

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SOCIAL WELL-BEING) held in the Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 1 March 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors P L E Bucknell, S Cawley,
Mrs K E Cooper, J J Dutton, Mrs P A Jordan,
P G Mitchell, P D Reeve and R J West.

Co-opted Members – R Coxhead and Mrs M
Nicholas.

99. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 1st February 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

100. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors S J Criswell, J J Dutton and R J West declared personal interests in Minute No. 104 by virtue of their membership of Cambridgeshire County Council.

Councillor P L E Bucknell declared a personal interest in Minute No. 104 by virtue of his association with voluntary sector organisations.

Councillor P D Reeve declared a personal interest in Minute No. 104 by virtue of his membership of Cambridgeshire County Council, Ramsey Neighbourhood Management Board and Ramsey Initiative and his association with Ramsey Junior and Infant Schools.

101. NEW COUNCIL PLAN

(At this point during the meeting (7.10pm) Councillor S Cawley took his seat at the meeting).

With the aid 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 prompted the need for a new Council Plan.

Having noted details of the process through which the Plan had been

developed, the Panel proceeded to review in detail each of the proposed priorities. Having regard to the outcomes proposed for the priority to “Keep the District clean, provide recycling services and collect rubbish”, the Panel was informed that the target of 45% for the recycling outcome would be revised in advance of the Plan’s submission to the Council as it was regarded as being too low. The Panel also discussed at length the proposed outcome for the generation of household waste. A Member expressed the view that the public might infer that the Council would measure the level of waste produced by each household. In response, the Policy and Strategic Services Manager informed the Panel that an attempt had been made to propose measures that were meaningful to local residents and that it was not intended to weigh individual households’ waste. Other matters raised during the Panel’s deliberations on this priority included the means of communicating waste and recycling messages to residents within the District, a suggestion that households might be rewarded for achieving recycling and waste targets and the different grades of plastic that the Council recycled.

Members commented on references to “providing advice”, “giving advice” and “supporting and encouraging community-led activity” under the activities sections for the priorities relating to “Prevent and deal with homelessness”, “Help vulnerable and disadvantaged people to live independently” and “Support strong communities”. It was felt that the recently approved Budget for 2011/12 and the Medium Term Plan might hinder the Council’s ability to undertake these activities.

In response to a question by a Member concerning the proposed measure for the priority to “Help vulnerable and disadvantaged people to live independently”, it was confirmed that the figure of 240 related to the number of individuals that would be assisted through the Disabled Facilities Grants scheme.

Having regard to the priority to “Encourage new jobs, homes and facilities to meet our needs”, comment was made by a Member on the need to ensure that new homes within the District were built to an acceptable standard. Members were however mindful that quality standards were taken into account as part of the Development Management process. A discussion then ensued on the means by which the Council would measure employment floor space.

Finally, clarification was received of the proposed measure relating to the number of homes to be built on land which had previously been developed under the priority to “Safeguard the environment and successfully manage the impacts of growth”. The figure of 29% related to an existing performance measure for Planning Services.

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.

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 2010. 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. Having noted reasons why performance against the target relating to affordable housing (commitments) on qualifying sites was "red", Members queried whether the target figure of 40% was too high given the patterns employed by builders when developing sites.

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.

103. 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 30th June 2011.

104. THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

(Councillor T V Rogers, Executive Councillor for Finance and Customer Services, was in attendance for consideration of this item).

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 gave consideration to how they would carry out their investigations into the voluntary sector in Huntingdonshire.

Having welcomed Mrs J Farrow, Chief Executive of Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations and Mrs P Shaw, Manager of Huntingdonshire Volunteer Centre, the Chairman indicated that the focus of the Panel's investigations should be to achieve greater understanding of the voluntary sector and to identify alternative ways of supporting the sector. The Council's budget plans would not have an impact for another two years so the study should seek to establish information that would facilitate future financial planning rather than look at budget considerations at the present time.

