

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, 2 December 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

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

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs P A Jordan.

53. MINUTES

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

54. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor P G Mitchell declared a personal interest under Minute No. 61 by virtue of his involvement in the Stilton Skate Park.

55. FREE SWIMMING FOR OVER 60S AND UNDER 17S

The Chairman reported that in accordance with Article 16 of the Access to Information Rules contained in the Council's Constitution, he had given consent to an item relating to free swimming for over 60s and under 17s to be submitted as an item of urgency to the meeting of the Cabinet held on 20th November 2008. Members were reminded that Article 16 required the Chairman to report upon his actions to the next ensuing meeting of the Panel.

56. 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 December 2008 to 31st March 2009. Members were reminded that an item on Older Persons Housing Strategy Update would be submitted to their meeting in March and that items on the ICT and Web Strategies would be circulated shortly with any comments being made directly to the relevant Executive Councillor.

57. CUSTOMER SERVICE DEVELOPMENT IN ST IVES AND ST NEOTS

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

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel were acquainted with the outcome of a review of the services delivered by the St Ives and St Neots Customer Service Centres.

In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Customer Services and Information Technology reported that the review had been prompted following the adoption of the Customer Service Strategy in February 2008. The Head of Customer Services, Mrs J Barber, provided Members with an overview of the services being provided at each of the Customer Service Centres and reported upon the research conducted and the findings of the review, together with their financial and staffing implications.

Having expressed general support for the recommendations proposed within the report, the Panel discussed the evidence provided to support the conclusions reached. The Panel commented that the survey findings required the support of further research data. Other matters that were discussed included the importance of offering customers a private meeting area, a suggestion to incorporate other services and facilities within the proposals such as the Shopmobility Scheme, the importance of locating the Customer Service Centres in an accessible and highly visible location and the need to consult with Ward Councillors on any proposals to change the location of the Centres. In terms of pursuing alternative accommodation, the Panel commented that this would be timely as it would enable negotiations on rent and rates to be undertaken with prospective landlords in a potentially advantageous market for the Council.

The Panel acknowledged the financial implications for St Neots Museum of amalgamating the two current offices in St Neots but they concurred with a suggestion that the customer service facility should be a single unit as it would enable efficiency savings to be achieved. Consideration has also been given to the long term planning developments and proposals for St Neots and the likely affect this would have on how the town centre was construed. Councillor P K Ursell expressed the view that the Customer Service Centre in St Neots should remain in the Priory Centre area and, as a result, clarification was sought on the Town Council's position on the District Council's facility located within the Priory Centre.

Having suggested that the provision of outreach services in larger villages should also be investigated as part of the proposals, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to

- (a) note the proposed increase in the range of services in St Ives and St Neots;

- (b) approve in principle the relocation of the St Neots Tourist Information Centre and the merging of staff into the main Customer Service Team;
- (c) approve the investigation of alternative accommodation in St Neots and St Ives and, subject to budgetary consideration, authorise the Director of Commerce and Technology after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Customer Services and Information Technology to complete moves to new premises; and
- (d) note the Panel's views on the contents of the report by the Head of Customer Services.

58. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing details of the Council's performance against its priority objectives. Having endorsed the comments made by the Corporate Plan Working Group (a copy of which is also appended in the Minute Book) the Panel's attention was drawn to two areas in which the Council had not achieved its targets. With regard to the objective to promote energy efficiency to householders through the Warmer Homes for Life Scheme, Members concurred with the Working Group's recommendation that further means should be taken to promote the scheme. It was suggested that the high levels of performance to date indicated that delays in excess of the target were not significant and that the performance reflected seasonal trends. Furthermore, it was noted that the allocation of additional resources in order to achieve the target was demonstrative of the fact that the performance management process was operating as intended.

In terms of the key measure relating to the percentage of affordable housing (commitments) on qualifying sites, the Panel were advised that the target was likely to be amended to 35% to reflect the target in the Regional Spatial Strategy. Having expressed satisfaction with the levels of performance achieved in the year to date, the Panel

RESOLVED

- (a) that the report be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet; and
- (b) that the Cabinet be formally notified of the Panel's views on the contents of the report by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services.

59. CARE QUALITY COMMISSION: ENFORCEMENT POLICY CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

The Panel considered the contents of a consultation document (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) issued by the Care Quality Commission on its draft enforcement policy. The Commission had been established as an independent regulator of health, mental health and adult social care in England, which brought together the

work of the three Commissions for Social Care Inspection, Healthcare and Mental Health.

Having discussed the questions raised in the consultation document, Members expressed their view that care services should be tightly regulated. However, concern was expressed at the proposed use of financial penalties which could be detrimental to the level of patient care being delivered and might result in some facilities ceasing to operate. Members also commented on the absence of any reference to the Local Involvement Network (LINK) and an inconsistency in the criteria for conducting a formal investigation.

In acknowledging the complexity of the framework represented in the consultation document, it was agreed that a representative of the Care Quality Commission should be invited to attend the Panel's January meeting to deliver a presentation on its work. In noting that the consultation period would end on 16th January 2009, prior to submitting its response, the Panel

RESOLVED

- (a) that a representative of the Care Quality Commission be invited to attend the Panel's January meeting; and
- (b) that a report outlining the Panel's response to the consultation be submitted to the next meeting.

60. ENHANCED CLEANSING SERVICES

Pursuant to Minute No. 38, the Panel received and noted 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 in the District's market towns. Having noted that the Cabinet had endorsed the principle of introducing enhanced cleansing in Sundays but that further work was required before its implementation could be considered, Members requested clarification of how this work would be completed.

61. IMPACT OF THE NEW A14 IN TERMS OF AIR QUALITY AND NOISE POLLUTION

Pursuant to Minute No. 14, Councillor M F Shellens reported upon his initial findings on the potential impact that the new A14 would have on air quality and noise pollution. Having been advised that relevant information contained in the Local Air Quality Management Further Review and Assessment Report had been presented at a previous meeting of the Licensing and Protection Panel, Councillor M F Shellens undertook to discuss this document with Officers in the Planning and Environmental and Community Health Services Divisions.

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

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the Panel's programme of studies and providing an opportunity for Members to add to their work programme. In discussing the programme of existing studies, Members noted that the final report on Disability Access would be submitted to the next meeting. Members also endorsed a suggestion that Councillor P G Mitchell should attend the relevant Cabinet meeting to present the Panel's report on Grant Aid.

Members discussed future potential study areas, including trends in the value of recycled materials and the provision of leisure facilities for young people. The Chairman also provided background to the consultation arrangements on the future governance of Hinchingbrooke Hospital and reported that the matter would be discussed further at the next meeting.

RESOLVED

- (a) that progress in relation to ongoing studies be noted; and
- (b) that scoping reports on trends in the value of recycled materials and the provision of leisure facilities for young people be submitted to future meetings of the Panel.

63. SCRUTINY

The 89th Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

Chairman