

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, Cambs, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 4 December 2012.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors S Akthar, K M Baker, R C Carter, P Kadewere, M C Oliver, J W G Pethard and R J West.

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

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors R Fuller and Mrs P A Jordan.

63. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 6th November 2012 were approved as correct record and signed by the Chairman.

64. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

65. NOTICE OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel considered and noted the current Notice of Executive 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 December 2012 to 31st March 2013.

66. NHS CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH: FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

(Mrs S Shuttlewood, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Groups, was in attendance for consideration of this item).

Pursuant to Minute No. 12/61 and with the aid of reports prepared by NHS Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book), the Panel was updated on the financial and operational performance of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital. Further updates were tabled at the meeting (copies of which are also appended in the Minute Book) providing the latest performance statistics which were due to be considered by the NHS Board the following day.

In introducing the reports, Mrs S Shuttlewood, representative of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group,

delivered an outline of the Commissioning Group's role in monitoring the performance of the Hospital. In so doing, it was reported that a rigorous contractual performance monitoring regime had been adopted to ensure that the standards required of the Hospital were being delivered. Members were encouraged to note that of the 46 acute providers within the County, Hinchingsbrooke's performance currently came in at 8th place in terms of its overall performance. Furthermore, the Panel was advised that the Hospital could be penalised financially if it was felt that it was not adhering to the terms of the contract or implementing appropriate remedial action when required to do so. Areas of current concern relating to the Hospital included the recent norovirus outbreak and its impact upon the availability of bed space which, in turn, had resulted in delays in waiting times within the Accident and Emergency Department, the need for improved performance against targets for treating cancer patients and the anticipated financial deficit expected at the end of the 2012/13 financial year.

The Panel discussed a number of matters including the powers held by the Commissioning Group, the requirement to report upon national health standards, the recent award received by the Maternity Unit, the cleanliness standards of the Hospital, the risks associated with the imposition of financial penalties on the Hospital, current issues with the Ambulance Service, delayed discharges, the availability of care in the community services and the Commissioning Group's relationship with Circle Healthcare. Clarification was then sought and received on the reasons for the reported financial deficit and Members discussed the Hospital's progress against the Quality, Innovation, Prevention and Productivity programme.

In terms of the way forward, it was agreed that regular reports would continue to be provided on the Hospital. Following a suggestion made by the Chairman that a Joint Working Group should be established comprising representatives of the Panel and the County Council's Cambridgeshire Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it was

RESOLVED

Councillors S J Criswell, P Kadewere, M C Oliver and R J West, together with Mr R Coxhead, be appointed on to a Working Group to pursue further investigations into Hinchingsbrooke Hospital.

67. HUNTINGDONSHIRE CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

(Councillor J D Ablewhite, Executive Leader of the Council, Councillor T D Sanderson, Executive Member for Healthy and Active Communities, and Mr M Mealing, Chairman of the Huntingdonshire Citizens Advice Bureau, were in attendance for consideration of this item).

(Councillor P J Downes was in attendance for this item).

Pursuant to Minute No. 12/56, the Panel received a further update on recent developments relating to the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and the provision of advice services in Huntingdonshire. Councillor J

D Ablewhite, Executive Leader of the Council, reminded the Panel of the background to the decision by the CAB to go into voluntary liquidation and the steps which had been undertaken prior to reaching this decision.

Councillor T D Sanderson, Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities, then reported upon the conclusions which had been reached on 21st November 2012, when the applications which had been received under the Council's new voluntary sector funding arrangements were determined. It was reported that Rural Cambs CAB had been identified as the preferred bidder for the delivery of advisory services across the District. The organisation's bid would provide for a four day service in Huntingdon and a three day service in St Neots with debt advisory services being provided at both locations one day each week. In addition, a three hour outreach session would be provided in Yaxley, St Neots and St Ives through a rotation basis with email, telephone and web advisory services also made available alongside front line services.

Councillor Sanderson went on to state that owing to the terms of the current service level agreement with the Huntingdonshire CAB a formal announcement cannot on the outcome of the bidding process could not be made until 8th December 2012. Once the formal announcement had been made, steps would then be taken to provide interim services for the period January to March 2013 inclusive. It was expected that an approach would be made to the successful bidder for this purpose. Mr M Mealing, Chairman of the CAB, reported that the CAB had now formally closed to the public but that debt advisory services would continue to be provided until 21st December 2012.

