

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SOCIAL WELL-BEING) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 2 October 2012.

PRESENT: Councillor R J West– Vice-Chairman.

Councillors K M Baker, R C Carter,
Mrs P A Jordan, P Kadewere, Ms L Kadic,
M C Oliver, J W G Pethard and R J West.

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

APOLOGY: An Apology for absence from the meeting
was submitted on behalf of Councillor S J
Criswell.

41. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 4th September 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

42. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Mr R Coxhead declared a non-disclosable pecuniary interest in Minute No. 12/44 by virtue of his membership of Godmanchester Town Council.

43. 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 Executive Leader of the Council for the period 1st October 2012 to 31st January 2013. Members were reminded that the Town and Parish Council Charter would be submitted to the meeting in November 2012. Details of the Gambling Act 2005 – Revised Statement of Principles had already been circulated to the Panel for information.

44. HOUSING STRATEGY 2012-15

(See Members' Interests)

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Planning and Housing Strategy (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) proposing the adoption of a new Housing Strategy 2012-15 for Huntingdonshire. The Housing Strategy Manager drew the Panel's attention to a number of achievements made under the previous Housing Strategy 2006-11 and to housing related trends for the Huntingdonshire area, in particular, population projections and changes in average house prices. These suggested there was a need to maximise opportunities to deliver more affordable housing. Having

advised the Panel that the revised Strategy focused on the Council's new priority areas, Members' attention was drawn to the key messages arising from the document.

In response to a question on the impact of developments on individuals' quality of life, the Head of Planning and Housing Strategy informed Members that there was a need to ensure that the right balance was achieved between the two and that due process was always followed. He then went on to state that the National Planning Policy Framework placed a duty on the Council to meet the housing needs of the District and that attempts were made to ensure that large scale developments were located in the least harmful areas. Following discussion on the role and importance of communication during large scale housing developments, Members concluded that good communication was important in terms of challenging negative attitudes towards such proposals.

Councillor R Carter queried whether there had been any changes in private sector rental rates and how they compared with the public sector. The Scrutiny and Review Manager reported that this was being pursued by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) with a recent report to that Panel having revealed that there had been little change in rent levels. He undertook to forward a copy of the report to Councillor Carter.

Other matters that were discussed included homelessness levels within the District and the role and importance of community planning within Parishes. Having regard to the latter, the Head of Planning and Housing Strategy advised that some communities had identified older people's homes as one of their community priority areas. These views would assist with shaping local planning policy in future years. Having expressed their satisfaction with the content of the Strategy, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to endorse the Housing Strategy 2012-15 for Huntingdonshire as appended to the report now submitted.

45. DRAFT TENANCY STRATEGY

With the aid of a report by the Head of Planning and Housing Strategy (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel considered the adoption of a Tenancy Strategy for Huntingdonshire. In introducing the report, the Housing Strategy Manager reported on the requirements placed on the Council by the Localism Act 2011 to have in place a Tenancy Strategy within twelve months of the Act coming into force. Members were advised that the most significant change proposed was the introduction of fixed term tenancies which would be offered by social landlords to their tenants. All social housing within the District was now managed by Registered Providers. Such Providers were not required to offer fixed term tenancies to their tenants, but instead they would have to have regard to the Council's Tenancy Strategy when setting their own policies. Members' attention was then drawn to the seven key principles which had been established to guide the Strategy; including the expectation that all Registered Providers would take a proactive approach to

tackling anti-social behaviour.

Members were informed that of the 9,000 homes owned and managed by Registered Providers within the District, 8,000 belonged to Luminus who would be introducing fixed term tenancies to new tenants from April 2013 onwards. It was confirmed that this would not affect tenants on existing assured tenancies even if they transfer to another property. Tenants' circumstances would be reviewed by social landlords prior to the end of their fixed term and all their housing options would be assessed. The options would include those on offer within the private sector as well as social housing options. Members were advised that the proposals were intended to encourage more effective utilisation of social housing whilst at the same time alleviating some of the pressures placed upon the Housing Register.

In response to a question about the publicity undertaken on the proposals, it was reported to Members that targeted consultation with social housing tenants had not been undertaken by the Council. This was a matter for Registered Providers to address as it would be their policies that would directly affect tenants.

Having referred to the impact of the welfare reforms, in particular those which related to home occupancy levels, it was reported that work was being undertaken in conjunction with Registered Providers to communicate the changes to affected tenants. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to endorse the Tenancy Strategy 2012.

