

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 14th July 2015.

PRESENT: Councillor T D Sanderson – Chairman.

Councillors Mrs B E Boddington,
Mrs S Conboy, J W Davies, Mrs A Dickinson,
Mrs L A Duffy, I D Gardener, D A Giles,
P Kadewere, K D Wainwright and R J West.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor I C Bates.

16. MINUTES

Subject to the inclusion of Councillors Boddington and Giles in the list of those present, the Minutes of the meeting held on 9th June 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Subject to the inclusion of Councillor West in the list of those present, the Minutes of the meeting held on 16th June 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

17. MEMBER'S INTERESTS

Councillor Duffy declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in relation to Item 4 on the Agenda by virtue of her membership of Ramsey Town Council, one of the respondents to the targeted consultation on the Local Plan.

18. 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 July 2015 to 31st October 2015.

19. LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION REVIEW

The Panel received a report by the Head of Development updating them on the key issues arising from the recent targeted consultation on the Local Plan. This report brings a fuller picture on the results and details of the next steps planned, as requested by the Panel when they received a position statement on the Local Plan in April.

The report sets out a number of key issues to be addressed. Some of these issues were raised through the consultation and others have been identified from reviewing the outcomes of examinations elsewhere.

The Panel was informed of continuing work on the preparation of the

Local Plan, including resources focussing on highways and transport modelling and analysis. It is expected that the majority of the work to complete the evidence base will take 6 to 9 months. The work needs to be undertaken in order, with flooding and highways work to take place before the new Retail Study is commissioned. The Local Plan will also need to be consistent with the results from the Environment Agency's new lower Great Ouse modelling due to be published in August 2015.

It was confirmed that the Council will continue making decisions on applications without a Local Plan in place, having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework. There is a need to continue to ensure that there is a five year supply of housing land to reduce the likelihood of unexpected decisions at appeal and it was confirmed that this is in place. The Council has continued to work with partners on development sites such as Alconbury Weald and sites in Ramsey and Warboys.

The possibility of land at RAF Molesworth and RAF Alconbury being included in the Local Plan was discussed and it was stated that this land cannot be allocated as it has not yet been declared surplus but the Council will continue to monitor the situation.

A Member sought confirmation of whether gypsy/traveller accommodation needs would be met through the Local Plan. The Head of Development confirmed that at a recent appeal relating to an application for six pitches in Alconbury the inspector confirmed the district had a 10 year supply of gypsy/traveller pitches and could meet the needs.

The number of responses to the consultation was queried. As a targeted consultation, fewer responses were expected than in earlier rounds which had a wider focus and involved more people. The response rate was not unexpected and the independent inspector would not penalise the Council for a lack of engagement but would focus on whether significant issues have been resolved. It was suggested that there had not been many responses from District Councillors as there were few changes for them to comment on.

In response to how progress will be communicated to residents, the Head of Development indicated that more communication was required and welcomed views on how to do this. It was suggested that information be sent to Town and Parish Councils at the earliest opportunity.

There was discussion over affordable housing and how to ensure enough was provided. The Head of Development described this as challenging but explained that the Council has an exception site policy in both its adopted core strategy and the draft Local Plan. However, there can be barriers to this from local opposition. The Council was previously able to secure grants from Government to help fund exception sites and due to the reduction in grants available now allows a proportion of market homes to subsidise the affordable homes built on these sites. It was confirmed that this has been communicated to town/parish councils. Exception sites are only sought where surveys have identified a need and the targeted consultation proposed to remove the requirement for town/parish

council support.

Affordable housing on larger sites is affected by viability but the Council is still seeking to maximise this. Retained consultants act as the Council's experts in undertaking viability assessments and these are paid for by the developer but instructed by the Council. Some developers consider that the Council is too hard in its challenges as it does the utmost to secure the best possible deal for communities. The Council is exploring use of its own land for affordable housing development and a report on affordable housing from a working group is due to go to the Overview & Scrutiny (Social Well-being) Panel in October.

In response to a comment regarding national criticism of how long local authorities are taking to produce Local Plans, the Head of Development explained that tests are being applied by inspectors so councils need to ensure that Local Plans meet their requirements. He confirmed that Huntingdonshire has the five year supply of housing land it is required to have.

Resources for highways and transport modelling were discussed and it was confirmed that contributions were being sought from Crest Nicolson, the development partner for the RAF Wyton site, as they will need to prove the viability of the site for housing.

Public transport and parking issues in new developments such as Love's Farm, St Neots were highlighted. The Panel was informed that the maximum parking standards applied by the Government at the time of the Love's Farm application no longer apply. The District Council is working with the County Council to move towards a monitoring and management approach to mitigate transport issues in new developments.

