

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, 7 October 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, Mrs M Banerjee, Mrs K E Cooper, Mrs J A Dew, J E Garner, P Godley, Mrs P A Jordan, P G Mitchell, M F Shellens and J S Watt.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors E R Butler, J M Sadler, Ms M J Thomas and P K Ursell.

33. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 2nd September 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

34. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor S J Criswell declared a personal interest in Minute No. 37 by virtue of his membership of Cambridgeshire County Council.

35. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000: FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered the current 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 October 2008 to 31st January 2009. In so doing, the Panel were informed that the Community Engagement item had been deferred to the Panel's November meeting.

Having noted the addition of the item on Amendments to Disabled Facilities Grants Legislation and having been reminded of the Panel's previous concerns relating to the length of time taken by Occupational Therapists to carry out assessments of need for home adaptations, the Panel requested for an update on the Occupational Therapy service for a future meeting.

The Grant Aid Working Group were requested to ensure that the Decent Homes Grant scheme was incorporated into their investigations.

36. FLEXIBLE WORKING STRATEGY

(Councillor L M Simpson, Executive Councillor for Customer Services and Information Technology, was in attendance for this item).

Following an introduction to the subject by Councillor L M Simpson,

the Panel received a presentation by Mr M Hinton, Senior Business Analyst, on the Council's progress in respect of flexible working. Having been informed of the background to the Flexible Working Strategy, Members were acquainted with the benefits that flexible working would bring.

The Panel were informed that the Corporate Mobile Working Project had resulted in technological developments being deployed within service departments, particularly the enforcement of car parking, with the roll out of mobile devices, which was in addition to a new back office system and processes. Other developments included the introduction of touchdown working and the use of digital pens, Blackberrys for some core workers and, potentially, integrated electronic forms.

The use of Remote Access Technology through the "My Office" system now meant that employees who regularly worked from home and Members had greatly improved remote access to the Council's network. A security key fob system provided an additional level of security for those using the Council's information technology systems from home.

With regard to the Full Time Home Working Pilot, Members were informed that this involved employees who had volunteered to take part from the Revenues and Benefits and Environmental and Community Health Services Divisions. This pilot had been led by the Human Resources and Payroll Services Division and it was anticipated that the results would be submitted to the Panel's November meeting.

Members asked a number of questions relating to the financial implications of introducing the initiatives referred to and the level of savings achieved. In response, it was reported that all projects had been implemented from within existing budgets and that although the level of savings achieved had not yet been identified, efficiency savings had been generated in terms of work processes and financial savings on staff travel and on expenses claims. It was planned to undertake further business process redesign. The Panel were of the view that the savings should be quantified.

In response to a question by the Chairman regarding the management of employees and monitoring of their performance whilst working full time from home, the Panel were assured that, as for all officers, appropriate performance management systems were in place, which enabled Managers to identify poor performance. Finally, Members expressed the view that care should be taken to avoid any adverse effects on team spirit caused by individuals working away from their teams.

37. CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH JOINT MUNICIPAL WASTE STRATEGY

(Councillor C R Hyams, Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services, was in attendance for this item).

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel were acquainted

with the contents of a revised Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Joint Municipal Waste Strategy.

By way of background, the Head of Operations, Mr R Ward, reported that the original Strategy had been adopted by the Council in 2002 and that the Recycling Plans appended to the Strategy had been reviewed in 2005. Members' attention was drawn to partner authorities' achievement of performance targets for recycling and composting. As a result the revised Strategy focused on new priority areas such as business waste and environmental issues. The revised Strategy would have no financial implications for the Council.

In response to a question by the Chairman, Mr Ward reported that actions to reduce the impact of waste management activities on climate change would only be pursued where they were financially viable. Following a further question on the effects of the closure of the Buckden waste disposal facility, Mr Ward confirmed that this had made no difference to the distances travelled by the Council's refuse vehicles and that it had produced benefits in terms of reduced damage to vehicles.

