

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) held in MEETING ROOMS 0.1A AND B, GROUND FLOOR, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 8 November 2012.

PRESENT: Councillor T V Rogers – Chairman.

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

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor E R Butler and Hall.

52. MINUTES

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

53. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor M F Shellens declared a non pecuniary interest in Minute No. 56 as a Member of Brampton Parish Council.

Councillor A H Williams declared a non pecuniary interest in Minute No. 56 as the Chairman of Brampton Choral Society.

Councillors G J Bull and P G Mitchell declared a non pecuniary interest in Minute No.55 as residents who were currently in possession of two green waste collection bins.

54. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 - FORWARD PLAN

(During the discussion on this item (7.10pm) Councillor S Greenall took his seat at the meeting).

The Panel considered and noted the current Notice of Executive Decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). The Chairman reported that it would have been normal practice to dedicate the Panel's December Meeting to the Budget and MTP. However as the necessary information for a full budget report to be prepared had not yet been received from Central Government, the Chairman indicated that he intended to allow other items also to be considered at the meeting.

55. CHARGING FOR A SECOND GREEN BIN

Councillors M Banerjee, Ward Member for Yaxley and Farcet, I C Bates, Ward Member for the Hemingfords, P L E Bucknell, Ward

Member for Warboys and Bury, Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Councillor for the Environment, and Councillor J D Ablewhite were in attendance for this Item).

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) setting out the case for reducing the cost of the refuse and recycling service by introducing an annual charge of £40 for an additional green waste bin. The report had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) who had agreed that the Council should not introduce a charge and the Cabinet had referred the matter to the Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being) for further consideration.

Councillor D M Tysoe explained that the Council currently spent £1.3M on collecting green waste, which represented 40% of the Council's total costs for waste collection and for which the Council did not receive any additional funding. A significant number of other Authorities charged a separate fee for all green waste collection. The Council was proposing to provide free collection of the first green bin for all its residents but the collection of the second green bin should be regarded as a premium service and, therefore should attract a charge. For the majority of residents in the District this represented no change to the current service.

Councillor Tysoe then sought to address the concerns which had been raised previously regarding the impact of the changes on green waste collection levels with the District. He suggested that whilst there might be an immediate reduction in the green waste collected, he did not expect the level of green waste collected to be lower in the medium term. The Panel's attention was drawn to the sensitivity analysis which was set out in section 6.2 of the report. This was based on a 40% reduction in residents subscribing to the new service. Councillor Tysoe reiterated that whilst the Council had previously sought to resist making cuts to services, the current budgetary situation dictated that consideration would need to be given to a number of difficult decisions in the future.

Members asked about the experience of other Councils who had introduced a charge for the collection of a second green bin. The Panel noted that there were currently 13 Authorities who made such a charge which ranged from £15 to £140 per annum. It was also reported that there had been no increase in fly tipping in those areas. Members indicated that it would have been useful to have had this type of information together with the detailed financial analysis within the report.

In considering the proposal, Members expressed concerns that it would result in residents putting additional green waste into their domestic waste bins and enquired what steps the Council would take if a resident did not pay the charge for the second green bin. Members were assured that waste collection operatives would not collect any bins in which green waste had been deposited and a note would be placed on the bin to this effect. All green bins remained the property of the District Council, who would instigate recovery procedures if necessary. In response to other questions, the Panel

noted that the proposed £40 charge was based upon the median figure for other authorities and that it would not be possible to discount further the cost of compost bins through the Council's Compost Bin Scheme.

In terms of the impact of the proposals, Members commented that there would be a particular effect on the rural areas, where a number of properties had a higher Council tax banding and it could, therefore be perceived to be unfair. Reference was also made to the likely public reaction from residents of Wyton on the Hill which was a private estate, and the level of the charge compared to the District Council's portion of the Council Tax.

On the question of the set up costs associated with the implementation of the charge, Members were advised that efforts had already been made to reduce the capital costs. The inclusion of the cost of one Full Time Equivalent post was an estimate of the additional resources that would be required from an analysis of all the tasks in the process. It would not be possible to absorb the administration into existing workloads.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, I C Bates and P L E Bucknell addressed the Panel. Councillor Bucknell expressed the view that residents would not pay for a second bin and would instead put green waste into grey bins. There would also be a consequently increase in fly tipping. He stated that VAT would apply because the charge was for a service and also reported on his discussions with a representative from a London Council, which had introduced such a charge, who has expressed the view that it was a mistake to do so. He also reported on his discussions with other local authority representatives whose investigations had led them to conclude that it would not be in their interest to introduce a charge for the collection of the second green bin.

Councillor Mrs M Banerjee reminded the Panel that the collection of green waste had been introduced to respond to a European Union Directive. To remove this facility would be unpopular with Huntingdonshire residents and would damage public perception of the Council.

