

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, 5 January 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors Mrs K E Cooper, J W Davies, J J Dutton, Mrs P A Jordan, J M Sadler and R J West.

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

71. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 1st December 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

72. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors S J Criswell, J J Dutton and R J West declared personal interests in Minute Nos. 09/76, 09/78 and 09/79 by virtue of their membership of Cambridgeshire County Council.

73. 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) which had been prepared by the Leader of the Council for the period 1st January to 30th April 2010. In noting the addition to the Plan of an item entitled Rural Strategy Cambridgeshire ACRE, Councillor R J West undertook to investigate the background to the Strategy to determine whether the Panel should have sight of the document prior to its submission to the Cabinet.

74. OVERVIEW OF NEW WEBSITE - FEATURES AND BENEFITS

The Panel received a presentation by Mr J Taylor, the Council's Information Management Division Development Manager, and Mr J Bedingfield, IT Development Team Leader, on the Council's new website. Members were advised that the change had been prompted by the need to introduce a new technical infrastructure for the website. In the circumstances, the opportunity had been taken to update and improve its appearance and the way it operated. The changes had taken into account survey information, analysis of past use of the Council's website and the views of Executive Members and Heads of Service. Additionally, it was noted that specialist advice had been received on the website's design.

Members were informed that most of the District's residents had

access to the internet and that the Council's website currently received in excess of 2000 visitors per day. Users of the website had access to over 2000 on-line documents and could submit electronically to the Council over 80 forms. In addition, it was possible to book services and make payments via the website. The introduction of these facilities had resulted in significant cost savings for the Council compared with equivalent manual processes. Finally, it was reported that an area would be added where the Council could carry out consultations together with a further area in association with Cambridgeshire.net containing information on local events. The Panel was, however, mindful that not all individuals had access to the website. In addition, it was recognised that some services were not suited to being provided electronically.

With reference to financial aspects of the website, it was reported that the specialist advice had cost £4,900 but that online transactions were estimated to cost the Council 27p each compared with £4.20 for face-to-face services. In response to a question by a Member, the Panel was informed that callers to the Call Centre and visitors to the Customer Service Centre were advised that information and services could be obtained via the website. Following a further question, Members were advised that the planning systems would remain the same, though access to them would be improved.

Having noted that a soft launch would take place in January followed by more formal publicity in February, Members were advised that enhancements would continue to be made throughout 2011 with Phase 2 of the upgrade including further new features and the ability to personalise the website. Such examples included postcode recognition and the translation of text into other languages. At the conclusion of the discussion, the Panel expressed support for the introduction of the new website design.

75. 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 business affairs of the authority.

76. IMPROVEMENTS TO KERBSIDE RECYCLING SERVICES

(Councillor C R Hyams, Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services, was in attendance for this item).

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the annex to the Minute Book) on proposed improvements to kerbside recycling services. In receiving background to the proposal to include glass in the materials collected through the kerbside recycling service, Mr R Ward, the Head of Operations, acquainted the Panel with the latest position regarding the Council's waste collection contract. Advances in technology now meant that it was possible to extract glass from waste collected at the kerbside. Changes in market conditions had prompted the investment in technology. This, coupled with the fact that the Council's waste processing contract had been due to expire in December 2009, meant

that it was timely for the Council to investigate the possibility of extending its service to include glass recycling.

In receiving details of the financial implications of the proposal Members noted that the new contractual arrangements could potentially deliver net revenue savings of up to £300,000 per annum. The contract would include a mechanism to protect the Council from significant changes in gate fee charges. In these circumstances the Panel expressed support for the proposals.

Members questioned the projected level of additional blue bins that would be required. Comment was made that, if glass collections were introduced, there was likely to be significant demand for blue bins from those existing residents who currently used green recycling boxes. With regard to the issue of charging for blue bins, whilst Members did not support charging for additional bins where residents already had a blue bin, they were in favour of charging developers for the provision of blue bins in new developments.

