

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE SUPPORT) held in Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon PE29 6DB on Tuesday, 10 March 2009.

- PRESENT: Councillor J A Gray – Chairman.
- Councillors M G Baker, K M Baker,
P H Dakers, J W Davies, P J Downes,
P M D Godfrey, D Harty, Ms S Kemp,
L W McGuire, M F Newman, R G Tuplin and
R J West.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J T Bell and A N Gilbert.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor A Hansard

84. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10th February 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the substitution of the word "policy" in place of the words "introduce unnecessary complications to the present arrangements" at the end of the second paragraph of Minute No. 08/81.

85. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

86. 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.

In so doing, the Panel were advised that St. Ives environmental improvements scheme would be considered by the Service Delivery Panel, following agreement with the Chairman.

In response to a question, the Head of Democratic and Central Services explained that the findings of the Structure Review Working Group would be presented to Cabinet before the Overview and Scrutiny Panels, as it had been Cabinet that had commissioned the report. However presentations had been arranged for all Members on the report and both Panels would be consulted before it was considered by the Corporate Governance Panel and at the Council meeting on 22nd April 2009.

87. CONSULTATION ON CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE ON LOCAL AUTHORITY PUBLICITY

(Councillor A Hansard, Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy was in attendance for this Item).

The Chairman welcomed the Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy, together with the Acting Head of People, Performance and Partnerships, and the Communications and Marketing Manager to discuss the proposed response to a consultation exercise on the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

The Panel was advised that the White Paper - Communities in Control had committed the Government to consulting on potential changes to the publicity code. In considering a report by the Communities and Marketing Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel suggested that the growth in electronic communication had not been adequately reflected in the code and that there was a greater need for Member awareness and compliance with the Code both arising from the development of electronic personal communication and since failure to have regard to the Code was a potential breach of the Members' Code of Conduct.

The Panel's attention was drawn by a Member to the County Council's practice when issuing press releases of including the contact details of a spokesperson of the opposition political party, which the Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy undertook to consider in the case of press releases issued by the District Council.

RESOLVED

- (i) that the Panel supports the proposed responses to the questions raised in the consultation paper as set out in the report now submitted; and
- (ii) that the Cabinet be invited to consider the comments of the Panel referred to above as part of its deliberations on the report.

88. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel considered the performance of the authority against the priority objectives identified in "Growing Success", the Corporate Plan approved by the Council in September 2008.

The Panel was pleased to note that all of the indicators where statistics were available were positive with the exception of the preparation of the external funding strategy. In the case of the latter which had been scheduled for completion by March 2009, Members were advised that the External Funding Officer had been asked to concentrate on a major application for an external source of funding, and that completion of the strategy had been delayed slightly.

89. MONITORING OF SECTION 106 (PLANNING OBLIGATIONS)

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was updated on the receipt and expenditure of money negotiated

under Section 106 Agreements by the Council. In so doing, the Panel was informed that a number of developers had requested the re-negotiation of trigger points due to the economic climate.

The Panel also was advised that subject to the Cabinet's approval of the recommendations in a recent review of section 106 Agreements by a working group of the panel, monitoring reports would be presented in future to the Section 106 Advisory Group.

90. 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.

91. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (SERVICE SUPPORT) - PROGRESS REPORT

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 on issues that had been discussed previously.

Councillor J W Davies reported that problems with the foul sewerage system in the St. Audrey's Lane area of St. Ives were ongoing. Members were reminded that further information was due from Anglian Water reviewing the situation following action that they had taken and that this would be presented to the Panel shortly.

With respect to the petition concerning commuter parking in the Longsands area of St. Neots, Members were informed that this was to be discussed by the Huntingdonshire Traffic Management Area Joint Committee in April. Members also sought clarification as to whether planning permission had been granted for the car park being constructed at the train station in Huntingdon, which the Head of Democratic and Central Services undertook to investigate.

With regard to attendance at meetings of the Joint Accountability Committee, the Chairman indicated that he would be considering alternative arrangements for the appointment of a representative from the District Council who might be better able to attend.

92. SCRUTINY

The Panel considered and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest, summarising the Council's decisions since the previous meeting.

Having regard to the report on homelessness and the housing market, the Panel suggested that it would be helpful if all Members were reminded as to who to refer constituents to when contacted about housing queries.

In response to a request for further information on the transformation of development control to development management, Members were informed that the relevant report would be circulated to Panel Members.

Chairman