

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, 6th October 2015.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors D Brown, R Fuller, T Hayward,
Mrs P A Jordan and P Kadewere.

APOLOGY(IES): Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors M Francis, Mrs R E Mathews, D J Mead, M C Oliver and Mrs D C Reynolds.

33. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 1st September 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

34. MEMBER'S INTERESTS

Councillor S Criswell declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to Agenda Item 4 as a non-executive member of the Hunts Forum Board.

35. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel received and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which has been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st October 2015 to 31st January 2016.

36. VOLUNTARY FUNDING UPDATE PRESENTATIONS

Six voluntary and community sector organisations in receipt of three year funding awards (Strategic Grants) from the Council each gave ten minute presentations to the Panel, with a further ten minutes allocated for questions from Members to each organisation's representatives.

The Head of Community provided the Panel with a brief introduction to the process for awarding Strategic Grants, concentrating on the following key points:

- The current Strategic Grants were allocated for a three year period from 1st April 2013 to 30th March 2016.
- The Council's budget for voluntary and community sector funding should be considered in line with the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy to ensure the sector is not disproportionately affected.
- The presentations would inform Members about what each of the organisations have delivered, how they consider they have assisted HDC in addressing its corporate objectives and what

- they consider their future challenges to be.
- Further reports will be presented to the Panel in advance of the Council setting its budget for 2016/17 in February 2016.
- An application process for future grant funding will be opened once the budget available for this has been confirmed for 2016/17.

Care Network

The Chief Officer and the Development Officer of Care Network presented to the Panel. Care Network received a Strategic Grant of £10,000 in 2015/16 and the presentation covered the following points:

What has been delivered:

- Supporting 32 small volunteer led groups.
- Set up 10 new groups for older and isolated residents.
- Supporting additional projects bringing funding into the area.
- Two part-time Community Development Officers were employed.
- Organisation of three inter-generational events.
- Developing work in eight additional areas.

How they support the Council's corporate objectives:

- Opportunities to volunteer increase residents' skills and confidence;
- Helping to keep people healthy and in their homes for longer;
- Community support provided for new developments;
- Building strong communities can sustain health and mental well-being;
- Working with communities at grass roots level helps them to respond to their own needs; and
- Supporting and setting up small community groups and schemes help reduce isolation.

Future challenges:

- A growing population: growing in numbers, age and a growing number of people with long-term health conditions.
- A changing profile of volunteers: fewer volunteers due to people working for longer and more people acting as carers. Those seeking voluntary work often require greater support.
- Increasing funding pressures as those organisations which provide grants are looking to cut spending.

The Chairman of the Panel asked what triggers the involvement of Care Network with community groups. The Panel were informed that groups are able to approach the Care Network directly and involvement can also be triggered by third party referrals. The three primary sources of funds for Care Network (Cambridgeshire County Council and South Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire District Councils) are all facing budget issues.

The Care Network confirmed that work including value stream mapping is taking place to ensure that the organisation is as lean as it

possibly can be.

When asked about the size of community groups supported, the Care Network confirmed that they are not concerned that many of the groups comprise of around 10 people as these groups tend to develop and change over time and the smaller rural groups are invaluable for residents in more isolated locations.

Disability Information Service Huntingdonshire (DISH)

The Manager for DISH, a user-led organisation supporting people with disabilities, presented to the Panel. DISH received a Strategic Grant of £19,000 in 2015/16 and their presentation focussed on the following:

What has been delivered:

- The £19,000 received from HDC is returned ten-fold to the community – resulting in the equivalent of £190,000 in welfare benefits received.
- The organisation specialises in home visits. Many clients have severe disabilities and the service is taken out to the people in the community.
- Contact with children's centres (Eaton Socon Children's Centre) includes giving advice on applying for benefits and care provision.
- A partnership with the MS Society within Huntingdonshire operates through a service level agreement contributing £4k to DISH each year.
- Referrals are received from the Cambridgeshire disability team.

How they support the Council's corporate objectives:

- Sound advice provided helps to maintain client's health and well-being.
- Obtaining available financial support helps to cover the extra costs of living for disabled clients who may struggle otherwise.
- Help for parents; preserving dignity for clients and their families.

Future challenges:

- Changes to Welfare payments; disability allowance is changing which has and will lead to further assistance being required for vulnerable people who need help with complicated forms. The need for home visits is escalating as many disabled people cannot use online forms.
- Demand for representing clients at appeals for benefits is increasing.
- The need for outreach services to help more people is increasing.