The Panel discussed the future operation of the mini recycling centres across the District and the proposal, in conjunction with third sector organisations, for the existing glass banks to be replaced by facilities for recycling other materials. A proportion of the recycling credits received for recycling through the new arrangements would continue to be paid to the Parish Councils that owned the land on which the facilities were located. The remainder of the recycling credits would be retained by the Council to cover its costs for maintaining the sites.

Finally, the Panel discussed the health and safety and practical implications of introducing kerbside glass collections, particularly for the elderly, and consideration was given to the impact of the proposals on the general repair and replacement costs associated with the Council's vehicles.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be advised of the Panel's views on the proposed improvements to kerbside recycling services.

77. RE-ADMITTANCE OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the public be readmitted to the meeting.

78. CARE QUALITY COMMISSION

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 the outcome of a meeting between Councillor R J West and Ms B Skinner of the Care Quality Commission held on 20th November 2009.

Councillor West reminded Members of the regulatory framework in which all provider and commissioning authorities and direct service providers were required to operate and of the work undertaken by the Commission to assess these services. The Panel's attention was

drawn to the fact that the District Council was also subject to inspection via the County Council as it contributed towards some of the latter's services. Members were advised that the Commission's assessments focussed on the outcomes that had been delivered by service providers and not the processes that providers had in place.

Finally, Councillor West informed the Panel that the Commission would, in the future, be extending an invitation to Members to attend a briefing on involving Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Local Involvement Networks (LINK's) in its work.

79. DISABILITY ACCESS STUDY - UPDATE

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 was updated on progress with its previous study into disability access. Members were advised that amongst the responses that had been received to the actions that had previously been identified, with regard to blue badge parking enforcement, Cambridgeshire County Council had advised that whilst civil parking enforcement currently operated in Cambridge City only, the enforcement regime included action to address the misuse of blue badge parking and disabled parking by unauthorised users. In noting that the County Council were still negotiating with the District Councils on whether to extend the scheme, Members noted that it was anticipated that, should it be extended, then similar enforcement activities also would be adopted in these areas.

In agreeing that the next step would be to inform Town and Parish Councils of the outcome of the study, it was suggested that these authorities should be reminded of the role of the Neighbourhood Forums and of the fact that in the future the Forums would be the most appropriate body to whom to report the kind of issues raised in the course of the study.

80. CAMBRIDGESHIRE HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor R J West delivered an update on matters currently being considered by the Cambridgeshire Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee. He reported that the Working Group appointed by the Committee to consider issues surrounding the future governance of Hinchingbrooke Hospital had met and endorsed the principle that the contract for the Hospital's future governance should seek to ensure that services were maintained at the same level as those provided in 2007. The Working Group also emphasised the need for a high quality Board of Governors, good management and clinical excellence.

Councillor West expressed disappointment at the lack of continuity in Officer attendance at meetings by the Strategic Health Authority, which both the Working Group and the Committee believed was impeding their investigations.

81. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel considered and noted 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 informing Members of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

82. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SOCIAL WELL-BEING) - PROGRESS

The Panel received and noted 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. Members were advised that the Play Facilities Working Group had met and that investigations were currently ongoing. Having regard to the Monitoring of Section 106 Agreements, Members noted that this would appear at their next meeting. In respect of Town Centre Cleaning, the Panel was advised that a new Operations Manager had now been appointed and that the post holder would commence her duties on 18th January 2010.

With regard to consultation being undertaken by the National Health Service (NHS) on proposed new patient rights for inclusion within its Constitution, namely "treatment within a maximum of 18 weeks from a GP referral and to be seen by a cancer specialist within 2 weeks from a GP referral, or where this is not possible, for the NHS to take reasonable steps to offer a range of alternative providers" and "NHS Health Checks for those aged 40 to 74 to assess their risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes and kidney disease", the Panel expressed the view that the proposed rights should already be an integral part of the service. Members also felt that the NHS should clarify the processes to be implemented and the means of assessing and benchmarking them. It was agreed to submit these comments to the NHS in a formal response to the consultation.

83. SCRUTINY

The 100th edition of the digest of decisions was received and noted.

Chairman