

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SOCIAL WELL-BEING) held in the Wren Room, Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, PE29 6DB on Tuesday, 2nd June 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors P L E Bucknell, Mrs K E Cooper, S J Criswell, J W Davies, Mrs P A Jordan, P G Mitchell, J M Sadler and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J E Garner and Monk.

7. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 13th May 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

8. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

9. 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 June to 30th September 2009. Members requested sight of items entitled St Ivo Leisure Centre - Proposals for Development and Leisure Centres Performance Monitoring Report prior to their consideration by the Cabinet.

10. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of the authority.

11. ST NEOTS LEISURE CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

(Councillors Mrs D C Reynolds, Executive Councillor for Leisure, A Hansard, Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy, and R S Farrer were in attendance for this Item).

With the assistance of a report by the General Manager, Leisure Centres (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel were acquainted with details of a proposal to extend and re-model the existing dry sports facility located at St Neots Leisure Centre.

Members noted that the proposal was intended to secure the future viability of the Leisure Centre, promote the health of the local people and take advantage of the latent demand, which had been identified for leisure facilities in the area.

Councillor A Hansard welcomed the proposals and suggested that, given the absence of such a facility in the local area and the perceived existing demand, they should incorporate a community hall facility. Following discussion by Members on this suggestion the view was expressed that Officers should investigate whether such a facility could be incorporated within the plans.

The Panel discussed the level of car parking facilities available on the site and the impact that an increased number of users of the Centre would have on the facility. In response, the Leisure Centres General Manager reported on the existence of an overflow parking facility which was already available to Leisure Centre users if required.

Having discussed the differing levels of demand placed on the Leisure Centre as a whole during peak and off peak times, a suggestion was made by a Member that the feasibility of charging lower rates to users who were able to use the Centres during off peak times should be investigated. It was further suggested that this might be achieved by offering discounts to customers directly or through a more formal arrangement with local agencies such as Job Centre Plus.

Councillor R S Farrer drew Members' attention to the adjacent Sydney Banks Playing Field and an associated contribution towards the cost of building changing rooms for users of the Playing Field. Members noted that the changing rooms referred to had been planned for incorporation within the development proposals for the Leisure Centre, but they expressed concern at the possible impact of their use on the Centre. Comment also was made on the need to clarify parking arrangements for users of the Playing Field. The Executive Councillor for Leisure, together with Officers, undertook to pursue these matters locally.

Having analysed the financial projections and the data on which levels of use of the new facilities had been predicted, the Panel expressed support for the development proposals at St Neots Leisure Centre.

RESOLVED

that Cabinet be recommended to

- (a) approve the scheme to extend and re-model the existing dry sports facility located at St Neots Leisure Centre, together with the associated capital expenditure; and
- (b) take into account the Panel's views on the contents of the report by the General Manager, Leisure Centre.

12. RE-ADMITTANCE OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the public be re-admitted to the meeting.

13. CORPORATE EQUALITY POLICY: ACTION PLAN PROGRESS

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

With the aid of a report by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel were acquainted with the progress made to date in respect of the Council's Corporate Equality Policy Action Plan. In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Policy and Resources reported on the achievements under the Plan that had been made by the Council over the previous year, which included the attainment of Level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. He went on to advise Members that the Council would now work towards achieving Level 3 of the Standard, which would require the completion of a series of evidence based Equality Impact Assessments and an external assessment of the Council, which would be undertaken in July 2009. Having regard to the latter, Members noted the importance of the assessment, given that it affected how the Council would be rated under the new Equality Framework, which would replace the Equality Standard.

The Panel were informed that residents' perceptions of Council services, which included their views on how the Council rated on equalities matters, this year had been sought via the Place Survey. It was intended to repeat the survey at least every two years.