Councillor I C Bates urged the Panel to endorse the views which were set out in the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being). In doing so, he stressed that the Environmental Panel had unanimously agreed that the Council should not introduce a charge for a second green bin. The waste collection service was a universal service, which was valued and recognised by the Community. The introduction of a charge would have an adverse effect on recycling rates and would represent a loss of service to the public. Finally, and in recognising the need for the Council to make budgetary savings, he expressed concern that the Panel was being asked to consider one proposal in isolation and not a range of possible options. Having suggested that savings could be achieved in staffing costs and from the One Leisure Service, he recommended that the Council should not take a decision on this matter until other options had been assessed.

In response, Councillor Tysoe informed the Panel that the Cabinet was looking at a number of options to achieve budgetary savings for the Authority. He reminded the Panel that the Council did not have a statutory responsibility to collect green waste and drew attention to the fact that 83 Councils within the Country currently charge for the collection of the first green bin which was not something that this Council was intending to introduce. He did not believe that this proposal would reduce recycling. Fly tipping was a criminal offence and the Council would undertake enforcement to combat it. Advice had been received that VAT would not apply on residential collections.

The Executive Leader confirmed that the Cabinet was looking at a number of 'big ticket' items for generating further savings. For example a Business Plan for One Leisure was currently being prepared.

In terms of the Council's financial position more generally, the Chairman drew the Panel's attention to the recent announcement by Central Government that increases in Council Tax in 2013 should be limited to 2%. This would require the District Council to find additional savings in the region of £680K to £940K and he indicated that the Panel should give further consideration to a range of possible options for delivering savings.

Having agreed that the business case for the additional charge was sound, Members were however of the opinion that it should be considered in the context of a range of other options for achieving budgetary savings. In view of concerns about the likely damage to the public's opinion of the Council, it was moved by Councillor M F Shellens and seconded by Councillor P G Mitchell that the charge should only apply for new requests for second green bins or where there was a change in the ownership of a property. Upon being put to the vote, the motion was declared to be lost. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the proposal to introduce a charge for a second green bin should be supported in principle, subject to it being considered as part of a package of savings.

56. ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Panel considered the Council's proposed arrangements for dealing with applications for listing community assets. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that as part of the Localism Act 2011, legislation had been introduced to assist local community groups preserve buildings or land which they considered to be important to their community's social well-being. Members' attention was then drawn to those bodies which could make nominations and to the proposed process for nominating an asset. Members were assured that Ward Members would be consulted on all applications.

In considering the contents of the report, the Panel questioned how

Parish Councils and other interested charities had been made aware of the introduction of the new legislation. Members were informed that a briefing note had been sent to all District Councillors and that this could be circulated to Parish Councils. They were advised that it would not be appropriate to provide any examples of the assets that might be listed given that the District Council had an obligation to determine applications, and this might be regarded as pre-determination.

In terms of the arrangements for dealing with compensation claims, the Panel was informed the Government had indicated that the estimated costs of compensation would be included within the 'new burdens' funding. In addition, the Government had committed to meet the cumulative costs of compensation exceeding £20k in one financial year. In the event of claims exceeding this limit, the District Council would have to request further reimbursement.

Members requested clarification of those bodies which could make a nomination and asked whether a disposal would be exempt from the moratorium arrangements in the case of an individual or organisation being placed into administration. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services undertook to investigate this further and advise Members in due course.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to

- a) delegate responsibility for receiving and processing applications to the Corporate Team Manager;
- b) delegate responsibility for determining whether an asset should be listed on the register of community assets or not to a panel of 3 appropriate Council Officers (who may be drawn from Planning and Housing Strategy, Environmental & Community Services and Legal & Democratic Services, supported by the Corporate Team) to be designated by COMT;
- c) delegate responsibility for determining reviews against listing of assets by the owners to the Head of Planning & Housing Strategy after consultation with the Head of Legal & Democratic Services (or their nominees);
- d) delegate responsibility for putting in place appropriate arrangements for determining requests for compensation and any review requests to the Corporate Team Manager; and
- e) request the Corporate Team Manager to put in place arrangements for publishing how applicable groups can go about making a nomination.

57. HUNTINGDONSHIRE ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT - KEY FINDINGS

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

By way of introduction, the Executive Leader informed the Panel that the Local Economic Assessment was a valuable tool for establishing the strategic economic direction of the District. Overall, the results presented a positive picture of economic development within Huntingdonshire. He drew particular attention to the Enterprise Zone and the fact that the first tenant had now been secured for the Incubator Unit on the site. He also drew attention to the large role played by manufacturing within the District and the Panel was informed that there had been an increase in the number of start up businesses within the District during the past year.

The Economic Development Manager explained that the Local Economic Assessment had been undertaken to provide an evidence base for a new Economic Strategy. A review of the Strategy was being undertaken to coincide with the creation of the new Local Plan for the District and to reflect a number of significant changes since the last review, namely, the impact of the recession and the establishment of the Local Enterprise Zone.

The Panel was advised that as part of the first stage of the assessment process, the data had been grouped into three themes – People and Communities, Business and Enterprise and Sustainable Economic Growth. The data had been tested at a number of workshops with stakeholders, elected Members and Officers.

In considering the themes which had been identified, Members were acquainted with relevant findings in each area. Particular attention was drawn to concerns about future labour supply and the structure of the economy arising from low population growth forecasts. Concern was also expressed about a decline in the level of job applicants with NVQ qualifications.

