

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) held in the Kestrel Room, Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, PE29 6DB on Tuesday, 7 April 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, 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 Mrs M Banerjee, J M Sadler, Ms M J Thomas and P K Ursell.

### **92. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **93. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillor S J Criswell declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Minute No. 99 by virtue of his membership of the Structure Review Working Group and left the meeting for the duration of discussion on this item.

Councillor Mrs J A Dew declared a personal interest in Minute No. 97 by virtue of her membership of the Huntingdonshire Traffic Management Area Joint Committee.

### **94. 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 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2009. In so doing, the Panel requested sight of items entitled St Ivo and St Neots Leisure Centres – Proposals for Development, Carbon Management Plan, Sustainable Communities Act and Leisure Centres Performance Monitoring Report prior to their consideration by the Cabinet. Additionally, it was requested that the Corporate Equality Policy Action Plan Progress Report be circulated informally to Panel Members.

**95. REVIEW OF THE HOME-LINK SCHEME AND THE COUNCIL'S LETTINGS POLICY**

*(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 Book) detailing the outcome of a review of Home-Link, the choice based lettings scheme, and the Council's Lettings Policy. By way of background, Members were advised of the work undertaken to review the Home-Link scheme, which comprised an examination of strategic and operational aspects of the scheme and consultation with housing association partners, statutory and voluntary agencies and customers of the scheme. Having been encouraged by the reported level of users' satisfaction with the scheme, Members noted that a significant proportion of customers experienced difficulty in understanding the mechanics of the scheme and that some users required assistance to bid for properties. As a result, it was reported that efforts would be made to inform potential users and raise awareness generally of the support that was available to them, particularly to those on the Housing Register.

With regard to the Council's Lettings Policy, the review had concluded that the current policy was adequate to meet local need and that only a minor amendment to the re-prioritisation of homeless persons who were sleeping rough to a Band B priority was required. Having expressed support for the amendment, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to

- (a) note the findings of the review of the Home-Link scheme;
- (b) support the proposal for the amendment to the Council's Lettings Policy for homeless rough sleepers; and
- (c) take into account the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) during their deliberations on this item.

**96. SPORTS FACILITIES STRATEGY**

*(Councillors D B Dew, Executive Councillor for Leisure, Mrs D C Reynolds, Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health and L M Simpson, Deputy Leader of the Council, were in attendance for this item).*

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) proposing the adoption of a Sports Facilities Strategy for Huntingdonshire. In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Leisure informed Members of the background to the Strategy and reminded the Panel that standards had been adopted

for the five core sports facilities in September 2008. The proposed Strategy examined all other known sports facilities in Huntingdonshire and would help to achieve an adequate range of facilities to meet future need.

The Panel were advised that the Strategy attempted to identify all sports facilities within the District, inclusive of those owned by the private, voluntary and education sectors. In addition, it has been reported that the data had been compared with national recommended levels of provision for a specified level of population and that the results would be used to inform the future provision of sports facilities in the District. Members discussed anticipated population growth in future years, particularly in St Neots, and the importance of the Building Schools for the Future Programme for the achievement of increased levels of provision within the District.

The Panel discussed the fact that the required level of provision sometimes did not take into account some existing provision, such as smaller sports halls, which had been discounted owing to their lack of flexibility. When such facilities were taken into account, there was little difference between existing levels of provision and the projected need. It was suggested that this might account for survey findings on available space and on satisfaction levels.

In response to a question by a Member, the Panel received assurances that the Leisure Development Service had adequate officer resources to assist sports clubs to obtain external funding, grant aid or sponsorship to enhance their facilities. The Panel also commented that while 69% of the District's residents found it easy / fairly easy to get to a sport / leisure facility, one third of the population found this difficult. Furthermore, this figure did not reflect the level of difficulty potential users experienced in getting to facilities. This issue would need to be addressed if the exercise to match the population to the levels of facilities was to translate into actual usage.

Having been advised that the Council would not be solely responsible for being the provider of new facilities and in expressing their support for the adoption of the Strategy, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to adopt the Sports Facilities Strategy for Huntingdonshire.

## **97. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS TO ST IVES TOWN CENTRE**

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Environmental Management (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel were acquainted with the outcome of a consultation exercise undertaken by the Council as part of the second phase of environmental improvements to the Market Hill and Bridge Street areas of St Ives. Members were reminded that their role in the process was to ensure that the Environmental Improvements Protocol previously approved by the Cabinet had been adhered to in advance of any works being carried out.

The Panel were advised that the consultation had revealed that there

was no clear majority amongst respondents for any of the three options that had been presented for consultation. It was reported that the results of the consultation had been subject to scrutiny by an Advisory Group, comprising County, District and Town Councillors, together with Panel representatives and representatives from local groups such as the Town Partnership, the Access Group and the Civic Society. The Advisory Group had suggested that as no consensus for any of the options had been gained, the scheme should be deferred from its planned start date of January 2010 to enable a review of the options to take place. Additionally, the view had been expressed that the deferment would be timely given the current economic climate and the impact that works would have on local retailers within the Town and upon the planned celebrations of the Town's 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2010.

