

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) held in CIVIC SUITE 0.1B, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON PE29 3TN on Thursday, 8 March 2012.

PRESENT: Councillor T V Rogers – Chairman.

Councillors G J Bull, E R Butler, S Greenall, R Harrison, R B Howe, A J Mackender-Lawrence, P G Mitchell, M F Shellens and A H Williams.

Mr R Hall.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Mrs H Roberts.

98. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 2nd and 28th February 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

99. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

100. 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). It was noted that reports on the Review of HR Service and Community Infrastructure Levy Governance Principles would be considered by the Panel at future meetings. The Chairman explained that the Members of the Environmental and Social Well-Being Panels would be invited to participate in the discussions on the Community Infrastructure Levy.

Members noted that the outcome of the tender exercise for development at One Leisure, St Ives would be considered by the Panel at its meeting in April 2012.

101. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the authority holding that information).

102. CASTLE HILL HOUSE

For the benefit of those Members who had been unable to attend, the Chairman reported on the outcome of the Panel's Special meeting which had been held on 28th February 2012. The meeting had been convened to discuss an offer for the sale of Castle Hill House, High Street, Huntingdon, prior to a decision being taken by the Cabinet.

Having been informed of the Cabinet's decision on the matter and the action which would now be taken to continue to market the property, questions were raised with regard to the information the Cabinet had taken into consideration in reaching its decision and the future marketing strategy for the sale of the building. The Panel discussed the potential to generate additional revenue from the car park attached to Castle Hill House. Members were informed that this would not be financially viable as the Council would be required to pay National Non Domestic Rates. In view of forthcoming changes to National Non Domestic Rates in April 2013, it was suggested that further information on them should be presented to a future meeting in due course.

Members were reminded that the item had been included on the Agenda to comply with Section 16 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules contained in the Council's Constitution to enable the Chairman to report that he had given consent for a report on the Sale of Castle Hill House to be submitted as an item of urgency to the meeting of the Cabinet held on 16th February 2012. In so doing, Councillor Rogers explained that he had spoken with the Executive Leader to request that items were not submitted to the Cabinet at short notice in the future.

103. LOCATION OF THE CALL CENTRE

(Councillor B S Chapman, Executive Councillor for Customer Services was in attendance for this item).

With the assistance of a report by the Managing Director, Communities, Partnerships and Projects (a copy of which is appended in the annex to the Minute Book) the Panel considered a range of options for the future location of the District Council's Call Centre. In so doing, the Panel was informed that the report had been prepared by the Council's Head of Paid Service and, therefore, did not reflect the views of any Executive Councillor.

By way of introduction, the Managing Director, Communities, Partnerships and Projects drew attention to the key developments which had taken place since the Panel's previous deliberations on this subject in September 2011. Members were pleased to note that as part of the Making Assets Count Project, the Council had reached a licence agreement to let part of the Civic Suite to another public sector organisation which enabled the Council to meet one of the targets in the Medium Term Plan.

Attention having been drawn to the work which had been undertaken to establish whether there could be any benefits achieved from co-locating the District Council's Call Centre with the Customer Service

Centre, Members were advised of the conclusions which had been reached. However, Members questioned the validity of the comparison and suggested that other co-located facilities might have been found that would have better facilitated this decision. Comment was also made that it was difficult to determine whether savings might be achieved by co-locating services when the option of multi-skilling existing employees had not been included in Section 5.2 of the report. Members were advised that significant savings had already been achieved from combining the management arrangements for the existing facilities.

On the subject of the partnership arrangements which were in operation with the County Council, Members were advised that the District Council was working in partnership to establish a new Countywide network which would be used to support the Call Centre.

Having noted that the retention of the Call Centre facility at Speke House offered the Council significant business continuity resilience, Members endorsed the decision to prioritise the improvement of the Council's resilience generally. As a professional exercise had established the necessity to have disaster recovery arrangements located in a separate urban area, Members were of the view that this should include improving resilience at Pathfinder House. In this respect, the Panel received an update on the work which was being undertaken to review the existing Business Continuity Strategy which was expected to conclude in August 2012. Councillor T V Rogers undertook to discuss with the Chairman of the Corporate Governance Panel the best way for the Panel to contribute to the review.

At the conclusion of the discussion on this item, the Panel congratulated the Head of Customer Services on the recent achievement of a Customer Services Excellence Award. As the Call Centre currently worked well and there were no apparent advantages to changing the current arrangements, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to seek to negotiate a new lease for Speke House for up to 5 years with a break after 3 years.

