

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) held in the Council Chamber, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 1 April 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, Mrs K E Cooper, J E Garner, D A Giles, Mrs P A Jordan, P G Mitchell, J M Sadler, P K Ursell and J S Watt.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J D Ablewhite and K J Churchill.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor D C Reynolds.

83. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 4th March 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

84. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

85. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000: FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered the Forward Plan of key decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which had been prepared by the Leader of the Council for the period 1st April to 31st July 2008.

The Panel noted that a meeting of the St. Ives Environmental Improvements Advisory Group was currently being arranged and that a report on the adoption of local standards for the provision of sports facilities in Huntingdonshire would be considered at the same meeting of the Panel.

86. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) PROGRESS

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of actions taken in response to recent discussions and decisions.

Members noted that the report on Promoting Health in Older People Through Physical Exercise would be submitted to the Cabinet on 24th April 2008 and that the report on the Town Centre Cleaning Regimes would now be submitted to the June meeting of the Panel.

In relation to Minute No. 07/71, Members were informed that a further meeting of the Grant Aid Working Group had been arranged for early July 2008 at which the Head of Policy and Strategic Services and the Sustainable Economic Development Manager would be present.

87. DISABILITY ACCESS STUDY - UPDATE AND OTHER MATTERS

(Mrs G Bird, Forum Manager for Disability Cambridgeshire (Directions Plus), was in attendance for this item).

The Panel welcomed Mrs G Bird, Forum Manager for Disability Cambridgeshire (Directions Plus) who had been invited to the meeting to discuss the study on Disability Access. Having been reminded with the aid of a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) of progress of the study to date, Mrs Bird advised Members of the background to the services offered by Disability Cambridgeshire in providing information and advice to disabled people and/or older people and carers in Cambridgeshire. Disability Cambridgeshire also provided short courses on disability awareness and lobbied on disability issues. Having shown recordings of two news items to illustrate the latter, Mrs Bird outlined the problem she had experienced with incorrectly installed dropped kerbs and her perception of the causes of abuse of Blue Badge parking permits. In particular, she stated that there was a need to introduce separate permits, which distinguished between those with temporary and permanent disabilities. Mrs Bird concluded by stressing that the Council should incorporate the views of those with disabilities into its policy making.

Members asked a number of questions regarding the installation of dropped kerbs and the application process for obtaining Blue Badge parking permits. The Panel were acquainted with information from Cambridgeshire County Council on the application process and measures currently in place to identify abuses of Blue Badge permits and the enforcement that was undertaken. Having discussed the problems experienced by legitimate Blue Badge holders as a result of the abuses of the system, the Panel asked that clarification be sought on the procedures involved in applying for a permit.

Having discussed the potential benefits of introducing 'Blue Routes' to assist those with disabilities in navigating around the District's towns, the Panel were informed that following consultation, the Papworth Trust had advised that it did not have similar routes in the District. The Panel requested that further investigation be carried out into the existence of a disability 'Blue Route' scheme that was introduced by the Council in previous years.

Further to Minute No. 07/79, the Panel gave further consideration to the provision of advocacy services by disability organisations. Mrs Bird confirmed that Disability Cambridgeshire did provide such a service. She also provided an update on new government requests to introduce a countywide coalition of disabled people.

Finally, Members reiterated their wish to invite a representative of the Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations to a future meeting to discuss the study.

88. OUTCOME OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE SUPPORTING PEOPLE HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY REVIEW

(Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds, Executive Councillor for Housing and Health, was in attendance for this item).

Following an introduction by the Executive Councillor for Housing and Health, the Head of Housing Services presented to the Panel the findings to date of a review of the Cambridgeshire Supporting People Home Improvement Agency (HIA). Having outlined the background to Supporting People, the Head of Housing Services reported on the complex Home Improvement Agency arrangements in Cambridgeshire. Each of the five agencies varied in the range of services they provided and the funding allocated to them. The Panel were informed that the review was intended to ensure that all HIAs were fit for the future, particularly in light of demographic changes in the County. It also made a value for money comparison of the HIAs. In that respect, the Panel noted that the Huntingdonshire HIA carried out the greatest volume of disability housing adaptations for the most economic price, and that the quality of delivery and customer satisfaction levels at the completion of adaptations were high for all HIAs.

Following a question on the likely effect of future market testing on the quality of local services, the Head of Housing Services advised that the current review included an assessment of HIAs' future ability to maintain current standards or improve the services they provide.

Although not part of the review, the Panel raised concerns regarding the length of time taken by Occupational Therapists to carry out assessments of need for home adaptations. In response, the Head of Housing Services informed Members that the Primary Care Trust had provided assurances that additional resources would be made available to ensure that the level of service matched that in other Districts in Cambridgeshire.

89. WORK PROGRAMME AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE EXECUTIVE

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which had been prepared following comments by Members regarding their work programme and engagement with the Executive. Members had expressed concern that few items appearing on the Forward Plan fell within their remit and that this had consequences for their ability to fulfil their function of holding the Executive to account.

Members discussed a suggestion to invite Executive Councillors to a future meeting to plan a programme of work but concluded that, while it would increase levels of pre-scrutiny, it would not increase overall support between the Panel and the Executive.

It was agreed to refer this matter to the next joint Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen's meeting for consideration.

90. SCRUTINY

The 82nd Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

Chairman