

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, 6 January 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

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

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs J A Dew and Ms M J Thomas.

64. MINUTES

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

65. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor S J Criswell declared a personal interest in Minute Nos. 67 and 70 by virtue of his membership of Cambridgeshire County Council.

Councillor Mrs M Banerjee declared a personal interest under Minute No. 67 by virtue of her membership of Cambridgeshire County Council's Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Mrs P A Jordan declared a personal interest under Minute No. 67 by virtue of her employment - the National Health Service.

66. 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 January to 30th April 2009. Having noted the addition of items on the Leisure Facilities Strategy and Structure Review Working Group Findings, the Panel requested sight of these reports at future meetings.

Members were reminded that an item on Older Persons Housing Strategy Update would be submitted to their meeting in March and that the ICT Strategy would be circulated shortly with any comments being made directly to the relevant Executive Councillor.

67. FUTURE GOVERNANCE OF HINCHINGBROOKE HOSPITAL: CONSULTATION ARRANGEMENTS

The Panel received a presentation by Dr S Dunn, Director of Strategy and Hinchingsbrooke Next Steps Project Co-ordinator for the East of England Strategic Health Authority, on forthcoming proposals for the future governance and operation of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital. Ms J Bawden, Director of Communications, NHS Cambridgeshire was in attendance for this item. The Panel also received and noted a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of the background to and issues associated with the governance of the Hospital and the associated consultation.

Dr Dunn reported upon the outcome of the formal public consultation led by Cambridgeshire PCT on the future of clinical services provided at the Hinchingsbrooke site. The second of the options identified for the purpose of the consultation, which sought to provide broadly the same range of services at lower volumes through redesign of services across the hospital and the community setting, had emerged as the preferred option. In order to take this proposal forward, the Panel were advised that, following the formation of a Project Board and Project Team established under the East of England Strategic Health Authority, a number of governance models for the Trust had been explored and a franchised agreement for a defined period had been selected as the preferred model. Dr Dunn outlined the main features of an operating franchise, its potential strengths and the competitive process through which a franchisee would be identified.

Subject to the Government accepting the new governance arrangements, extensive consultation was planned prior to their introduction. Having been apprised of details of the proposed approach to public engagement that it was intended to adopt, Members noted a proposal for a Stakeholder Panel to be established, which would aim to brief, involve and consult with interested groups and parties. Dr Dunn reported that the Stakeholder Panel would be chaired by the District Council's Chief Executive.

A number of questions were raised by the Panel, particularly with regard to the potential of the competition exercise to facilitate the repayment of the Hospital's existing debt and enable future subsidy of services should market testing establish that it was required. Members also discussed the role of the Government and the course of action should the Government not approve the franchise proposal. In response to expressions of concern, it was reported that the range and quality of services would be ensured by the contract specification, which would be part of the Stakeholder Panel's deliberations. It was expected that patient choice would make it possible to attract greater numbers of patients. Following a further question, Members were reassured that there was no intention to sell any land or buildings currently in the Hospital's ownership. Having also been assured that a franchise was a robust model employed by other Strategic Health Authorities, the Panel was advised of the cost of the process to date and the likely timescale for its completion.

The Chairman thanked Dr Dunn and Ms Bawden for their attendance at the meeting.

68. HOMELESSNESS AND THE HOUSING MARKET

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

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Housing Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute) containing an analysis of current national and local economic factors affecting the housing market and the associated demand for social rented housing, together with details of a proposal to re-model Coneygear Court. Members were reminded that the report had been requested following their deliberations on the Council's quarterly performance monitoring report at the previous meeting (Minute No. 58 refers).

By way of introduction, the Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health reported that a number of initiatives had been put in place to address the effects of the economic downturn in terms of preventing homelessness and home repossessions. Members were encouraged to note that locally there had not been a significant increase in home repossessions compared with the same period in the previous year.

Having outlined the partnership working in which the Council was engaged in this area, the Head of Housing Services reported that a range of services was available to residents experiencing financial difficulties and that they were encouraged to seek advice at the earliest opportunity. In anticipating that demand for housing services was likely to increase significantly over the course of the next year, the Panel also acknowledged that the Housing Service was currently operating at maximum capacity. As a result the Panel decided to request the Cabinet to look sympathetically on future requests for additional resources to meet any further increases in demand should they materialise.

With regard to the re-modelling of Coneygear Court, the Panel were advised that the Council would be supporting the bid for external funding by Granta Housing Society for the redevelopment of the site. Members were advised that should the bid be unsuccessful, other funding options would be explored. In response to concerns raised by Members, the Panel received assurances from the Head of Housing Services that interim arrangements would be made to accommodate occupiers of the property during the construction period.

Having commended the Housing Service for its response to the current economic conditions and stressed the importance of publicising the services that were available, the Panel

RESOLVED

- (a) that the initiatives in place to help prevent a rise in mortgage repossessions in the District be noted;
- (b) that the issues around identifying capital funding for the re-modelling of Coneygear Court be noted; and

- (c) that the Cabinet be formally notified of the Panel's views on the need for additional resources to be made available to the Housing Department should increases in demand for services arise.

69. CARE QUALITY COMMISSION: ENFORCEMENT POLICY CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Pursuant to Minute No. 59, the Panel considered a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute) seeking endorsement of the Panel's response to the Care Quality Commission's proposed enforcement policy for the regulation of health and adult social care services.

In response to their previous request, Members were advised that as the Commission would not begin operating until 1st April 2009, a representative was not at present able to attend one of the Panel's meetings. In that light, it was agreed that an invitation to attend a future Panel meeting should be extended to the Commission in the spring. In noting that the consultation period for the proposed enforcement policy would end on 16th January 2009, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the response set out in the report as appended be endorsed for submission to the Care Quality Commission.

70. DISABILITY ACCESS STUDY

Pursuant to Minute No. 19, the Panel considered the final report on the study into Disability Access across the District (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). Members were reminded that a Working Group had been established to review the findings of the study and to compile the Panel's final report. Having discussed the timescale within which a review of the outcome of the study should be conducted, and in nominating the Chairman to attend the relevant Cabinet meeting to present the Panel's report, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that subject to minor textual amendments, the Panel's report on Disability Access be approved for submission to the Cabinet; and
- (b) that a further report reviewing the outcome of the study be submitted to the Panel in six months time.

71. 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.

Members received an update from Councillor J S Watt on a recent meeting of the Adoption of Roads and Sewers Working Group and in so doing, they noted the scope of Government plans to transfer responsibility for privately owned sewers and lateral drains in England to statutory water and sewerage companies. In addition, it was reported that investigations into the procedure for the adoption of roads were ongoing and that a further meeting of the Working Group had been arranged for 29th January 2009.

72. SCRUTINY

The 90th Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

73. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Panel would be held on Tuesday, 3rd February 2009 at 7:00pm in the Wren Room, Countryside Centre, Hinchbrooke Country Park.

Chairman