Having expressed their satisfaction that the Environmental Improvements Protocol has been adhered to, the Panel considered the proposed options available to the Council. The Panel has concluded that the preferred option should be the deferral of the scheme. It was further suggested that the situation should be reviewed in 12 months time to allow for the formulation of a scheme which more adequately suited the requirements of the Town. It was also suggested that financial contributions should be sought from the County and St Ives Town Councils. Whereupon, it was

#### RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to

- (a) note the progress of the scheme and the results of the consultation to date;
- (b) defer the project and review the scheme in 12 months to allow time for the production of a scheme which more adequately suits the requirements of the Town; and
- (c) seek financial contributions towards the cost of the scheme from the County and St Ives Town Councils.

#### **98. RECYCLING**

Pursuant to Minute No. 08/62, the Panel were acquainted with the outcome of recent negotiations relating to the contract for the processing and onward sale of recyclable materials. The Head of Operations reported that, in light of recent market trends, the gate fees under the current contract had been varied. Having noted that the contract would end in November 2009, the Panel were informed that a tendering process currently was being undertaken for a new contract in conjunction with Fenland District Council and Cambridge City Council.

## 99. REVIEW OF DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURE

### Councillor J D Ablewhite in the Chair.

*(See Minute No. 93 for Members' Interests)*

*(Councillor K J Churchill, Special Advisor to the Cabinet, was in attendance for this item).*

The Panel received a report by the Structure Review Working Group (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) summarising the findings of an extensive review of the Council's democratic structure, together with the initial thoughts of the Cabinet on the proposed recommendations. In introducing the report, the Special Advisor to the Cabinet acquainted Members with the background to the review, namely the political composition of the Working Group, the changing role of the local authority Councillor, the review methodology and the legislative position of the authority. Additionally, it was reported that two presentations on the outcome of the review had been delivered to all Members in March.

Whilst Members expressed support for many of the Working Group's recommendations, some concerns were expressed in relation to the financial implications of the recommendations, particularly in terms of the Special Responsibility Allowances proposed for the additional Cabinet Member and for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the additional Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Specifically, Members did not support the proposal relating to the adoption of a Speaker at Council meetings.

Having thanked the Working Group for their efforts in producing a thorough and comprehensive report, it was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) and the Corporate Governance Panel would also have an opportunity to comment on the report prior to final considerations by the Cabinet at a special meeting on 17th April 2009.

### RESOLVED

with the exception of the points listed below, that the Cabinet be recommended to endorse the recommendations of the Structure Review Working Group as summarised in the report now submitted:

- recommendation (b) – subject to a detailed consideration of the relative workloads of portfolios and the funding of the financial implications;
- recommendation (n) – subject to the opportunity for Independent Members to choose the subject of debate alongside opposition parties;
- recommendation (o) – subject to the deletion of the word “annual”;
- recommendation (p) – that this recommendation is not supported;

- recommendation (s) – subject to the prior setting of evaluation criteria for the trial;
- recommendation (aa) – that further consideration be given to the membership of the Panel and the views of ELAG;
- recommendation (hh) – subject to it excluding significant partnerships where other arrangements apply; and
- recommendation (rr) – that the Working Group be invited to consider alternative options for funding the proposed changes.

**100. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH ACT 2007 - IMPLICATIONS FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

**Councillor S J Criswell in the Chair.**

With the aid of a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel were acquainted with legislative changes affecting Overview and Scrutiny, which had arisen from the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The changes introduced a Councillor Call for Action, which would enable any Member of the Council to refer to an Overview and Scrutiny Panel any local government matter relevant to the functions of that Panel. In noting that the changes would require alterations to the Council Procedure Rules and Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, the Panel endorsed the content of a guide outlining the process for making a Councillor Call for Action.

The Panel's attention also was drawn to changes which affect the scope of the Panels' work and the way in which Overview and Scrutiny reports and recommendations were responded to. Additionally, there were new provisions for joint scrutiny arrangements between the County and District Councils. Legislation relating to the scrutiny of crime and disorder matters was expected to come in to force at the end of April 2009.

**RESOLVED**

- (a) that the changes outlined in the report now submitted that take effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 be noted;
- (b) that the Head of Democratic and Central Services be authorised, after consultation with the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chairman, to determine whether a Councillor Call for Action should be included on a Panel Agenda and which Panel is the most appropriate;
- (c) that the Corporate Governance Panel be recommended to approve the changes required to the Council Procedure Rules as set out in Annex A to the

report now submitted; and

- (d) that the Corporate Governance Panel be recommended to approve the guide for the Councillor Call for Action as set out in Annex B to the report now submitted.

**101. NHS CAMBRIDGESHIRE STRATEGIC PLAN 2009 - 2014**

With the aid of a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was acquainted with details of a consultation exercise being undertaken by NHS Cambridgeshire on its Strategic Plan for the period 2009 – 2014. In noting that the consultation period would end on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2009, and in advance of submitting a response to the consultation, the Panel decided to meet with a representative of NHS Cambridgeshire to discuss, in detail, the proposals contained within the Plan.

**102. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) - PROGRESS**

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of actions taken in response to recent discussions and decisions. Councillor P G Mitchell reported that he had yet to meet with the Executive Councillors for Finance and Environment and for Housing and Public Health to discuss the Panel's final report on grant aid.

**103. SCRUTINY**

The 93<sup>rd</sup> Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

Chairman