

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, 10 March 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor J D Ablewhite – Chairman.
Councillors E R Butler, 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, Mrs J A Dew and Ms M J Thomas.

88. MINUTES

Subject to the deletion of the word “illegal” in the second line of paragraph 6 in Minute No. 82, the Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10th February 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

89. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

90. 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 30 June 2011. Members were advised that a report on proposals for development at One Leisure, St Ives would be submitted to their next meeting.

91. NEW COUNCIL PLAN

With the assistance of a report prepared by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel gave consideration to the content of a new Council Plan, which set out the Council's vision and priorities for the 2011 to 2015 period. By way of background, the Policy and Strategic Services Manager reported that the current Plan was in its sixth year of operation and that changes announced by the Government to the national performance framework for local authorities and the abolition of the Comprehensive Area Assessment and the Audit Commission, together with new challenges faced by the Council had necessitated the development of a new Council Plan.

Having received details of the process undertaken to develop the Plan, the Panel were advised that all Members had been invited to comment on the proposed priorities and targets in advance of the meeting. The comments of the Social Well-Being and Environmental Well-Being Panels were also reported.

In examining the individual priorities within the Plan, Members commented on the proposed target for recycling which, at a figure of 50%, appeared to represent a reduction in performance compared with the current target. Members were of the opinion that the target should be more challenging. Whilst they recognised that recycling rates were declining, it was argued that if the Council was successful in encouraging residents to produce less waste, the amount of waste that was recycled as a proportion of the total waste produced would increase. Moreover, the introduction of glass recycling should have the effect of increasing recycling rates. A similar comment was made about the Plan's target to encourage residents to create less waste. The proposed target of 550kgs represented a reduction in performance as the Council currently collected approximately 420kgs of waste on average from each household in the District. As a result and having noted that the targets had been developed in conjunction with Executive Councillors and Heads of Service, the Panel requested clarification of the rationale for the outcomes and targets and queried whether they were sufficiently robust.

Discussion then ensued on the target for street cleansing. Clarification was sought of the methodology which would be used to determine whether streets were at an acceptable level of cleanliness. Further information also was requested with regard to the current arrangements for street cleaning in towns and villages in the District.

In considering the proposed Vision for the Council Plan, Members were of the opinion that it should recognise the position of the Council, in terms of the Localism Bill, as a "competent authority", that it should be forward looking and that it should reflect the Council's current financial circumstances.

Having regard to the reservations they had expressed about the Plan, the Panel were of the opinion that further work needed to be carried out to demonstrate that the proposed outcomes and targets were sufficiently challenging and robust before they could endorse it. The new Plan should take into account current performance levels, the rationale for the proposed targets, the degree of challenge that they represented, a comparison between the Council's priorities and its other targets and their budget implications including the proportion of the budget they absorbed and the recharges apportioned to them. It was also suggested that the Plan should contain progressive targets for its intended four year life. Members indicated that they were willing to assist with this work. Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be invited to consider the Panel's comments as part of its deliberations on the report by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships on the new Council Plan.

92. 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 the priority objectives in the Panel's remit in the quarter to 31st December 2011. In so doing, attention was drawn to the matters raised on the report at a meeting of the Corporate Plan Working Group.

Having noted that the Council's performance against some of the targets was amber, a Member expressed the view that this was to be expected as the financial constraints on the Council took effect. Moreover, it was not necessarily desirable continually to exceed targets by a significant margin as this could indicate that too much resource had been dedicated to their achievement.

In considering the target which related to Council employee attendance rates, the Panel were advised that the average sickness levels of 6.6 days in a 12 month period compared favourably with the situation nationally in the public sector (9.6 days) and the private sector (6.7 days). However, in order fully to understand the underlying trends, Members requested that consideration was given to including further figures at various percentiles in future reports. Comment was also made that monitoring should be undertaken on the impact of the ongoing process to reduce employee numbers on those employees that remained.

With regard to Leisure Centres income and expenditure, attention was drawn to inconsistencies between the figures now presented and those which had recently been reported at a meeting of the Leisure Centres Working Group and further clarification in this respect was requested. In more general terms, it was suggested that the Council should adopt a more rigorous approach to the identification and management of risks that might affect the Council's ability to achieve its priorities.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be invited to consider the Panel's comments as part of its deliberations on the report by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships on Performance Management.

93. 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 on matters that had previously been discussed by the Panel. Having noted that Councillor M F Shellens had not been provided with the business case which had been prepared to justify the Council's investment in the construction of a multi-storey car park in Huntingdon town centre, it was agreed that the Panel should formally request the information for consideration at a future meeting.

Having regard to the Panel's previous discussions on the cancellation of the A14 improvements scheme, Members were advised that an update on the current situation had recently been circulated to all Members and the Social-Well Being Panel had also made a number of comments on this subject, which would be conveyed to the Director of Environmental and Community Services.

94. WORKPLAN STUDIES REPORT

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 that were being undertaken by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels. In so doing, a request was made for further information on progress with efforts to sub-let Council premises and Members were advised that a work programme was currently being developed for the One Leisure Working Group. An update on the Local Enterprise Partnership was expected at the next meeting.

In response to a question by Councillor S Greenall, the Scrutiny and Review Manager reported that an Officer project group had been established to review the Council's funding arrangements with the voluntary sector. The Social Well-Being Panel had also established a working group to assess the value locally of the voluntary sector. Following discussion about the potential value of a study into central recharges, it was agreed that this subject would be considered at the conclusion of the One Leisure study.

With regard to a suggestion made previously by Councillor M F Shellens about the need to give further consideration to the financial implications for the Council of its future housing responsibilities, the Scrutiny and Review Manager undertook to provide him with a copy of a forthcoming report on the Cambridgeshire Local Investment Plan when it became available. Having then commented on the closure of RAF Brampton and the need to ensure the availability of all sizes and types of affordable housing, Councillor M F Shellens requested details of the number of social housing properties categorised by number of bedrooms, which had been let via the District Council's waiting list over the course of the previous year.

95. SCRUTINY

The Panel received and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest.

Chairman