

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, 2 March 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

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

Mr R Coxhead and Mrs M Nicholas.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs P A Jordan and P G Mitchell.

97. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 2nd February 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

98. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

99. 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 March to 31st June 2010. Members were reminded that they would have an opportunity to comment on the item on St Ivo Leisure Centre – Proposal for Development, which it was anticipated would be submitted to the Panel's meeting in June 2010.

100. RURAL STRATEGY FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE 2010 - 2015

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel gave consideration to the draft Rural Strategy for Cambridgeshire 2010-2015. The Strategy was subject to consultation with key stakeholders and Partners and Members noted that the consultation period would end on 23rd April 2010.

The Panel was informed of the background to the Strategy and noted that the Cambridgeshire Together Board had commissioned Cambridgeshire ACRE to undertake the work required to produce it with a view to identifying the challenges of living and working in rural communities. Members' attention was drawn to the actions and "Ambitions" identified under the Strategy's three themes of living in the countryside, economic well-being and land and environment.

Details of the consultation undertaken to date with statutory agencies, community organisations, rural businesses and residents were presented to the Panel and particular attention was drawn to Appendix A to the report, which contained a summary of Officers' responses to each of the actions proposed within the Strategy. Members endorsed the comments contained in Appendix A, but also registered concern at the lack of ownership and funding available to meet the aims of the Strategy.

The Panel stressed the importance of recognising that rurality was an equalities issue. Comment also was made that the Strategy sometimes lacked evidence of partnership working where it was required and Members were of the view that work carried out under the Strategy should be carefully co-ordinated. It further appeared to them that there was potential for duplication in service provision. At the same time it was felt that efforts should be made to ensure that all organisations that could potentially be involved had not been excluded from contributing to the achievement of the Strategy and that Town and Parish Councils would be important in delivering many of its actions.

Having regard to the theme of living in the countryside, specific comment was made on the need for retirement homes to be provided on "exceptions sites" in rural areas as this would enable elderly individuals to remain close to their families and communities. The Head of Environmental and Community Health Services undertook to clarify whether this already formed part of the Older Peoples Housing Strategy.

With regard to the actions identified within the "Widening transport options" priority, the Panel was of the view that this matter required action at the national level.

Finally, comment was made on the difficulties faced by residents living in rural areas who did not have their own transport and who were reliant on other transport providers to attend health service facilities. While there were some local providers, including volunteer car schemes, it was evident that there were gaps in provision and this was something that could be addressed under the Strategy.

RESOLVED

that that the Cabinet be advised of the Panel's views on the draft Rural Strategy for Cambridgeshire 2010-2015.

101. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT: THE CRIMINAL LAW ACT 1977 & THE PROTECTION FROM HARRASSMENT ACT 1997

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) seeking delegated authority to appoint Officers to enforce the provisions of the Criminal Law Act 1977 and the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 when dealing with allegations of harassment and illegal eviction in the private housing sector.

The Neighbourhoods Interventions Manager informed Members that the Council usually received 8-10 reports of potential cases of harassment or illegal eviction each year but that, at present, the Council did not have the necessary powers to undertake investigations and prosecute offenders.

The Panel questioned why the new powers were only now being sought as the legislation that created them had been in existence for a number of years. In response it was reported that private sector housing was a dynamic market and recent demographic changes had lead Officers to believe that these powers were necessary and could effectively be utilised to protect potentially vulnerable tenants.

Having been advised that the new powers would enable Officers to regain possession of a property on the tenant's behalf, enabling them to reside there until the correct legal procedures for possession had been followed, the Panel expressed support for the delegations that were proposed, which would not have any financial implications for the Council. In that light, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to delegate authority to

- (a) the Director of Environmental and Community Services to appoint Environmental Health Officers and Environmental Health Protection Officers to enforce the provisions of the Criminal Law Act 1977 and the Protection from Harassment Act 1997;
- (b) appointed Environmental Health Officers and Environmental Health Protection Officers to exercise the powers set out in the Criminal Law Act 1977 and the Protection from Harassment Act 1997; and
- (c) the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services, following consultation with the Executive Councillor, to institute legal proceedings for offences under the provisions of the Criminal Law Act 1977 and the Protection from Harassment Act 1997.

102. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

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 December 2009. Members endorsed for submission to the Cabinet the comments of the Corporate Plan Working Group, particularly with regard to the objectives where targets had not been achieved. They also noted that the Working Group had undertaken a review of the non-priority targets, objectives and measures contained in Growing Success, which would be used employed in 2010-11.

Having had their attention drawn to developments regarding the Council's involvement in Making Cambridgeshire Count, the Panel endorsed the Working Group's suggestion that the Cabinet should be recommended to investigate whether there were any opportunities for jointly employing expert staff in order to avoid the greater costs of using specialist consultants.

103. STUDY - PARKING AT HINCHINGBROOKE HOSPITAL

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 reviewed the study into car parking at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital, which had recently been completed.

Members were advised that the Hospital's Senior Executive Group had already taken a decision on car parking charges at the site. A charge of £2 for the shortest period of stay of 2 hours, rising by £1 for every hour thereafter, had been adopted. Members expressed disappointment that this decision had been taken before the Panel's report had been received and requested that the Hospital's Business Facilities Manager was invited to a future meeting to report on the Hospital's own review of its car parking arrangements.

104. 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, which included an overspend in Adult Support Services, the County Council's 2010 Budget Plan and the overall financial position of NHS Cambridgeshire. Other matters that had been discussed included Occupational Therapist waiting times, pressures on Cambridgeshire's acute hospitals as a result of the severe winter weather, service quality and staffing at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital and primary care out of hours services. Attention was also drawn to issues surrounding mental health and the inequalities in service provision that existed within the District. It was suggested that the latter would be a suitable subject for debate at a future full Council meeting.

105. 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. Members' attention was drawn to a proposal for a study, which had been suggested by a resident of the District, into Information Communications Technology in the public sector. The proposal would be considered by the Economic Well-Being Panel at its meeting on 11th March 2010.

106. 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. In agreeing to delete the Disability Access item from the Panel's work programme, Councillor R J West reported that the matter concerning High Dependency Toilets at Saxongate Community Learning Centre, Huntingdon had been referred to the Varrier Jones Trust and a response was awaited.

The Chairman provided an update on the outcome of the meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Hospital Stakeholder Panel on 25th February 2010. The Panel had appointed a sub-group to meet with bidders in a private session to discuss their proposals. Members of the Sub-Group had signed a confidentiality agreement to protect bidders during the competitive bidding process.

It was reported that the final report of the Play Facilities Working Group would be considered by the Cabinet at their meeting on 22nd April 2010. Councillors P G Mitchell and R J West would be attending the meeting to present the report.

Pursuant to Minute No. 09/90, the Scrutiny and Review Manager outlined the process involved in determining requests to defer Section 106 schemes. Having advised the Panel that Ward Members were consulted as part of the process, it was reported that the Panel's views on the request to defer completion of the Agreement in respect of St Ives Golf Course had been conveyed to the Head of Law, Property and Governance, who would take the final decision on this matter.

Members requested an update from the Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services on progress with their previous recommendations on town centre cleaning on Sundays. As the District's towns were now very busy at weekends disappointment was expressed at the time it had taken to initiate consultation with the Town Councils.

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman undertook to raise the question of further work following the Place Survey at the next meeting of the Corporate Plan Working Group.

Councillor J J Dutton drew attention to problems that were currently being experienced regarding bus shelters in Hartford. In so doing, he reported on his intention to request the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel to investigate this matter.

107. SCRUTINY

The 102nd Edition of the Digest of Decisions was received and noted.

Chairman