Councillor P J Downes expressed concerns over the process, which had been adopted to determine the applications received under the new voluntary sector funding arrangements. He was of the opinion that the bidders should have been given the opportunity to address Members to explain how they would meet the grant criteria. In response, the Executive Leader and Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities assured Members that due process had been followed and the preferred bidder would be able to meet the needs of the District.

Members agreed that the Voluntary Sector Working Group, previously established by the Panel, would take part in regular review meetings with the successful bidder and the Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities to monitor the performance of the service. Whilst six monthly meetings had been suggested, it was agreed that more frequent meetings could be held if necessary.

A brief discussion then ensued on the fact that grants could be tapered to encourage recipients to obtain other funding and to allow the remaining money to be used for other proposals. This had been agreed by Cabinet at its meeting in July 2012.

In concluding their discussions, the Executive Leader, on behalf of the Council, placed on record his thanks to Mr Mealing and the Huntingdonshire CAB for their efforts over the years.

68. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT FROM 1ST APRIL 2013

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

With the aid of a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel gave consideration to a proposal to adopt a new local Council Tax Support scheme for the District. This scheme would supersede the current national Council Tax Benefit scheme on 1st April 2013.

By way of background, the Executive Councillor for Customer Services acquainted Members with the proposals and drew their attention to the impact of the scheme upon the District whilst providing a comparison of it to the Government's proposed transitional scheme. The Panel was advised that the draft scheme had been subject to consultation in late summer, which had resulted in changes being made relating to the backdating of payments for up to six months and to the capital limit, which would remain at the existing Council Tax Benefit level of £16,000. These changes had been incorporated within the new scheme.

The Panel discussed at length the impact of the proposals upon Town and Parish precepts. Members acknowledged the difficulties faced by the Head of Customer Services in providing accurate estimates on Council Tax calculations given that they depend on a Government announcement which was expected on 13th December 2012. Town and Parish Councils had been advised by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils to defer setting their precepts until this announcement had been made. At the request of the Panel, it was agreed that a report outlining the impact of this process on Town and Parish Councils would be made available to Members in February 2013.

Members discussed the groups of individuals who would no longer be eligible for Council Tax assistance under the new scheme; namely those in receipt of Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment Support Allowance. The Panel also considered the recommendation contained within the Equality Impact Assessment relating to the definition of vulnerable groups. The Head of Customer Services advised that legal opinion would be obtained on this matter. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended

- (a) to have due regard to the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment and approve the proposed Council Tax Support scheme for the District;
- (b) to authorise the Head of Customer Services to administer the Council Tax Support scheme in accordance with Section 10 and Schedule 4 of the Local Government Finance Act 2012; and

- (c) to recommend to Council the subsequent amendments to the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

69. POTENTIAL MERGER BETWEEN CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND SUFFOLK FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES: CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Pursuant to Minute No. 12/55, the Panel considered a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) seeking the Panel's endorsement of a response to the consultation on the proposals for further collaboration up to a full merger between Cambridgeshire and Suffolk Fire and Rescue Services.

RESOLVED

- (a) that Sections 3 and 4 of the report now submitted be endorsed as the basis for the Panel's response to the consultation on the proposals for further collaboration up to a full merger between Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service and Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service; and
- (b) that Officers be authorised to submit the response directly to the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service.

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

The Panel received and noted the Minutes of the meeting of the Cambridgeshire Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25th October 2012 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). Councillor R J West reported upon a recent meeting of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Working Group on Mental Health Services Across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, where consideration had been given to the Joint Commissioning Draft Strategy for the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Adults of Working Age.

71. 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.

72. 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 delivered a brief update on the outcome of a recent meeting of the Corporate Plan Working Group. The draft Delivery Plan would go before the Executive Leaders Strategy Group in January 2013, seeking Executive Members' endorsement of their respective activities. Councillor S J Criswell then provided an outline of a meeting of the Social Value Working Group, where it was decided to focus on three key areas; namely the social, financial and health benefits of the Council's health and wellbeing activities.

Having regard to the annual monitoring report on Grant Aid, it was reported that the Panel would have sight of this at its meeting in November 2013.

In response to Members' reported concerns that the North Huntingdonshire pilot Local Joint Committee had yet to hold a public meeting, Councillor M C Oliver informed the Panel that he had attended an initial meeting in November 2012 and that a further informal meeting would be held in January 2013. Councillor M C Oliver undertook to update the Panel on developments as and when they arose.

Having queried the Council's involvement in the Cambridgeshire Future Transport Initiative, the Scrutiny and Review Manager confirmed that a representative from the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) had been appointed to participate in the County Council's arrangements for scrutinising the Initiative.

73. SCRUTINY

The 129th Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

Chairman