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**TITLE: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT**

Committee: Council

Date: 10 December 2012

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[M185]

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1.0 ISSUE

1.1 To receive a summary of the items considered by the Scrutiny Committee at its meetings on 4 September 2012, 15 October 2012 and 12 November 2012.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 That the report be noted.

3.0 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING 4 SEPTEMBER 2012

3.1 Business Rate Pooling in Cambridgeshire – Proposal to Government

The Committee considered proposals to enter into ‘Growing Cambridgeshire’ – Business Rates Pool for local authorities in Cambridgeshire. It was the first opportunity for Members to look in detail at the proposed new system. Business rates were currently collected locally and returned to the Government. It was then redistributed via a grant scheme, the grants of which bore no resemblance to the actual rates collected. A review of the scheme led to suggestions that local authorities could retain the business rates they collected. As suspected, this was not as straight forward as it appeared, as this would cause funding disparities throughout the country.

The Government would set the baseline on local spending, which would allow the Council to retain business rates up to that baseline. If the Council did not pool its money with other local authorities the excess income above the baseline would be returned to Government and redistributed countrywide. Only 20% would go to the County Council, which was not enough to fund its services. The Government allowed local authorities to pool together, to generate more value for the local economy.

In Cambridgeshire, if this were considered, it would be best if it cut across the districts and the county. So instead of returning money to the Government, the money would be kept within Cambridgeshire.

The Committee questioned whether the Council would lose out such arrangements and what would happen if pooling was not undertaken. As the Council would benefit from pooling, by being able to keep more of the money it generated, it was agreed that this should be recommended.

The Committee resolved to recommend to Finance and Governance Committee that the Council agreed to enter into the Business Rates Pool 'Growing Cambridgeshire'.

### 3.2 Littleport Railway Station – EXEMPT Item

The Committee considered a report which set out the strategy to increase the spaces available for car parking for users of Littleport Railway Station. The need for additional car parking had been identified due to the increased use of the Littleport Station and the District Council supported Littleport Parish Council's action relating to on-street parking. There was no provision to allow people to park on-street and restrictions were being considered.

Potential sites had been considered for extra car parking but a business case would have to be developed, including engagement with landowners. This would involve the engagement of an agent, as the Council did not have the expertise. The Committee wanted to compare potential sites and take into consideration the views of the Parish Council.

The Committee resolved to recommend to Finance and Governance Committee that the strategy and budget implications for increasing car parking provision for users of Littleport Railway Station and to develop a business case be approved.

## 4.0 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING 15 OCTOBER 2012

### 4.1 Review of Commercial Team, Environmental Services Report and Improvement Plan

The Committee considered a report on the Service Review and draft Improvement Plan for the Commercial Team, Environmental Services, including licensing. The Committee looked at the responsibilities of the Team, the types of premises they were responsible for inspecting, some of the problems it faced and the proposals for improvement.

The Committee felt there was further work needed to improve the Improvement Plan so decided to note the progress to date and requested the Head of Environmental Services to report back to Scrutiny Committee and present a final draft Improvement Plan, specifically to address the:-

- budget implications of proposals to changes to establishment within Commercial Services;
- costed IT Improvement Plan as per the recommendations;
- alternative methods of service delivery and proposals for income generation within the Licensing services.

#### 4.2 Review of Provision of Home Improvement Agency Services for East Cambridgeshire District Council – EXEMPT report

The Committee reviewed the draft improvement plan for the provision of Home Improvement Agency (HIA) services for East Cambridgeshire District Council in light of the findings of the review undertaken.

The review had been triggered by Care and Repair, who currently provided the HIA services in the district. The Committee appreciated that the services were of benefit to the district and should continue to be delivered. A number of options for future service were considered.

The Committee decided to recommend that the Development and Transport Committee consider the draft Improvement Plan.

#### 5.0 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING 12 NOVEMBER 2012

##### 5.1 Presentation: Post Offices

Mr Gary Herbert, from Post Offices Limited, gave a presentation explaining the Post Offices Ltd had only been in existence for a few months. It had been awarded a substantial amount of Government money to take forward a investment programme to modernise existing post offices. There was no intention of closing any current branches but to convert them to one of two new models.

Around 4000 of the current branches would be converted to the 'mains' model, which would have longer opening hours, a dedicated area for post office business and the offer of a full range of services. Approximately 2000 branches would change to the 'local' model with open plan arrangements and the offer of between 95-97% of post office transactions. Branches that had already converted had shown a 9% increase in business.

The Committee were very positive over the proposals but wanted to ensure that Parish Councils were consulted and that they would be monitored as part of the process.

##### 5.2 Boundary Commission for England – Revised Proposals (Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries)

The Committee considered revised proposals from the Boundary Commission for England for parliamentary constituency boundaries. The Council had discussed and agreed to the original proposals, which suggested that East Cambridgeshire would be joined by 3 Newmarket Wards in a new constituency.

These proposals had been turned on their head and split the district very differently. It was important for the Council to express its views, although there were restrictions on where objections could be made. A draft response had been prepared stating that the Council agreed to the original proposals.

The Committee were unimpressed with the new proposals and agreed to the urgent action proposed by the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to respond to the Boundary Commission, based on the points detailed in the report.

### 5.3 Service Review of Discretionary Rate Relief

The Committee considered a report detailing the Stage II Discretionary Rate Relief (DRR) Service Review. The Review had looked to find savings but causing minimum disruption to the service. It had compared its services to those of the partnership authorities in the Anglia Revenues Partnership, which found that the services provided were very similar. One main difference was that this Council did not have a percentage cap or set a ceiling on the amount granted, as the Council wanted to help protect businesses during the savings exercise.

A number of options for future service deliver were considered and the one recommended would provide savings of £15,000 (against a set target of £10,000) but with less impact than other options. The Council would also offer business planning to help organisations avoid needing hardship relief.

The Committee were pleased with the outcome of the Review and noted the outcome and recommended that Community and Environment Committee approve the Report and Improvement Plan and take into consideration a public question received and the response at the meeting.

## 6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1 No financial implications associated with this report.

6.2 Equality Impact Assessment (INRA) not required.

## 7.0 APPENDICES

7.1 None.

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<b><u>Background Documents</u></b>	<b><u>Location</u></b>	<b><u>Contact Officer</u></b>
Scrutiny Committee minutes of the meetings held on: 4 September 2012, 15 October 2012 and 12 November 2012.	Room 103 The Grange Ely	John Hill Chief Executive (01353) 665555 E-mail: <a href="mailto:John.hill@eastcambs.gov.uk">John.hill@eastcambs.gov.uk</a>