel that the intention is that the relationship between Overview and Scrutiny and Operations will be improved and maintained. The Panel has agreed that all Task and Finish Groups/Working Groups for the Panel are to be disbanded while the Operations review and restructure is ongoing, giving the Department time to implement changes identified in the review. In order for the Panel to remain involved and kept abreast of changes which are taking place, the Corporate Director (Services) has made a commitment that the Panel will receive regular reports on progress.

The Chairman has praised the presentation and has suggested that a greater sense of clarity within the Operations Division is needed and that monitoring and tracking of jobs is important so it is simple to determine whether work is being done or is completed. The interim Head of Operations has informed the Panel that a change in culture at the Council needs to happen alongside the restructure, which will involve a clearer understanding of the organisation's values, with a follow-through process making use of customer feedback.

The Panel has asked for further information on sickness levels within the Operations Division. The Interim Head of Operations has informed Members that sickness is an area that requires investigation and that this topic is being addressed, featuring greater responsibilities for line managers in the future.

It has been agreed that the Panel will receive regular updates regarding the Operations Review. There will be quarterly updates directly to the Panel and further monthly meetings will update the Chairman/Vice-Chairman of the Panel so that they can feedback to Members as appropriate.

## **6. RECAP UPDATE**

The Panel has received an update on the Recycling in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough (RECAP) partnership. A Member has stated that the benefits from working with RECAP as it is configured presently need to be clearer moving forward.

The Members have agreed that RECAP updates will be reported to the Panel as and when they are available.

## **7. LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION REVIEW**

The Panel has received an update on the key issues arising from the recent targeted consultation on the Local Plan.

The report has set out a number of key issues to be addressed. Some of these issues have been raised through the consultation and others have been identified from reviewing the outcomes of examinations elsewhere.

The Panel has been informed of continuing work on the preparation of the Local Plan, including resources focussing on highways and transport modelling and analysis. It is expected that the majority of

the work to complete the evidence base will take 6 to 9 months. The work needs to be undertaken in order, with flooding and highways work to take place before the new Retail Study is commissioned. The Local Plan will also need to be consistent with the results from the Environment Agency's new lower Great Ouse modelling due to be published in August 2015.

The Panel has been advised that the Council will continue making decisions on applications without a Local Plan in place, having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework. There is a need to continue to ensure that there is a five year supply of housing land to reduce the likelihood of unexpected decisions at appeal and it has been confirmed that this is in place. The Council has continued to work with partners on development sites such as Alconbury Weald and sites in Ramsey and Warboys.

The possibility of land at RAF Molesworth and RAF Alconbury being included in the Local Plan has been discussed and it has been stated that this land cannot be allocated as it has not yet been declared surplus. The Council will continue to monitor the situation.

Confirmation has been sought on whether gypsy/traveller accommodation needs will be met through the Local Plan. The Head of Development has confirmed that at a recent appeal relating to an application for six pitches in Alconbury the inspector had confirmed that the District had a 10 year supply of gypsy/traveller pitches and could meet the needs.

The number of responses to the consultation has been queried. As a targeted consultation, fewer responses were expected than in earlier rounds which had a wider focus and involved more people. The independent inspector will not penalise the Council for a lack of engagement but will focus on whether significant issues have been resolved. It has been suggested that there were few responses from District Councillors as there were few changes for them to comment on.

In relation to how progress will be communicated to residents, the Head of Development has indicated that more communication is required and has welcomed views on how to proceed. It has been suggested that information be sent to all Town and Parish Councils at the earliest opportunity.

Affordable housing provision has been discussed. The Head of Development has described this as challenging but has explained that the Council has an exception site policy in both its adopted Core Strategy and the draft Local Plan. However, there can be barriers to this from local opposition. The Council has previously been able to secure grants from Central Government to help fund exception sites and due to the reduction in grants available now allows a proportion of market homes to subsidise the affordable homes built on these sites. It has been confirmed that this change has been communicated to Town/Parish Councils. Exception sites are only sought where

surveys have identified needs and the targeted consultation proposed to remove the requirement for Town/Parish Council support.

Affordable housing on larger sites is affected by viability but the Council is still seeking to maximise this. Retained consultants act as the Council's experts in undertaking viability assessments and these are paid for by the developer but instructed by the Council. Some developers consider that the Council is too hard in its challenges as it does the utmost to secure the best possible deal for communities. The Council is exploring use of its own land for affordable housing development and a report on affordable housing from a working group is due to be presented to the Overview & Scrutiny (Social Well-being) Panel in October.

In response to a comment regarding national criticism of how long local authorities are taking to produce Local Plans, the Head of Development has explained that tests are being applied by inspectors so councils need to ensure that Local Plans meet their requirements. He has confirmed that Huntingdonshire has the five year supply of housing land it is required to have.

