

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE SUPPORT) held in the Council Chamber, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 8 April 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor J A Gray – Chairman.

Councillors M G Baker, K M Baker, J T Bell, J W Davies, P J Downes, A N Gilbert, P M D Godfrey, D Harty, Ms S Kemp, L W McGuire, M F Newman, R G Tuplin and R J West.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor P H Dakers.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor D B Dew.

101. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 11th March 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

102. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Ms S L Kemp declared a personal interest in Minute No. 104 as an employee of a subsidiary of Anglian Water.

103. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000: FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered and noted the current Forward Plan of key decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) scheduled for consideration by the Cabinet, which had been prepared by the Leader of the Council.

Members requested that the reports by the Planning Policy Manager on the adoption of the Core Strategy and the Preferred Options for Development Control Policies be submitted to future meetings of the Panel. In respect of the forthcoming item on St Ives environmental improvements, the Head of Administration undertook to ensure that relevant ward Members and Members appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) were invited to attend a forthcoming meeting of the Environmental Improvements Working Group.

As a result of concerns from the Service Delivery Panel about the extent of their workload vis-à-vis that of the Service Support Panel, the Chairman reported that the terms of reference of both Panels would be discussed at a meeting of the Chairmen and Vice Chairmen after the Annual Meeting of the Council in May 2008.

104. SEWERAGE PROBLEMS, ST AUDREY LANE, ST IVES

Further to Minute No. 07/75 the Panel received a report by the Projects and Assets Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the sewerage problems experienced by residents in St Audrey Lane, St Ives and adjacent streets which had been brought to the attention of the Panel by a petition signed by 26 people presented to the February meeting. The report summarised the responsibilities of those parties involved in local drainage and the Projects and Assets Manager provided specific information relating to the pumping station at Broadleas, St Ives, its catchment area and the likely impact of recent development in the area. Attention also was drawn to recent correspondence between the Council and Anglian Water on the specific problems at St Audrey Lane with the company claiming that they received few complaints from local residents. They had indicated that the problem was related to severe weather conditions, that they were not liable for water entering their foul drainage systems illegally and that they had no plans to upgrade the pumping station.

Member's attention was drawn to a recent Statutory Instrument, the Water Supply and Sewerage Services (Customer Service Standards) 2008 which had come into force on 1st April 2008 which had provided for financial compensation to customers for each occurrence of internal and external flooding to domestic properties from foul sewers.

In their role as ward councillors, Councillors J W Davies and D B Dew commented on the scale of development in the vicinity of St Audrey Lane which they suggested had exacerbated the situation. In particular they expressed concern over a perceived lack of infrastructure planning to cope with the impact of recent developments on the sewerage system.

Having regard to the claim by Anglian Water that they did not receive sufficient complaints to justify upgrading the pumping station, the Panel reiterated the need for local residents to report all incidents of sewage flooding to Anglian Water when they occurred. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- a) that the Chairman be authorised to invite a representative from Anglian Water to attend a future meeting to discuss the way forward;
- b) that in the event of Anglian Water choosing to accept the invitation, Councillors K Baker, M G Baker and J W Davies be appointed to a working group for the purpose of gathering further information from local residents about the extent and frequency of the problem;
- c) that details of the recent statutory instrument on compensation for occupiers who had be flooded be provided to all Members; and

- d) that all Members be informed of the Panel's investigations and invited to identify any other areas within the District which had experienced similar problems in advance of the discussion with Anglian Water.

105. REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY - DRAFT POLICY ON PLANNING FOR GYPSY & TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION

With the aid of a joint report by the Heads of Planning Services and of Housing Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel gave consideration to the Council's suggested response to a draft policy by the East of England Regional Assembly on the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers within local authority planning areas.

The Planning Policy Manager explained that, in terms of the future requirements for pitches in Huntingdonshire, the draft policy was consistent with the level of need identified in the 2005 Gypsy and Traveller Assessment. It had been proposed that provision beyond 2011 should be made on the basis of a 3% increase per annum, which would equate to a further 18 pitches being required for the period 2011 – 21. Members were advised that a future review of the policy would need to take into account the need for transit sites and the needs of travelling show people.

In discussing the report, Members endorsed the recommendations as a practical and sensible approach to the draft policy. However concerns were expressed about the potential for some authorities to object to the proposed allocation because they wished to make no or inadequate provision for gypsies and travellers in their areas. Any consequential re-distribution of pitches could adversely impact on Huntingdonshire's current proposed allocation and the report made it clear that, in such circumstances, the Council would wish to reserve its position and consider the response

In reply to a question by the Chairman, the Planning Policy Manager informed the Panel that the preparation of a Development Plan Document (DPD) to determine sites for gypsies and travellers in the District was unlikely to be finalised until some time in 2009 as part of the Local Development Framework (LDF). Concerns were expressed by Members in relation to the potential difficulty in dealing with unauthorised encampments and determining planning applications in the interim. Reference was made to a number of specific locations within the District where planning issues had risen in respect of gypsies and travellers and concerns were expressed about a growing number of temporary permissions being granted if sites were not earmarked at an early stage. With this in mind, Members suggested that the DPD on site provision should be developed as soon as practicable within the LDF timescale.

RESOLVED

that the report be endorsed and the Cabinet informed of the Panel's views on the matter.

106. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel considered and noted a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the Panel's programme of studies.

The Head of Administration reported that the outcome of the Panel's review into town centre initiatives had been considered by the Cabinet at their meeting on the 3rd April 2008. The Cabinet had agreed to invite the four Town Centre Partnerships to enter into three year funding agreements with the District Council which would require them to produce a business plan with annual action plans and targets.

Members were informed that meetings of the Study Groups investigating a Parish Charter for Huntingdonshire and parking for Heavy Good Vehicles would be convened shortly.

With reference to the study into Section 106 Agreements, the Panel agreed that the Working Group should meet with the Leader of the Council in the first instance to establish the work currently being undertaken by the Cabinet on the subject and to seek to avoid any duplication of effort between Scrutiny and the executive.

RESOLVED

- a) that Councillor T D Sanderson be co-opted to the membership of the Section 106 Working Group; and
- b) that Councillor D Harty be requested to act as the rapporteur for the Working Group.

107. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (SERVICE SUPPORT) PROGRESS

The Panel considered and noted a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the Panel's progress to date on issues that had been discussed previously.

In referring to the recent study of the Council's Travel Plan, the Chairman reported that the Panel's recommendations in respect of Members Allowances had been endorsed by the Corporate Governance Panel and would be considered by the full Council at its meeting on 16th April 2008.

Councillor R J West reported on his recent attendance at the Cambridgeshire Together: Joint Accountability Committee, the Minutes of which had been circulated to all Members of the Panel for information.

In respect of other matters contained within the report, Members noted that a questionnaire had now been developed to invite comments from all Members on the operation of the procedure for public speaking at meetings of the Development Control Panel which would be issued within the next week. The Chairman reported that he had requested a copy of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment and would be considering the way forward.

108. DECISION DIGEST

The Panel considered and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest, summarising the Council's decisions made in the past month.

Arising from a question, the Head of Administration undertook to circulate details of the "Manifesto for Councils" published by the Local Government Information Unit to Members of the Panel.

Chairman