

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in Civic Suite 1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 9 October 2012.

- PRESENT: Councillor D Harty – Chairman.
- Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, I C Bates, I J Curtis, J W Davies, G J Harlock and Mrs D C Reynolds.
- Co-opted Members Messrs D Hopkins and M Phillips.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors D A Giles and C R Hyams.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors P L E Bucknell and D M Tysoe.

35. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 11th September 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

36. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

37. 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. Having questioned why a report on CIL Governance Principles had been considered by the Economic rather than Environmental Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Panel, the Scrutiny and Review Manager advised Members that as the report concentrated on the management of finances generated through the CIL scheme it fell within the Economic Panel's remit. Members were reminded that they had been invited to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being) Panel for consideration of this Item. In light of Members' concerns, the Scrutiny and Review Manager undertook to circulate the report to the Panel to enable Members to convey comments to Cabinet if necessary.

38. CHARGING FOR A SECOND GREEN BIN

(Councillor P L E Bucknell, Ward Member for Warboys and Bury, and Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Councillor for the Environment, were in attendance for this Item.)

Councillor D M Tysoe introduced a report by the Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on charging for a second green bin. He advised the Panel that the Council was looking at ways to reduce its costs while maintaining service standards and raising revenue. He also stated that some London Borough Councils charged for all green waste collections. Huntingdonshire District Council proposed to provide free collection of the first green bin for all residents but the collection of the second green bin should be regarded as a premium service and, therefore, should attract a charge. Councillor Tysoe expressed the view that this would be fairer to all residents as currently the majority of additional green bins were in seven wards and other wards were effectively subsidising their service.

Having regard to the practicalities of the proposals, Members were advised of the need for additional green bins to be easy to distinguish as operatives should not be tasked with responding to complaints and arbitration in questions of eligibility when going about their rounds. For reasons of cost the preferred approach was to fit new lids to additional green bins so that they could be easily identified by operatives and residents.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor P L E Bucknell, Ward Member for Warboys and Bury, addressed the Panel. Councillor Bucknell informed Members that he acknowledged the Council needed to generate revenue but, in his opinion, this was not the right way to do it. He expressed the view that residents would not pay the charge for a second green bin and would put green waste in household waste bins instead, which would have an adverse effect on the waste service budget. He also expected that implementation of the proposal would lead to an increase in fly-tipping. The proposed charge amounted to a significant sum compared to the District Council's portion of the Council Tax. Furthermore, in Councillor Bucknell's opinion, properties with additional green bins tended to pay higher levels of Council Tax, which should afford them collection of a second green waste bin without having to pay an additional charge. He suggested that VAT would apply because the charge being incurred was for a service. Finally, Councillor Bucknell reported on his discussions with a Cabinet Member of a London Council that had introduced such a charge who had expressed the view that it was a mistake to do so.

A Member highlighted the fact that it was not just properties in the higher Council Tax band which benefited from the enhanced service. Further to this, the experiences of a London Borough Council were not comparable with this Council and a comparison with a rural area would have been preferable.

The view was expressed that the waste collection service was one of the most highly valued services provided by the Council. Attention was drawn to the fact that it was a universal service and was one of the best performing in the Country. Concerns were raised that the performance of the waste collection service would worsen if the proposal was adopted and that public perception of the Council might be damaged. It was argued that the Council should instead promote recycling. In this respect, the Council could take steps to encourage

composting of green waste. Furthermore, it was suggested that the Council should focus on non-statutory services when looking to make savings rather than on services such as waste collection, which were a statutory requirement. In response, Councillor Tysoe stressed that the proposed charge would not affect the majority of residents and that if every second green bin was returned there would be a 3.4% reduction in the waste collected. Moreover the Council had recently extended the range of material it collected, which would increase recycling.

Having specific regard to fly-tipping, it was established that the additional cost of enforcement had not been factored into the business case presented in the report. Experience at other authorities had suggested that adoption of the proposal would result in an initial increase in fly-tipping which would decline over time. Councillor Tysoe assured Members that as fly-tipping was a criminal offence enforcement action would be undertaken where necessary. If fly tipping continued to be a problem then there would be a need for additional resources.

Councillor Tysoe advised Members that in the current economic climate, imaginative ways of raising income were needed. It was anticipated that implementation of the proposal would lead to an increase in complaints to the call centre, the majority of which would come from the seven wards which had the most additional green bins. This had been allowed for in the business case. Members were reminded that the proposed charges did not represent an increase to residents' Council Tax bills; it was a charge for an additional service which residents could choose not to receive. The Head of Operations pointed out that the Council could opt to charge for all green waste collected; however, the proposals only related to an enhanced service and as such would not affect the majority of residents. It was expected that adoption of the proposals would lead to many residents returning their second green bins, but it was felt that the practicalities of finding alternative means of disposing of green waste would result in residents choosing to take back their additional green bin. It was also noted that, if the proposal was adopted, a communication strategy would be devised and implemented to educate residents about waste disposal.