Resources for highways and transport modelling have been discussed and it has been confirmed that contributions are being sought from Crest Nicolson, the development partner for the RAF Wyton site, as they will need to prove the viability of the site for housing.

Public transport and parking issues in new developments such as Love's Farm, St Neots have been highlighted. The Panel has been told that the maximum parking standards applied by the Government at the time of the Love's Farm application no longer apply. The District Council is working with the County Council to move towards a monitoring and management approach to mitigate transport issues in new developments.

It has been suggested that the Council needs to ensure that contributions from developers are adjusted where extra homes are added after developments and contributions are approved. It has also been suggested that creating bus stop areas in new housing sites would encourage bus companies to route services through new developments. The Head of Development has undertaken to consider these suggestions in discussion with local bus companies.

## **8. SHARED SERVICES**

The Panel has received a Shared Service Overview report by the Managing Director, setting out the overarching principles to apply to proposed shared services for Legal, ICT and Building Control. The report has previously been discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-being) Panel on 9 July 2015.

Members have queried whether the initial agreement of 5 years, with reviews scheduled for years 2 and 4, is an appropriate term. It has been explained that a 5 year term fits with the Council's financial

planning cycles and scheduled review points would provide an opportunity for testing whether the aims of the shared services were being delivered. However, the shared ambition for the shared services is a long-term arrangement and it is hoped that dispute resolution measures outlined in the report would resolve any issues between parties.

Members have stated that they would have expected the report to provide more information on risks if circumstances changed or a shared service was found not to be a suitable option after its establishment. Members have sought assurance that such risk and associated costs were fully understood if there was a need to opt-out.

Members have stressed that there is a need to ensure that basic ICT support between the Councils is adequate and that systems will work together as ICT problems could present a serious risk to service delivery, as has occurred when Central Government has introduced various high profile systems. The Panel has been informed of the reasoning behind why ICT is one of the first services to be shared so a common IT service can be put in place to support the other shared services across the whole geographical area. Principles being agreed will mean software adopted across all three Councils will not be new to all of the Councils, taking a best fit approach to existing systems.

Scrutiny arrangements for shared services have been discussed as the Panel would like the ability to review and approve any changes proposed by other Councils. It has been confirmed that all three leaders would sit on the proposed Joint Committee but arrangements would allow each authority's Scrutiny panels to 'call in' or request items on shared service matters if appropriate. Budget savings through shared services would appear in each Council's budget reports.

The Panel has recommended that the Cabinet approve the recommendations in the report, subject to the following additional recommendations -

- consider whether the full cost of an exit strategy and associated risks are known and understood;
- consider the need to ensure that the costs of introducing any new ICT systems to support the shared services are well managed; and
- consider whether the safeguards in the sovereignty guarantee are sufficient to allow the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Panels to scrutinise topics related to shared services.

## **9. BUILDING CONTROL SHARED SERVICE BUSINESS CASE**

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

The Panel has been informed that different legal parameters applying to the Building Control service mean that the focus of the shared

service is on resilience rather than just financial savings. The service operates in a commercial environment with private sector competitors and cannot make a profit from fee-earning activities over each rolling 3-year period. This means savings in delivering these activities reduce the amount of income that can be taken. However, the proposal includes savings on non-fee earning activities which are not limited in the same way and seeks to improve resilience in staffing, ensuring the service can respond rapidly to work requests. It would provide staff with more development opportunities and more varied and rewarding work.

It has been explained that there will be an assessment of two ICT systems currently used by the three Councils to determine which is most appropriate. This means that the system adopted for the shared service will not be a new system for all but will be one that is currently supported and in use by at least one of the authorities.

Members have suggested that creating a Building Control shared service would present an opportunity to change the perception of how the public sector delivers these services.

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### **Other Matters of Interest**

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#### **10. 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.

#### **11. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) – PROGRESS**

The Panel has reviewed its work programme at each of its meetings. Members have questioned the lack of progress on Task and Finish Groups/Working Groups relating to Operations Division services. Members have been informed that this is due to the Operations review and restructure. These concerns have been addressed at the Panel's meeting on 16th June 2015 where it has been agreed that these Groups are to be disbanded during the review and restructure.

The Panel has requested an item on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to explain the basics of how it is calculated, collected and how it can be spent as well as detailing what money has been received and how this has been spent to date. It has been agreed that this will be added to the workplan for a future meeting.

#### **12. WORKPLAN STUDIES**

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



The Panel has been informed that a new structure for Overview & Scrutiny Panels has been proposed and that this will be considered as part of the forthcoming review of the Constitution.

**13. SCRUTINY**

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

T D Sanderson  
Chairman