In the course of further discussions questions were raised regarding the level of commercial waste generated in the District and the measures that had been introduced to encourage commercial waste recycling. Mr Ward reported that external funding had been received to carry out pilot studies into recycling initiatives for small businesses with a view to introducing schemes across the County. Having endorsed the content of the Strategy, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to approve the adoption of the revised Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Joint Municipal Waste Strategy.

38. ENHANCED CLEANSING SERVICES

(Councillor C R Hyams, Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services, was in attendance for this item).

Pursuant to Minute No. 20, the Panel considered a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the Cabinet's response to the Panel's recommendations arising from the study on Enhanced Cleansing Services for the District's market towns.

Having noted the Cabinet's requests for further information on the operational issues associated with the scope of the areas to be cleaned and the delivery of the service, the Head of Operations confirmed that those areas highlighted within the plans originally circulated with the report represented the minimum deemed necessary for cleansing. Having regard to the Cabinet's concerns relating to the effect of early morning noise on residents living within the vicinity of the areas to be cleaned, it was reported that the proposed cleansing service would be limited to the emptying of litter bins and the use of small mechanical road sweepers. In addition, it was noted that whilst employees would report to Eastfield House at

6:00am, work in the market towns would not start until approximately 7.30am.

The Panel endorsed the view that financial contributions should be sought from the Town Councils but stressed that this should only be done once the Cabinet had agreed the principle of providing an enhanced cleansing service. This would then enable the Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services to arrange for a financial proposal to be prepared for consideration as part of the Council's Medium Term Planning process. It was, therefore

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be formally notified of the Panel's responses to the points of clarifications sought.

39. ALCOHOL DISORDER ZONES

Pursuant to the Panel's study on Enhanced Cleansing Services (Minute No. 38 *ante* refers), the Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on Alcohol Disorder Zones. Having noted that the introduction of Zones could only be used to address nuisance and annoyance to members of the public in relation to alcohol consumption and could, therefore, not be applied to other problems associated with late night entertainment such as hot food outlets and litter, the Panel decided that it would not be appropriate to pursue this in the context of the present study.

RESOLVED

that the position with regard to the power to designate Alcohol Disorder Zones be noted.

40. IMPROVING LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY CONSULTATION CHANGES TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY POWERS

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained suggested responses to questions raised in a consultation exercise by the Department for Communities and Local Government following the recent publication of the White Paper - Communities in Control. The consultation originated from the Strong and Prosperous Communities White Paper in 2006. Since then the Panel had considered changes to overview and scrutiny powers introduced by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, namely the use of local petitions and calls for action (Minute No. 70 refers).

In discussing the suggested responses to the consultation, the Panel expressed general support for area scrutiny committees operating on a district basis, especially given the need to scrutinise the Local Area Agreement and the Local Strategic Partnership and their effect on Huntingdonshire. Members went on to emphasise that it was councillors rather than officers whom the public should hold to account. It was, however, suggested that, if officers were to be held to account, this should apply only to officers of other bodies with which the Council was in partnership.

With regard to the general aim of the measures referred to in the consultation document, which was to increase public interest in overview and scrutiny, the Panel suggested that the relevant area of the Council's website should be updated on a regular basis on the Panel's progress. Finally, it was observed that, should this aim be achieved, there would be resource implications for the way overview and scrutiny was supported. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the comments outlined above, the suggested responses appended to the report now submitted be endorsed for submission to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

41. STRATEGIC HEALTH AUTHORITY: STRATEGIC VISION DOCUMENT

The Panel received and noted the content of a report by the Strategic Health Authority (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) outlining the Strategic Vision of the National Health Service over the next 10 years.

42. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) - STUDIES

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. Meetings of the Grant Aid and the Adoption of Roads and Sewers Working Groups would be held in the near future.

43. SCRUTINY

The 87th Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

Chairman