The Panel discussed a number of matters, which included the structure of the voluntary sector, community engagement, whether there was duplication in the delivery of services and alternative funding sources. Members were advised that the Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations acted primarily as a liaison vehicle between all voluntary organisations and the Council and its Partners, including the County and Town Councils. They were also informed that effective communication channels had already been established with both voluntary organisations and the community. Having regard to the structure of the voluntary sector, Mrs Farrow reminded Members that a number of organisations were registered charities and that this should be borne in mind during the Panel's deliberations. In response, it was confirmed that the Panel would not be examining individual organisations but that opportunities for sharing resources with a view

to identifying efficiencies would be explored.

The Panel discussed the impact of Localism and the Big Society on the voluntary sector. Particular mention was made of the suggestion that volunteers would be expected to take on enhanced roles within the community. Having noted that it would not be appropriate to hold volunteers to account for their work, Members commented on the differences between paid staff and volunteers. In so doing, they accepted that paid employees would be required to manage the work of volunteers. This would mean that their knowledge and experience of the voluntary sector would be retained.

Other matters that were discussed included the Third Sector Assembly event, partnership working with neighbouring voluntary sector organisations within the County, the availability of national funding, the social return on investment methodology and the impact of recent developments on smaller charities.

The Executive Councillor for Finance and Customer Services drew Members' attention to the strategic links between the new Council Plan and the activities of voluntary organisations and the need for the Council to enter into discussions with its Partners on the future of the voluntary sector. The Executive Councillor also expressed the view that it would have been beneficial for interested Officers to have been present at the meeting as a review was currently being undertaken into the Council's budgetary proposals relating to the voluntary sector in future years.

In discussing further potential areas of duplication in voluntary sector activities, Mrs Farrow undertook to provide the Panel with a list of meetings that she was currently required to attend under the Forum's existing commissioning agreements with the County and District Councils.

Owing to the extent of the detailed work that would be required, the Panel decided to establish a Working Group to carrying out the necessary investigations. Mrs Farrow and Mrs Shaw both offered their assistance to the Working Group. Mrs Farrow also drew the Panel's attention to a meeting that had been scheduled with District Council Officers to be held the following week.

RESOLVED

that Councillors S Cawley, Mrs K E Cooper, P G Mitchell and R J West, together with Mrs M Nicholas, be appointed onto a Working Group to investigate the social value of the functions performed by the voluntary groups that have Service Level Agreements with the Council.

105. CAMBRIDGESHIRE ADULTS WELL-BEING AND HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Panel received and noted the Report of the Adults, Well-Being and Health Scrutiny Committee (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the Budget for Adult Social Care as outlined in the Integrated Plan 2011/12. Councillor R J West reported that further updates in this respect would be provided in due course.

In response to a question by Mr R Coxhead on the closure of Hawthorne Ward at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital, Councillor R J West reported that negotiations were still ongoing on the provision of a replacement service locally. Having registered concerns at the potential length of time the negotiations could take, Councillor R J West undertook to raise these concerns with the Adults, Well-Being and Health Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting.

106. WORK PLAN STUDIES

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 Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

Councillor R J West reported that a meeting of the Consultation Processes Working Group was scheduled for 1st April 2011 when a review would be undertaken of the Council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy and associated Guidance. An interim report summarising the Working Group's initial findings would also be considered at this meeting.

In noting that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) had indicated that they would be engaging with local Members of Parliament as part of their study on the A14 improvements, comment was made by a Member on the need to ensure that discussions on this matter should be held with all relevant interested parties including local Members of the European Parliament and the Local Enterprise Partnership. The Scrutiny and Review Manager undertook to circulate an update from the Director of Environmental and Community Services to the Panel on the action that was being taken to try to secure improvements to the A14.

107. 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 so doing, it was reported that representatives from Circle would be in attendance at the Panel's April meeting to discuss their plans for the future governance of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital. In addition, it was noted that the first meeting of the One Leisure Working Group would be held on 3rd March 2011.

108. SCRUTINY

The 112th Edition of the Digest of Decisions was received and noted.