

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) held in the Corporate Training Suite, Eastfield House, 6 Latham Road, Huntingdon PE29 6YE on Thursday, 11 June 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor J D Ablewhite – Chairman.

Councillors E R Butler, Mrs J A Dew, L W McGuire, M F Shellens, Ms M J Thomas, G S E Thorpe and R G Tuplin.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J T Bell and A N Gilbert.

5. 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.

6. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

7. 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 expressed an interest in discussing an item on land adjacent to the Grand Cinema, Ramsey.

8. CUSTOMER SERVICES MONITORING REPORT

The Panel gave consideration to the Customer Service Quarterly Performance Report for the period January to March 2009 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). The report outlined the levels of performance and standards achieved by the Service. Members were informed of the effect of current economic trends on the Customer Service Centres and the Call Centre in terms of an increase in enquiries particularly for benefits and housing services. Despite this customer satisfaction levels had remained extremely high, though achieving this had put pressure on employees. In recognising that this was not sustainable in the long term, additional resources received from the Government for this purpose would be deployed to meet the additional demand.

In reviewing progress against the Customer Services Service Plan, a question was raised by a Member on how it was intended to address an expected overspend. In response it was been reported that virement had been used as a short term measure and that the

Service's budget would be reviewed in the next financial year.

The Panel discussed complaints handled by the Call Centre on behalf of service departments. It was recognised that given the level of activity involved, especially by the Operations Division, the level complaints received should be regarded as low. Members endorsed the practice of close liaison between Customer Services employees and Operations on areas where further improvements might be made.

Members received an update on the Customer Service Centres in St Ives and St Neots. A launch was planned for a modernised office in St Ives from which an extended range of services would be available. In noting plans for customer service provision in St Neots, the Panel were acquainted with proposed staffing arrangements and the measures taken to support the museum until November 2010 following the withdrawal of the District Council from its premises.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

9. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

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 reviewed the Council's performance against the targets within the Corporate Plan "Growing Success" that fell within its remit. In focussing on the targets that had not been achieved, the Panel noted that income from hospitality at leisure centres continued to decline. As a result Members endorsed a suggestion by the Corporate Plan Working Group that as Huntingdon Leisure Centre had seen an increase of 15% in this area, similar techniques to those used at Huntingdon should be implemented at the other leisure centres.

The Panel was informed that the percentage of bids which had successfully attracted external funding had significantly exceeded the target of 60%. However, the target for producing an External Funding Strategy had only been partially met owing to the redeployment of officer resources to work on a major funding bid. Members discussed amending the target on obtaining external funding in order effectively to monitor performance in this respect, but it was considered to be preferable to retain the original target.

The Panel was further informed that in future monitoring reports would provide links to the Local Area Agreement indicators.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

10. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ACT

By means of a report by the Heads of People, Performance and Partnerships and of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was acquainted with the background to the introduction of legislation under which the Council would be empowered to pursue local initiatives aimed at

promoting the sustainability of local communities. At the invitation of the Secretary of State, under the Sustainable Communities Act, councils would be able to make proposals for local initiatives but they would have to be the subject of consultation with a representative sample of the local population and with affected agencies.

Having noted the process for the upward transmission of suggestions to the Government and the criteria against which proposals would be assessed, Members were informed that only a limited number of councils appeared to be taking the opportunity to make suggestions following the first request for proposals by the Secretary of State. In that context and given the need for clarification of the way the process would operate, the Panel concurred with a suggestion that procedures should be developed to generate and formulate ideas and proposals in conjunction with the implementation of neighbourhood panels.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

11. BUDGET WORKING GROUP

The Panel considered the final report of the Budget Working Group (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). Having commended the Group for the extent and depth of their work, Members requested the Cabinet to take into account the report during the budget process.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be requested to consider the report by the Budget Working Group during the budget process.

12. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - REMIT, ROLE AND STUDIES

In considering a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Panel were reminded that, following completion of the Democratic Structure Review, new arrangements for overview and scrutiny had been devised and revised remits had been allocated to each of the Panels. Having been acquainted with precise details of their remit as it related to the internal operation of the Council, Members were advised of the scope of extra duties that they had been allotted through scrutinising the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership and the Countywide Sustainable Community Strategy.

The Panel went on to review its future programme of studies. Members noted that all of the ongoing studies under their remit had reached or were nearing completion. As a result they decided to undertake an exercise outside of the meeting to identify potential study areas. In the meantime they decided to initiate a study on the economic and other impacts of tourism on Huntingdonshire and the wider area.

RESOLVED

that tourism be added to the programme of studies.

13. SCRUTINY

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

Chairman