In response to a question, the Head of Operations informed Members that Cambridgeshire County Council did not pay recycling credits for green waste. It was reiterated that the scheme was intended to raise additional revenue for the Council, and while it was difficult to give accurate marginal costs, the calculations within the report were accurate. Having specific regard to payback period, the Panel was advised that this was expected to be achieved in year two.

It was agreed that representatives of the Panel would attend the Cabinet meeting for consideration of this Item.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the proposal to introduce a charge for the collection of a second green bin be not supported; and
- (b) that the Cabinet be requested to take into

consideration the views of the Panel when considering this item.

39. JAPANESE KNOTWEED

Pursuant to Minute No. 11/20, the Panel considered a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on Japanese Knotweed. Given that there was a very limited occurrence of Japanese Knotweed in Huntingdonshire and where the Council was responsible action had been taken to deal with it, the Panel decided not to pursue a study on this matter.

40. CORPORATE TRAVEL PLAN UPDATE

(Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Councillor for the Environment, was in attendance for this Item.)

Councillor D M Tysoe introduced a report by the Head of Environmental Management (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the updated Corporate Travel Plan. The new Plan was designed to build on work already undertaken to reduce single occupant car use by employees travelling to and for work, and to encourage a model shift towards more sustainable forms of transport. Having questioned how the updated Plan differed from the original, the Panel was advised there had been a number of minor modifications, most notably relating to the incentives offered for owners of low carbon vehicles who were able to purchase car parking permits at a reduced rate.

Members' attention was drawn to a mapping exercise undertaken to show where Council employees lived. A Member suggested that the District Council should use this information to explore the possibility of providing a staff bus service from the main settlements to Pathfinder House. The Head of Environmental Management undertook to determine whether this suggestion would be cost-effective and subsequently a viable option.

A Member stressed the effectiveness of car sharing as a means of meeting the Travel Plan's objectives and questioned whether the Council offered any incentives to employees choosing to car share. In response, Members were informed that car sharing was actively encouraged but no incentives were provided.

Having discussed the increase in the percentage of employees cycling to work from 2006 to 2010, Members requested an analysis of the usage of cycling routes. The Head of Environmental Management agreed to liaise with colleagues at the County Council in order to provide the requested information. Having commented on the lack of information relating to staff travel in 2011, Members also requested 2011 statistics for staff travel behaviour.

With reference to the Council's objectives, targets and indicators and particularly the objective 'to reduce local traffic and road congestion', the Panel questioned whether the targets were sufficiently challenging for a five-year period. Having recognised that an increase in home working could be a means of delivering the Travel Plan's objectives, it was suggested that the Council should place more emphasis on

home working and that there should be a systematic analysis of posts for which home working was appropriate.

RESOLVED

that, subject to the inclusion of more challenging targets, the Cabinet be recommended to adopt the updated Corporate Travel Plan (2012/2013 to 2017/2018) and support the objectives, targets and action plan contained within it.

41. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS

With the aid of a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was advised of progress on issues that had been previously discussed.

Following a request for information at the Panel's previous meeting, Councillor D M Tysoe clarified the Cabinet's position regarding stickers on wheeled bins. Members were advised that Speedwatch had approached Councillor Tysoe in his capacity as Executive Councillor for the Environment, regarding sticking speed limit notices on wheeled bins across the District. Following this request, a trial had been agreed whereby Speedwatch could place stickers on wheeled bins. Councillor Tysoe was awaiting the findings from the pilot initiative so that an informed decision could be made regarding the approach to be taken for the remainder of the District. At present he was concerned that stickers could be distracting to drivers and have an impact on road safety. In this light, Councillor Tysoe needed to be assured that the scheme would be well thought out, managed and policed. A Member expressed the view that as wheeled bins were only on the road side sporadically, little would be achieved from using them to convey messages. In response, Councillor Curtis informed Members that in the opinion of the Police and the County Council, residents took more notice of features which were not a permanent fixture.

Councillor Bates suggested that contact ought to be made with representatives of Speedwatch in order to determine the pilot's findings. In response, Councillor Tysoe emphasised that he required firm evidence from Speedwatch before making any further decisions regarding the Council's policy on stickers on wheeled bins.

Councillor Mrs M Banerjee reported that a further meeting of the Design Principles for Future Developments Working Group had been held at which the Urban Design, Trees and Landscape Team Leader had agreed to provide Working Group Members with sight of a detailed design guide in December.

42. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

The Panel approved for publication the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2010/2011 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book).

43. DRAINAGE

With the aid of a report by the Drainage Working Group (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillor Mrs M Banerjee informed Members of the successful outcome of the Working Group's investigations into Anglian Water's general powers and responsibilities and the limitations on its ability to prevent flooding. Following discussions with representatives of Anglian Water and the Environment Agency, Anglian Water and the County Council were working together to find a solution to the drainage issues in Yaxley.

44. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel considered and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) informing them of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

45. SCRUTINY

The Panel received and noted the latest edition the Council's Decision Digest (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), which summarised recent decisions by the Council. In response to a question by Councillor G J Harlock, the Panel was informed that testing of proposals for changes to Council Tax discounts and exemptions had been undertaken to ensure they could be implemented and would increase the Council's income.

Chairman