It was suggested that the Council needs to ensure that contributions from developers are adjusted where extra homes are added after developments and contributions are approved. It was also suggested that creating bus stop areas in new housing sites would encourage bus companies to route services through new developments. The Head of Development undertook to consider these suggestions in discussion with local bus companies.

20. SHARED SERVICES

The Panel received a Shared Service Overview report by the Managing Director, setting out the overarching principles to apply to proposed shared services for Legal, ICT and Building Control. The report was due to be considered at Cabinet on 16th July 2015 and had previously been discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny (Economic Well-being) Panel on 9th July 2015.

Members queried whether the initial agreement of 5 years, with reviews scheduled for years 2 and 4, is an appropriate term. It was explained that a 5 year term fits with the councils' financial planning cycles and scheduled review points would provide an opportunity for testing whether the aims of the shared services were being delivered. However, the shared ambition for the shared services is a long-term arrangement and it is hoped that dispute resolution measures outlined

in the report would resolve any issues between parties.

Members stated that they would have expected the report to provide more information on risks if circumstances changed or a shared service was found not to be a suitable option after its establishment. Members sought assurance that such risk and associated costs were fully understood if there was a need to opt-out.

Members considered that there is a need to ensure that basic ICT support between councils is adequate and that systems will work together as ICT problems could present a serious risk to service delivery, as has occurred when Central Government has introduced various high profile systems. The Panel was informed of the reasoning behind why ICT is one of the first services to be shared so a common IT service will be put in place to support the other shared services across the whole geographical area. Principles being agreed will mean software adopted across all three councils will not be new to all of the councils, taking a best fit approach to existing systems.

Scrutiny arrangements for shared services were discussed as they would like the ability to review and approve any changes proposed by other councils. It was confirmed that all three leaders would sit on the proposed Joint Committee but arrangements would allow each authority's scrutiny panels to 'call in' or request items on shared service matters if appropriate. Budget savings through shared services would appear in each council's budget reports.

Subject to the following additional recommendations, the Panel recommended that the Cabinet approve the recommendations in the report.

- consider whether the full cost of an exit strategy and associated risks if any of the shared services are dissolved are known and understood;
- consider the need to ensure that the costs of introducing any new ICT systems to support the shared services are well managed; and
- consider whether the safeguards in the sovereignty guarantee are sufficient to allow the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Panels to scrutinise topics related to shared services.

21. BUILDING CONTROL SHARED SERVICES BUSINESS CASE

The Panel received a report by the Managing Director, presenting the business case for the proposed Building Control shared service and including details of the financial savings expected.

The Panel was informed that different legal parameters applying to the Building Control service mean that the focus of the shared service is on resilience rather than just financial savings. The service operates in a commercial environment with private sector competitors and cannot make a profit from fee-earning activities over each rolling 3-year period. This means savings in delivering these activities reduce the amount of income that can be taken. However, the proposal includes savings on non-fee earning activities which aren't limited in the same way and seeks to improve resilience in staffing, ensuring the service can respond rapidly to work requests. It would

provide staff with more development opportunities and more varied and rewarding work.

It was explained that there will be an assessment of two ICT systems currently used by the three councils to determine which is most appropriate. This means that the system adopted for the shared service will not be a new system for all but will be one that is currently supported and in use by at least one of the authorities.

Members suggested that creating a Building Control shared service would present an opportunity to change the perception of how the public sector delivers these services.

The Panel recommended that Cabinet approve the recommendation in the report.

22. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel received and noted a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of studies bring undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Economic Well-Being and Social Well-being.

The Panel was informed that a new structure for Overview & Scrutiny Panels has been proposed and that this will be considered as part of the forthcoming review of the Constitution.

23. 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.

A Member asked when an update on the Whole Waste System Approach and Waste Collection Policies could be expected. The Panel was reminded that they had agreed at their last meeting to disband Task and Finish/Working Groups while the Operations review and restructure is ongoing. The Panel will receive quarterly updates regarding the Operations Division review, with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman having monthly meetings with the interim Head of Operations to allow them to feedback appropriate information to the Panel. An update on timescales can be sought at the next quarterly update and Councillor Giles was invited to join the Chairman and Vice-Chairman at their next meeting with the interim Head of Operations.

A number of other issues relating to the Operations Division were also raised. These included the cost and responsibility of both current and future maintenance of green spaces and play equipment, graffiti and the frequency of weed clearing and grass and verge cutting. The Panel was informed that work to identify landowners was underway and that the Operations review and restructure would include these service areas.

The Panel requested an item on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to explain the basics of how it is calculated, collected and how it can be spent as well as detailing what money has been received and

how this has been spent to date. This will be added to the workplan for a future meeting.

24. SCRUTINY

The 156th Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted by the Panel.

Chairman