

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 12 February 2013.

PRESENT: Councillor D Harty – Chairman.

Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, I J Curtis,
J W Davies, D A Giles, G J Harlock,
C R Hyams and Mrs D C Reynolds.

Messrs D Hopkins and M Phillips – Co-opted Members.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors M G Baker and I C Bates.

74. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 15th January 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

75. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor C R Hyams declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 82 by virtue of being a Huntingdon Town Councillor.

76. NOTICE OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel considered and noted the current Notice of Executive Decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which had been prepared by the Executive Leader of the Council for the period 3rd February to 31st May 2013. It was noted that the items entitled Local Plan and Revision of Wind Power Supplementary Planning Document would be submitted to the Panel's March 2013 meeting.

77. PROCURING A GREEN DEAL PARTNER RELATIONSHIP FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE

(Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Member for Environment, was in attendance for consideration of this item).

With the aid of a report by the Head of Environmental Management (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel gave consideration to the establishment of a Countywide Green Deal partnership. The Executive Member for Environment reported that the Home Energy Act required all local authorities actively to promote and report on local Green Deal activity within their area whilst also playing a lead role in its delivery. The scheme would enable households to spend up to £10,000 on energy saving measures within their homes

with repayments made through their energy bills. The “Golden Rule” was that repayments should not exceed the projected cost savings on an average bill for the duration of the green finance arrangement, which could be for as long as 25 years for houses.

The Environment Team Leader acquainted the Panel with the events which had led to the development of a Cambridgeshire Green Deal brand. To date, three of the participating authorities had endorsed the proposals. Members were advised that a joint procurement exercise would be required in order to establish a partner relationship with a fully accredited Green Deal Provider. This would be subject to EU procurement rules and it was intended that local assessors and installers would be involved in the scheme. It was confirmed that the costs of any energy improvements works would be levied upon the property and not homeowners. In response to a question by a Member, it was confirmed that in the case of private rented properties, permission to carry out works would be required from the landlord.

Members’ attention was drawn to the Green Deal investment potential in Huntingdonshire, together with the likely number of leads that might be generated, which was expected to produce an income of around £30,000 - £60,000 per annum for the Council. These projections were based on the findings of a report commissioned by the County Council. The Panel expressed the view that safeguards should be put in place to ensure the scheme did not operate in a way that might damage the Council’s reputation.

Discussion then ensued on the Energy Company Obligation (ECO). The ECO assisted with the installation of energy efficiency measures in hard to treat properties and in vulnerable and fuel poor households. Funding to undertake works to qualifying properties under the ECO would only be available through the Green Deal. The cost would be met by the major energy companies.

The Panel expressed the view that a robust methodology and associated assessment software would be required to support the accreditation and certification of energy improvement assessors and installers. This would guarantee the standard of works undertaken and the probity of the practices employed to sell them and also protect the Council’s reputation. It was further suggested that points of contact within the Council and communities should be established who would act as “trusted” informants about the scheme.

The Panel was also of the view that the Green Deal offer for Cambridgeshire should commence operation as soon as possible. Whilst there was a need to ensure the partnership arrangements with a Green Deal provider and the offer were sound, Members were aware that other providers had started marketing their products and expressed their view that this opportunity should not be missed. In response, the Environment Team Leader reported that adherence to the timescales for the launch of the scheme specified within the report would ensure that this did not happen.

Members commented that the level of referral fees should not form part of the criteria employed to identify the Provider. The Provider should be selected on the basis of its ability to provide high quality

energy saving measures in a responsible way to meet the needs of customers. Following discussion on the role of the Environment Team in generating leads and undertaking marketing activity and having requested that an update report was submitted to the Panel after a year of the scheme's operation, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that, subject to the Panel's comments above, the Cabinet be recommended to endorse the content of the report now submitted by the Head of Environmental Management; and
- (b) that an update on progress of the Green Deal Partnership scheme be submitted to the Panel after 12 months of operation.

78. REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Consideration was given to a report by the joint Working Group, which had been established with the Overview and Scrutiny Panels (Social Well-Being) and (Economic Well-Being) to undertake a review of the effectiveness of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels. A copy of the report is appended in the Minute Book.

In introducing the report, the Internal Audit and Risk Manager indicated that the Panels were generally acting effectively in terms of the discharge of their responsibilities and fulfilling their terms of reference. Members' attention was drawn to a number of opportunities for improvement that would be incorporated into an action plan, which would be subject to review by the Working Group.

In response to a question by Councillor G J Harlock concerning the appointment of Member Champions, it was confirmed that at present there was one Champion whom had been appointed by the Economic Well-Being Panel for the Document Centre. Members considered this to be good practice and expressed the view that it should be further developed. Other matters discussed by the Panel included the need to generate more publicity on their work, ways of encouraging public attendance at meetings and the role of the Panels in influencing decision making. Having regard to the latter, a suggestion that the Working Group should meet with the Executive Leader to discuss opportunities for earlier scrutiny of and involvement in the formulation of policy, was endorsed.

Having noted that the report would also be submitted to the March 2013 meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels (Social Well-Being) and (Economic Well-Being) and the Corporate Governance Panel, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the outcome of the effectiveness review be noted;
- (b) that the opportunities for improvement identified within Annex B to the report now submitted be endorsed for

implementation; and

- (c) that the Working Group be requested to discuss with the Executive Leader opportunities for earlier scrutiny of and involvement in the formulation of policy.

79. AGRICULTURE WORKING GROUP

By means of a report by the Agriculture Working Group (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was advised that the Working Group had completed its investigations into the Council's planning policy framework as it related to agriculture. As part of the investigations, the Working Group had held discussions with local representatives of Linking Environment and Farming and the National Farmers Union and developed a list of matters it was felt should be addressed within Council policy.

The Working Group had reviewed the relevant part of the draft Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 and Members were satisfied that the majority of the matters they had identified were now being addressed. A number of comments had been made on the content of the draft document, which would be reviewed by the Planning Service. Having noted that the Working Group's recommendation relating to the Council's use of consultants when dealing with applications where agriculture was a factor had been accepted by the Development Management Panel, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report now submitted be noted.

80. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of studies being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Social Well-Being and for Economic Well-Being. In respect of the One Leisure Business Plan, Members were advised that the public had been excluded from the meeting when the matter had been considered.

81. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) - PROGRESS

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of actions taken in response to its recent discussions and decisions. Following a query by Mr M Phillips regarding the status of the Waste Collection Working Group, the Panel was advised that an investigation into waste service communications had been completed and the Working Group would consider whether to resume its work once the RECAP studies had been completed. Arising from this, Councillor C R Hyams queried why Members had not been provided with information on the new waste collection rounds, which would be going live on 25th February 2013.

A Co-opted Member referred to the fact that the Landbeach Waste

Management Plant was currently not operational and that this would significantly increase the level of waste directed to landfill. On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman undertook to make enquiries in both respects and to report back thereon to Members. In addition, the Panel requested a breakdown of the current recycling figures with a view to determining what the impact of the situation at Landbeach had been.

82. SCRUTINY

The 131st Edition of the Decision Digest (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) was received and noted.

Chairman