104. RE-ADMITTANCE OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the public be re-admitted to the meeting.

105. BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT - HUNTINGDON

The Panel gave consideration to a report by the Economic Development Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) outlining proposals to establish a Business Improvement District (BID) in Huntingdon and the process which would need to be followed if it was to proceed. Members were informed that BIDs were business led and, in this case, would operate in tandem with the development of the Chequers Court area.

In considering the contents of the report, the Panel discussed the operating arrangements for the collection of the BID levy and also queried how the success of the BID would be measured. With regards to the latter, Members noted that if the Business Plan was not convincing, this would be reflected in the outcome of the BID ballot. In addition, all projects would have their own critical success factors. It would also be possible to dissolve the BID at any time if local businesses did not consider that it was delivering the anticipated outcomes.

Discussion ensued on the funding which had been provided by the District Council to assist the development of the BID. A member questioned whether funding would be available to assist other towns within the District if any of them wished to adopt a similar approach. The Economic Development Manager explained that Huntingdon Town Partnership had evolved to such an extent that the District Council funding only amounted to 40% of its overall budget and, therefore, was best placed to become a BID. Furthermore, it was unlikely that BIDs in St Ives and Ramsey would be viable and St Neots was bidding to become a Portas Pilot Town to regenerate the town centre. Comment was then made about the changing face of high street shopping and the likelihood that town centres would become more leisure orientated and a focal point for the community in future years.

On the question of car parking having been identified as a key priority area for BID activities, Members were advised that it was possible for the BID to use its funding to reimburse the local authority to provide for free car parking. However, in other areas this had been considered but not pursued.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to

- a) authorise the Head of Customer Services to enter into the BID Levy Operating Agreement required to meet the Council's obligations under the Local Government Act 2003; and
- b) authorise the Managing Director, Communities, Partnerships and Projects, in consultation with the Executive Leader, to cast any votes to which the District Council is entitled in the ballot.

106. ONE LEISURE WORKING GROUP

With the assistance of a report by the One Leisure Working Group (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel received an update on the Working Group's investigations into the future business model for One Leisure and the development of a methodology for the quantification of social value. Members were informed that the Working Group had decided to divide this work between two sub-groups of its Membership. Having noted that the sub-group looking at the business model wanted to co-opt another Member who had experience of outsourced or managed services to assist with its work, it was

RESOLVED

that Councillor A Mackender Lawrence be appointed to the Working Group.

107. BUDGET 2012/13 AND MTP - FEEDBACK

The Panel received and noted a report from the Cabinet (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on its response to comments on the Budget 2012/2013 and the Medium Term Plan. Members noted that the Cabinet had addressed all of the Panel's previous recommendations.

Councillor P G Mitchell reported that he had spoken to the Head of Financial Services regarding the presentation of financial information within future reports.

108. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing details of studies that were being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Social and Environmental Well-Being. In so doing, a Member queried when further information would be available on gypsy and traveller sites. The Scrutiny and Review Manager explained that gypsy and traveller welfare would be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) when the Council had resolved its policy position. Whilst this would take some time to complete as the Government had not yet made a decision on it, contingency arrangements would be put in place to deal with applications in the mean time.

With regard to the ongoing review of Neighbourhood Forums, Members were advised that a report would be considered by the Executive Leaders Strategy Group at its forthcoming meeting. Concerns having been expressed about the need for further consultation with the existing Forum Chairmen, Councillor T V Rogers undertook to raise the matter with the Executive Leader. It was then suggested that the Social Well-Being Panel should clarify the position regarding the provision of an enhanced CCTV Service when it considered the impact of changes to the service.

In noting the progress which had been made on the study of design principles for future developments, Councillor R Harrison suggested that St Neots Town Council would be keen to contribute to this work.

109. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) - PROGRESS

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing progress of matters that had been previously discussed by the Panel. In considering the contents of the report, Members were informed that work was currently being undertaken to develop a new format for the Council Plan and the Corporate Plan Working Group would be involved in this work.

With regard to the item on the A14 Improvements, it was suggested that a presentation should be made to the whole Council on this subject in due course. The Chairman then provided an update by on the activities of the Working Group which had been established to review the Council's support services.

At the suggestion of Councillor M F Shellens, it was agreed that the Panel should discuss the Council's approach to its financial reserves and the priorities for funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy at future meetings. It was decided that a discussion on the level and purpose of reserves, borrowing and liquidity should take place at the June meeting. Councillors R B Howe, P G Mitchell and M F Shellens were invited to prepare a short introduction to facilitate the discussion.

110. SCRUTINY

The Panel considered and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). With regard to the Monitoring of Section 106 Agreements, the Chairman suggested that it would be useful for the Section 106 Advisory Group to receive a monitoring report detailing the use of contributions which had been allocated for health purposes.

Chairman