Comment was made with regards to the figures for housing growth within the District. Members noted that one person households were predicted to take up a significant proportion of the increase in the number of households. The Executive Leader explained that a significant issue going forward would be the affordability of housing within the District. House prices in Cambridge were expected to continue to rise over the course of the next few years which would have a knock on effect on the surrounding areas. Furthermore Members noted that the commercial property market had stalled and the relevant data appeared to indicate that there was a mismatch between the type of properties that were available and those for which there was a demand.

Having noted the outcome of the conversations with local businesses and the stakeholder workshops on the assessment data, the Economic Development Manager drew attention to the eight priority areas which had been developed for action. Councillor Ablewhite urged Members not to underestimate the role of the District Council in promoting Economic Development within the District. In this respect

he made reference to the Council's role in developing the Local Enterprise Partnership and establishing the Local Enterprise Zone.

In terms of the next stage of the process, the Panel commended the Economic Development Manager for the work that had been produced, which would underpin the future strategic development of Huntingdonshire. Members were informed that work would now be undertaken to draw up a new Local Economy Strategy for the District. In view of the significance of this piece of work, they were of the opinion that this warranted further consideration by the Panel. With this in mind, the Economic Development Manager was requested to present the Strategy and associated action plans to the Panel in the New Year.

58. CORPORATE BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING (2012 ANNUAL REPORT)

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

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Information Management (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel received an update on the progress that had been made in reviewing the Council's corporate business continuity arrangements. By way of introduction, the Executive Leader explained that a Business Continuity Plan was being developed to replace the Council's former Service Recovery Plan. Good progress had been made, but this had not yet been completed.

The Head of Information Management outlined the process which had been undertaken to develop and maintain the Business Continuity Plan for the Council. Detailed information was provided on the background to the need to change the existing processes, the specific work which had been undertaken, the issues and risks which had been identified and the resource requirements of the process. Having been advised of the next steps in the process, Members were provided with details of the incidents during the last 12 months which had triggered action by the Business Continuity Team. It was intended to review the Plan on an annual basis, the outcome of which would be considered by the Corporate Governance Panel.

Councillor R B Howe drew attention to the current problems being experienced with the remote My Office system which was not allowing Members to obtain access to My Office and associated software. Comment having been made about the action which was being taken to communicate with those councillors about the problem and the length of the down-time, Members were informed that the ICT Support Officer was making efforts to contact affected individuals and, where appropriate, Council emails would be redirected to their personal email accounts. As the problem was a result of a major hardware failure it was not possible to resolve it immediately. The Head of IMD explained that in future, the Council would broadcast MMS messages to affected individuals. Work was ongoing with Democratic Services to establish a contact list for elected Members

for this purpose.

In considering the contents of the report, Members enquired what action would be undertaken to test the Plans and were informed that because of the associated costs involved, this may well be undertaken on a bi-annual basis in conjunction with the Council's Emergency Plan. In terms of the resourcing requirements of the Business Continuity Plan, the Panel noted that it had been allocated 0.7 Full Time Equivalents in Officer time. A Member suggested that in the absence of the Head of Information Management and the Head of Environmental Management, a Managing Director should nominate a Head of Service to take the corporate lead on behalf of the Strategic Management Group should the Plan need to be implemented.

In concluding the discussion, the Executive Leader reminded the Panel that the District Council's Emergency Planning Arrangements were considered to be exemplary and that it was important to give due and appropriate consideration to the Council's arrangements for business continuity.

59. APPOINTMENT OF NEW INDEPENDENT MEMBER

Councillor G J Bull reported on the outcome of the Selection Panel which had met on 7th November 2012 to interview candidates for the vacant position of co-opted Member. The Panel was informed that two candidates had been acceptable and that the unsuccessful applicant should be kept on a reserve list for any future vacancies. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Council be recommended to appoint Mr R Eacott as a Co-Opted Member to the Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well Being) Panel for a period of four years.

60. 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.

Pursuant to Minute No. 49, the Chairman reported on the outcome of his discussions with the Executive Leader on the One Leisure review and more generally about the role of scrutiny. The Executive Leader had agreed that overview and scrutiny should be able to operate independently and without any constraints imposed by the Cabinet. In terms of the One Leisure Review, the Chairman had agreed that work on the business model would not continue until the Business Plan had been completed and considered by the Panel.

With reference to the review of Neighbourhood Forums, Councillor R B Howe reported that he had written to the Executive Leader of the Council to ask him to review the decision to put the Forums in

abeyance pending the completion of the pilot of the Local Joint Committee. In his view a mechanism that enabled the different tiers of local government to work together was particularly necessary at this point in time and the progress that had been made by the Forums would be lost. The Panel endorsed this view and agreed to convey these comments to the Leadership.

61. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL (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 on matters that had previously been discussed. Members were informed that a meeting of the Borrowing Working Group had now been held. The Group had requested further information to enable them to examine the Council's current practices and financial position. A further report would be forthcoming in due course.

62. 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).

Chairman