Representatives from DISH explained that 332 home visits were carried out last year, with an average of 2 to 3 home visits per week. In terms of internet use and online forms, Members were informed

that the organisation strives to reach clients who have 'fallen into the gaps' when it comes to internet access. Learning difficulties and some other disabilities mean that sometimes DISH needs to complete online forms on behalf of service users but if they can educate clients in how to use these facilities themselves, they do.

Members questioned whether the service is duplicating that of similar organisations operating within the area. The Panel were informed that DISH is a small, streamlined service which offers help with debt and improving facilities as well as information and that the expertise offered by DISH distinguishes them from other organisations.

Huntingdon Shopmobility

The Manager of Huntingdon Shopmobility presented to the Panel. Shopmobility received a Strategic Grant of £29,700 2014/15 (with £12,000 retained by the Council to meet rental costs) and their presentation concentrated on the main points as follows:

What has been delivered:

- Over 18,000 visits since opening.
- A membership scheme has been introduced with a £30 fee. Casual visitors are welcome for £5 per day and many of these 'pay as you go' customers are temporarily disabled or visiting from other areas.
- The scheme has an average of 100 members at any one time.
- Opening times have increased from 4 to 6 days per week.
- Fundraising is constant, through membership, raffles and other events.
- Shopmobility receives commission through referrals to a local mobility shop and from sales of personal scooter insurance.

How they support the Council's corporate objectives:

- Shopmobility has created some volunteering opportunities, helping local people in the community, including people with learning and physical disabilities, to get some work experience.
- The organisation is a social outlet for some customers, for whom Shopmobility provides an opportunity to get out and see people.
- Planning permissions granted for the building of further elderly residential buildings in Huntingdon town centre mean that the need for the organisation's services will increase as the older population grows.

Future challenges:

- Difficulties in being able to raise extra funding.
- Outgoings have already been reduced with condensed opening hours and money saved on paid working hours and extra duties taken on.
- The stock of scooters has so far been maintained for nine years – some will shortly need to be replaced which is a high cost.

The Panel queried whether the organisation would be able to continue without funding from the Council. It was explained that any closure from lack of funding wouldn't happen in the next year due to reserves but further than that they cannot be sure. There is no chance of Huntingdonshire Shopmobility becoming a fully volunteer-led organisation as volunteers tend to be unable to work for longer than a couple of hours due to their disabilities and there is a clear need for a paid member of staff to manage volunteers.

Hunts Forum for Voluntary Organisations

The Chairman of Hunts Forum for Voluntary Organisations addressed the Panel. Hunts Forum received a Strategic Grant of £38,000 in 2015/16 and their presentation focussed on the following:

What has been delivered:

- Hunts Forum is the umbrella organisation for the voluntary and community sector in Huntingdonshire, with 109 members and a reach and impact that goes beyond the district and across Cambridgeshire.
- They are recognised nationally as a 'beacon for change' organisation.
- They run the Maple Centre community hub on behalf of the Council. Work experience is provided for young people from local collages.
- Training sessions and networking keep their members up to date.
- Communications package is freely available (e-bulletins).

How they support the Council's corporate objectives:

- Strong local economy – funding of £625k has been secured to support delivery of frontline services through advice and support provided by Hunts Forum. There are over 1,100 paid staff and volunteers working in local voluntary and community organisations.
- Working with our communities – the community hub at the Maple Centre assists migrant families in integrating into the local community.

Future challenges:

- Financial support – direct funding is declining while demand increases.
- Organisations need to be supported to work smarter - redesigning services to meet new challenges - and in partnership with others.
- Volunteers are more in demand yet are harder to find than ever before.
- Embracing new technology to save money and also to expand reach.
- Working with businesses to promote corporate social responsibility.

The Panel asked whether there were too many volunteer organisations locally and whether organisations could work more closely together rather than overlapping in some areas. Members were informed that Hunts Forum does encourage groups in the area that are no longer viable because of competition and other factors to wind down or merge with others. Hunts Forum is also looking to work more closely with others in the future and is already sharing staff with the Cambridge Council for Voluntary Services.