Having regard to the Action Plan to promote equalities relating to race, disability and gender, the Panel suggested that rurality and access to services in rural areas should be regarded as an equality issue and incorporated within the Plan. Members received an assurance that the Council was addressing the particular requirements of customers in rural areas, but they commented that this work should be made more overt by incorporating it within the Action Plan. In addition, the Panel expressed concern at the effect of a 10% reduction in the budget on the Council's ability to deliver the Action Plan. In response, Members were informed that the budget reduction would not have an adverse effect upon the completion of the Equality Impact Assessments that the Council aims to undertake over the forthcoming year. Having also discussed the identification by managers of practices that were inconsistent with promoting the aims of the Policy and the training provided to employees on equality and diversity matters and the introduction of a new e-learning course, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to

- (a) note the progress against with the Corporate Equality Policy Action Plan;

- (b) endorse the new Corporate Equality Action Plan;
- (c) note the findings of the Equality Impact Assessments conducted during 2008/09;
- (d) endorse the revised Equality Impact Assessment timetable set out in Appendix 4 to the report now submitted; and
- (e) take into account the Panel's views on the contents of the report by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships.

14. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

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

The Panel considered a report by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing details of the Council's performance against its priority objectives in the quarter to 31st March 2009. Having endorsed the comments of the Corporate Plan Working Group, the Panel concurred with a suggestion that the Working Group should receive information on all of the Community and Council aims where targets were not being achieved.

The Panel discussed trends in demand for housing services within the District. Members noted that the number of households living in temporary accommodation was close to achieving its target, with 61 households reported as living in temporary accommodation. It also was noted that there had been a significant increase in the number of households that had been prevented from becoming homeless. Comment was made on the fact that economic conditions had required a level performance considerably above the target for this indicator and that, under the present circumstances, the use of temporary accommodation was preferable to an increase in homelessness in the District. Furthermore, the Panel was advised that the Government had created a national performance target, which required housing authorities to work towards reducing the number of households living in temporary accommodation by April 2010 to 45 households. This target was reported as being achievable by the Council.

The Panel questioned the performance reported under the key measure relating to affordable housing on qualifying sites. Members were advised that the variation in the performance levels recorded was attributable to the decline in the demand for private housing, which had promoted the construction of affordable housing. Having expressed their overall 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 People, Performance and Partnerships.

15. NHS CAMBRIDGESHIRE STRATEGIC PLAN 2009 - 2014: CONSULTATION RESPONSE

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel gave consideration to a draft response to consultation by NHS Cambridgeshire on the content of its Strategic Plan 2009 - 2014. The response incorporated a number of points which had been raised by Members at a seminar that had taken place in May 2009.

RESOLVED

that the response set out in the Appendix to the report now submitted be endorsed for submission to NHS Cambridgeshire.

16. CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the introduction of legislative changes which placed a requirement upon the Council to scrutinise crime and disorder matters. This new duty fell within the remit of the Social Well-Being Panel. In noting that guidance had recently been issued in this respect and that work currently was being undertaken to incorporate it into the Council's co-option scheme, the Panel was advised that further details on the new duty would be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

17. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - REMITS AND STUDIES

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the Panel's programme of studies and providing an opportunity for Members to plan their work programme for the year. Members' attention was drawn to their remit following changes to Overview and Scrutiny, which had arisen from the review of the Council's Democratic Structure. They also were acquainted with the extent of their new responsibilities for scrutinising the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership and the Cambridgeshire Sustainable Community Strategy.

In reviewing their existing programme of studies and membership of Working Groups, Councillors Mrs P A Jordan and R J West expressed interest in joining the study on the Provision of Leisure Facilities for Young People. Having also discussed potential future study areas, the Panel suggested that car parking at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital might be pursued as a study area.

RESOLVED

- (a) that progress in relation to ongoing studies be noted;
- (b) that Councillors Mrs P A Jordan and R J West be appointed to the Provision of Leisure Facilities for Young People Working Group; and
- (c) that a scoping report on car parking at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel.

18. SCRUTINY

The 94th Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

Chairman