46. HUNTINGDONSHIRE CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

(Councillor J D Ablewhite, Executive Leader of the Council, was in attendance for consideration of this item).

Following the recent announcement on the closure of Huntingdonshire CAB, the Chairman reported that this matter was on the Agenda so that Members could discuss the social implications of the closure for residents of the District and its effects upon the Council.

In his opening remarks, the Executive Leader reported that the announcement by the CAB that it would go into voluntary liquidation was a fundamental issue for Huntingdonshire and that a number of discussions had been held with the CAB in the last few months on the financial viability of the organisation. The CAB provided a key area of support to the District's residents and attempts were being made to work positively with the organisation to manage the situation and to identify the next steps forward. The Executive Leader reported to the expectation that the service would cease to operate in December 2012. Interim arrangements were therefore being planned for the final quarter of the financial year. The valuable service provided by the organisation's volunteers was acknowledged by Members. It was confirmed that the volunteers would play an important part during the transition period, pending the identification of a long term solution for

Huntingdonshire. In his concluding remarks, the Executive Leader confirmed that any future service provision would be made available across the whole District.

The Community Health Manager reported that the District Council would be meeting with the CAB the following day to consider future service provision. He also indicated that the closing date for applications under the Council's new voluntary sector funding arrangements was 31st October 2012 and that proposals were expected from the CAB in this respect. All Members would receive a summary of applications received prior to a decision being made by the relevant Executive Members.

The Panel discussed a number of matters including the importance of maintaining an ongoing training and development programme for CAB volunteers, ensuring that the organisation had adequate insurance cover, the means by which trained volunteers could be retained by the CAB and the importance of maintaining communications with the public.

Having thanked the Executive Leader for his attendance at the meeting, it was agreed that a further update on this matter would be provided at the Panel's meeting in November 2012.

47. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2011/12

The Panel reviewed the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2011/12 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). In so doing, Members were reminded of the constitutional requirement to produce a Report each year and were advised that it would be circulated to Town and Parish Councils, other local authorities and press and libraries.

48. CAMBRIDGESHIRE ADULTS, WELLBEING AND HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A brief update was delivered by Councillor R J West on the outcome of the meeting of the Cambridgeshire Adults, Well-Being and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12th September 2012. He drew attention to the fact that the Committee had discussed Clinical Commissioning Groups and the Adult Social Care Integrated Plan.

49. WORK PLAN 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) which contained details of studies being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Economic Well-Being and for Environmental Well-Being.

50. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SOCIAL 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) which contained details of actions taken in response to recent discussions and decisions.

Councillor R J West reported that he had attended Circle's Annual General Meeting on 7th September 2012 when the 2011/12 Annual Report on Hinchingsbrooke Hospital had been delivered and updates received on recruitment, the Hospital's Estates Strategy and the London 2012 Olympics. The Panel also was advised that a meeting would be held on 14th November 2012 to consider the impact of the redesign of mental health services across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Brief updates were delivered on the work of the Corporate Plan and the Consultation Processes and Social Well-Being Working Groups. Councillor R J West extended his thanks on behalf of the Equality Working Group to Councillor Mrs P A Jordan who had agreed to attend the Equality Framework Steering Group.

Having regard to the Joint Member Led Review on Domestic Abuse, it was reported that the Lead Member, Councillor Ms S Hoy, would be meeting with the Home Secretary on 30th October 2012 to discuss the study's findings.

Having informed the Panel that a review of the effectiveness of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels would be undertaken on 22nd October 2012 and in noting that the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Mr R Coxhead would be participating in the review, a request was made for a further Panel Member to assist with the review process. Councillor Mrs P A Jordan indicated that she had previously expressed an interest and would be happy to be involved in the review.

Members concurred with a suggestion made by Mr R Coxhead that Circle Healthcare should be invited to back to the Panel's March 2013 meeting. This would be timely given that it would be a year since Circle had addressed the Panel.

51. SCRUTINY

(See Members' Interests)

In receiving the 127th Edition of the Decision Digest, the following comments were made:-

- a meeting of the Design Principles for Future Developments Working Group established by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) would be held on Friday, 5th October 2012.
- following on from concerns raised at the last meeting by Councillor Mrs P A Jordan, Members' attention was drawn to the fact that Group Leaders would be meeting to discuss the findings of the Employee Opinion Survey; and
- having regard to Bearscroft Farm, Godmanchester, Mr R Coxhead reported that this matter was causing concern within the Town, particularly in relation to the consultation process.

Chairman