Huntingdonshire Volunteer Centre

The Manager at the Huntingdonshire Volunteer Centre presented to the Panel. The Centre received a Strategic Grant of £37,000 in 2016/17 and their presentation highlighted the following:

What has been delivered:

- Support for 1,795 new volunteers, of which 1,536 are in ongoing volunteering positions.
- 1:1 support to help people find the right volunteering role for them.
- Local offices where volunteers can receive support (in Huntingdon, Ramsey, St. Ives and St. Neots).
- Local volunteering roles advertised via the national 'Do-it' website.
- Monitoring of volunteering enquires and applications and provision of follow-up support, such as helping people complete documentation.

How they support the Council's corporate objectives:

- Strong local economy – new Huntingdon Together Charity Shop to be opened soon, providing employment and volunteering opportunities as well as producing a small income stream from funding.
- Volunteering helps people into work as well as benefitting the organisations recruiting volunteers. Volunteers contribute to community health and those working in healthcare contribute to improved health.

Future Challenges:

- Responding to the changing and challenging volunteer environment
- Communications and marketing in a high tech and visual environment.
- Reductions in funding coupled with an increased demand for services.

When asked about how the organisation intends to attract more volunteers, the Panel were informed that internet presence has been the primary method of recruitment, as well as walk-by enquiries (which is key in market towns), leaflets in libraries and other public buildings such as doctor surgeries and village halls. Word of mouth and recommendations are also invaluable in attracting more volunteers.

In response to a question about opportunities to work with other

organisation with similar functions, Members were informed that there is no overlap with Hunts Forum or other local organisations but that knowledge and understanding is shared with other volunteer groups across borders. Members were also informed that the organisations they support could not afford to pay for their services – there is currently no charge as funders pay the Centre to provide services to these organisations.

Rural Cambridgeshire Citizens Advice Bureau

The Chief Officer for Rural Cambridgeshire Citizens Advice Bureau and the Chairman addressed the Panel. The Bureau received a Strategic Grant of £115,000 in 2016/17 (with some retained by the Council to cover rental costs of their St Neots office) and their presentation highlighted the following:

What has been delivered:

- The Bureau has offices in Huntingdon and St Neots, with outreach services in Yaxley and Ramsey plus an ad-hoc service in St Ives.
- 8,672 Huntingdonshire residents have been supported in dealing with a total of 20,424 issues, two-thirds of which were resolved in 6 months.
- Service users have had debt totalling over £5m.
- It has been calculated that the service has delivered a £164k direct saving to the Council and that clients have accessed £2.7m in benefits.
- The top three issues raised by Huntingdonshire residents related to benefits, debt and employment.

How they support the Council's corporate objectives:

- Creating safer, stronger and more resilient communities - helping people to get on with their lives without having to rely on the Council;
- Improving health and well-being – two-thirds feel less stressed, depressed or anxious after receiving support;
- Improving work prospects through volunteering opportunities.

Future Challenges:

- Working in a fragmented and overlapping advice sector.
- Impact of welfare reforms.
- Digital inclusion/exclusion, the Bureau needs a robust IT infrastructure.
- Need to work with other advice agencies to deliver advice in the home.

It was suggested that the Bureau should look into an outreach service, using volunteers within communities. Members were told that the organisation already uses local village halls and libraries and are always looking for suitable community venues to use to reach those who need their services.

It was confirmed that those residents with have no access to online

services have the option of a telephone service, introduced with the support of lottery funding. Demand for this service is increasing, with increased confidentiality among the reasons some users prefer this option.

The Panel queried the relationship between funding provided by area and the numbers of clients assisted. Huntingdonshire pays the highest grant to the Bureau yet less clients are supported within the district. The Panel were informed that there are twice as many volunteers in Huntingdonshire, creating higher costs in training and travel, and that the geographical extent of the Huntingdonshire area is larger with offices in Huntingdon and St Neots. Written answers to this question and the question of how much of the grant goes towards the whole organisation's management costs were requested.

Closing remarks

Members of the Panel thanked the representatives from each organisation for their attendance and for the information provided.

The Head of Community re-iterated that the budget available for future voluntary and community sector grant funding will not be finalised until February 2016. Members stated that they would expect an application process for this but expressed some concern about timescales for those organisations with funding arrangements due to finish in March 2016. The Head of Community will bring a further report to an upcoming meeting of the Panel.

37. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel received and noted a report (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 Environmental Well-Being.

38. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROGRESS

With the aid of a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel reviewed the progress of its activities since the last meeting. It was noted that the review of elderly patient care at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital was on hold as this was linked to ongoing Care Quality Commission activity.

39. SCRUTINY

The 158th Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted by the Panel.

Chairman