

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in the Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 7 December 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor P M D Godfrey – Chairman.

Councillors K M Baker, M G Baker,
Mrs M Banerjee, J W Davies, P J Downes,
P Godley, D Harty, M F Newman and
J S Watt.

Messrs D Hopkins and M Phillips

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors D B Dew and J A Gray.

57. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 9th November 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

58. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

59. 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) scheduled for consideration by the Cabinet, which had been prepared by the Leader of the Council.

In so doing, Members requested sight of the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy when this became available.

60. CABINET FEEDBACK

The Panel received and noted a report from the Cabinet detailing their deliberations on the St Neots East Urban Design Framework in response to the Panel's recommendations.

61. TREE STRATEGY

(Councillor D B Dew, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport was in attendance for this item.)

The Panel received a presentation from the Council's Arboricultural Officer on the development of a Tree Strategy for Huntingdonshire. Members were advised of the desire to ensure that the District had a plentiful, healthy and attractive tree population that was managed and maintained to a high standard for the benefit of all which it was hoped would be achieved by the preparation of a Tree Strategy.

In compiling the Strategy, Officers would be establishing the nature and extent of the resource to be managed and would be consulting widely to ensure that the Strategy met the needs of the community. A small Working Group of the Panel had been established to assist in the process.

In noting that the neglect of trees and hedges was a regular complaint of constituents to Members, the Panel was advised that Officers could not get involved with neighbour disputes but that local Members were often in a good position to mediate. In response to a question by a Member, the Panel was advised that the County Council had powers to serve a notice to prune trees and hedgerows overhanging a highway if an owner failed to carry out the works, the County Council could carry them out either recharge the owner or place a charge on the Land Charges Register against the property.

62. ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY REVIEW

(Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor the Environment and Information Technology was in attendance for this item.)

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Environmental Management (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the Council's Environment Strategy.

The Panel was advised that the recent budget consultation had highlighted that environmental projects were perceived as a low priority for the District's residents. However, the Environmental Management Team remained committed to delivering the aims set out in the Environment Strategy with the implementation of environmental projects providing an opportunity to reduce energy costs for both the Council and residents by becoming more environmentally efficient and making the District more economically competitive. Members were informed that the Environment Strategy placed the District Council at the forefront of moving forward the low carbon agenda.

With regard to the 'Watts Going Down' scheme whereby residents were encouraged to reduce energy wasted in the home with the help of real time energy monitors, the Panel noted that the withdrawal of LPSA funding from the project meant that the stock of meters was diminishing. The Council's Environment Team Leader undertook to explore the feasibility of hiring the remaining meters to the public through the District's libraries.

In noting that electricity usage in the new Pathfinder House was higher than anticipated, the Panel was assured that the forthcoming server virtualisation project would resolve this issue as the power consumed by the Council's computers would be significantly reduced.

Members congratulated Officers for their work to date on the Environment Strategy and requested a further review in twelve months time.

RESOLVED

that the report be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet.

63. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The Panel received a report by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the performance of the authority against the priority objectives for environmental well-being as identified in 'Growing Success', the Council's Corporate Plan. The report had already been presented to a recent meeting of the Corporate Plan Working Group which comprised the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

64. PLANNING FOR SCHOOLS DEVELOPMENT: CONSULTATION

The Panel endorsed a response to the recently published Planning for Schools Development consultation exercise which had invited views on the Government's proposals to make changes to the General Permitted Development Order to give permitted rights for a change of use for school development. The draft response highlighted the Panel's concerns that the proposed absence of any requirement for planning permission would prevent local objection to the opening of a new school, dispense with the requirement for a traffic impact assessment and remove any democratic involvement in the process. (A copy of the draft response prepared by a working group comprising Councillors Dew, Downes and Mitchell is appended in the Minute Book).

RESOLVED

that the draft response be approved and submitted to the Government.

65. WORK PLAN STUDIES AND WORKING GROUP TEMPLATES

The Panel considered and noted a response 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 Scrutiny Panels.

The Panel noted that the next meeting of the Tree Strategy Working Group would be held in January 2011.

66. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS

The Panel was advised of progress on issues that had been previously discussed.

67. SCRUTINY

The Panel considered and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest summarising the Council's decisions since the previous meeting.

Chairman