

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) held in the CIVIC SUITE 0.1A, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON PE29 3TN on Thursday, 14 October 2010.

- PRESENT: Councillor J D Ablewhite – Chairman.
- Councillors Mrs J A Dew, S Greenall, N J Guyatt, M F Shellens, G S E Thorpe and D M Tysoe.
- Mr R Hall and Mrs H Roberts.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J T Bell and Ms M J Thomas.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor K Churchill, Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy
- Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds, Executive Councillor for Leisure and Law, Property and Governance
- Councillor T V Rogers, Executive Councillor for Finance and Customer Services
- Councillor L M Simpson, Deputy Leader of the Council and Vice-Chairman of the Cabinet.

38. MINUTES

RESOLVED

subject to the inclusion of the words “*(Councillor M F Shellens abstained from voting on this item)*” after the resolution relating to Minute No. 34, the Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 9th September 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

39. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

40. 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 October 2010 to 31st January 2011. Members noted that the draft MTP would be presented to the Panel for consideration as a matter of

course.

41. 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.

42. HUNTINGDON TOWN CENTRE RE-DEVELOPMENT

(Councillor K Churchill, Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy and Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds, Executive Councillor Leisure and Law, Property and Governance were in attendance for this item.)

The Panel considered a report by the Chief Officers Management Team (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on proposals to redevelop Huntingdon Town Centre. Members were advised that the local economy was driven by the market towns through service, employment and retail provision. Although Huntingdon was regarded as the District's economic linchpin its retail footprint (CACI) ranking had recently declined. It was noted that retailers had raised particular concerns about the low levels of trade occurring on Saturdays. The Panel were informed that the existing units in the town were too small to attract the higher quality retailers that residents required yet, owing to its location, there would be little difficulty in attracting this kind of retailer to Huntingdon.

It was felt that there was a need to protect and develop the local retail market, particularly as Huntingdonshire had significant exposure to the potential contraction of the public sector given that it provided approximately one third of local employment. The retail sector was known to create jobs. Attention was drawn to the fact that as well as protecting existing jobs, the proposals could create a significant number of new jobs. While Members acknowledged that the required construction works would create employment, concerns were raised that the works could have an adverse impact on trade levels. In this respect the Panel recommended that the Council should seek to influence the sequence of developments in order to minimise disruption to trade.

It was noted that work on developing Huntingdon had been ongoing for approximately ten years and that the implementation of the proposals could not commence without the involvement and input of the District Council. Having examined at length the financing arrangements for the proposals, the Panel felt that a formal analysis of the risks involved should be undertaken, following which contingency plans should be devised. Members were keen that the proposals should succeed and, following extensive discussions, they outlined a number of concerns about them as they stood and made suggestions to mitigate risks to the Council.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be advised of the Panel's views on the redevelopment of Huntingdon Town Centre.

43. RE-ADMITTANCE OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be re-admitted to the meeting.

44. NEW HEADQUARTERS AND OTHER ACCOMMODATION CLOSE REPORT

(Councillor L M Simpson, Deputy Leader of the Council and Vice-Chairman of the Cabinet was in attendance for this item.)

Consideration was given to a report by the New Accommodation Project Co-ordinator (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the New Headquarters and Other Accommodation project and identifying lessons learnt which would be transferable to the inception, development and delivery of future projects.

In response to a question by a Member, the Panel was advised that it was planned to sell Castle Hill House and the site originally proposed for Building 'A' once the property market showed signs of recovery. Following a further question, it was noted that although there was no demand at present for the sub-letting of part of Pathfinder House, if this was required in the future, then the offices could easily be sub-divided.

Having congratulated the New Accommodation Project Co-ordinator on the successful completion of the New Headquarters and Other Accommodation project, it was

Resolved

that the report be received and noted.

(Councillor M F Shellens abstained from voting on this item).

45. ONE LEISURE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 2009/10

(Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds, Executive Councillor Leisure and Law, Property and Governance was in attendance for this item.)

The Panel considered a report by the General Manager, One Leisure (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the overall financial performance of One Leisure in 2009/10. Members were informed that the report reflected an improvement in the forecast financial position but that the Council's forthcoming budgetary decisions could have an impact on the forecast. It was noted that ongoing efforts were made to reduce costs and that staffing structures were constantly under review.

Members discussed the information presented. They indicated that more detailed financial reports would be of value and would assist when considering future proposals and recommendations. In particular, it was suggested that a distinction needed to be made between those areas of activity that competed with the private sector and others that had a purely "social" benefit, such a swimming, which

were subsidised by the Council. The Director of Commerce and Technology advised the Panel that One Leisure represented the largest and most complex division within the Council and that the Council's accounting systems were not able to produce information on individual activities. It would, however, be possible to present the information that had been requested.

In response to a question, Members were informed that each Centre had a five year business plan for both the "social" and financial aspects of their operations, which was constantly updated. There also existed an overall business plan for One Leisure.

Members requested further information, which separated out "social" services provided by One Leisure from those services that competed with the private sector. The information should contain key business indicators and include reference business plans, the calculation of recharges and a breakdown of the staff structure at the Leisure Centres. The Panel also requested an annual report on the performance of One Leisure.

46. LEISURE CENTRES HOSPITALITY PERFORMANCE AND FUTURE PLANS

(Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds, Executive Councillor Leisure and Law, Property and Governance was in attendance for this item.)

The Panel considered a report by the General Manager, One Leisure (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the financial performance of the hospitality section of One Leisure. Overall trends in hospitality had improved in recent years and in 2010/11 a profit of £45k was projected. However, the bars continued to make a loss. Members emphasised that both the bars and Impressions were competing with the private sector and as such should be run as businesses with clear business plans. The Director of Commerce and Technology advised that action had already been taken to address the current situation and that further measures would follow.

The Panel questioned whether the Leisure Centres should have bars given that one of their objectives was to improve the health of the local population. In response, Members were advised that there was continued demand for alcohol and sweets at the Leisure Centres, though there was growing demand for healthier options. The Centres presently endeavoured to catered for both tastes. Members felt that an assessment of the degree to which the bars attracted customers to the leisure centres would assist their discussions when they received the detailed reports from the General Manager, One Leisure that had been requested under Minute No. 45 ante.

47. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC 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) reviewing progress of matters that had previously been discussed. In the context of the study on the impact of the Licensing Act, Members accepted the Alcohol Harm Reduction Co-ordinator's offer to attend a future meeting of the Panel to discuss the Alcohol

Harm Reduction Strategy.

Having noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Panels' previous comments on Performance Management would be resubmitted to the Cabinet's next meeting, it was agreed that the Chairman of the Panel should attend the meeting to present the report and respond to questions. It was also noted that arising from the Panel's recommendations on the Financial Strategy a meeting would be held with Town and Parish Councillors on 1st November 2010.

48. WORKPLAN

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) containing details of studies being undertaken by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels. Members were advised that the review of performance development for employees was ongoing and the outcome would be submitted to the Panel in due course.

The Panel requested a report on the implications for Huntingdonshire of the abolishment of the East of England Development Agency and its replacement by Local Enterprise Partnerships. It was also suggested that the implications of the Government's decision not to proceed with improvements to the A14 for the local economy should be considered at a future meeting of the Panel.

49. SCRUTINY

The Panel received and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest. In light of recent Government announcements regarding the future of the Standards Committee, the Panel questioned whether the appointment of Parish Council representatives to the Committee was necessary. The Overview and Scrutiny Manager undertook to circulate a response after the meeting.

Chairman