

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 7th June 2016.

PRESENT: Councillor T D Alban – Chairman.

Councillors B S Chapman, Mrs A Dickinson, Mrs A Donaldson, M Francis, D Harty, T Hayward, P Kadewere and L R Swain.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J W Davies, Mrs P A Jordan and Mrs J Tavener.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors R C Carter, J A Gray and R B Howe.

5. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Customers) held on 5th April 2016 and the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Environment) held 18th May 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor T Alban declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to Minute Number 11.

Councillor B S Chapman declared an interest in relation to Minute Number 8 as a member of the Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee on Cambridgeshire County Council.

7. 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 June 2016 to 30th September 2016.

8. REVIEW OF THE OWNERSHIP AND MAINTENANCE OF ORPHAN SITES

Preceding the report the Panel received a presentation from the Executive Councillor for Environment, Street Scene and Operations and the Interim Head of Operations on the Operations Services. The key points were as follows:

- The service is divided into three sections: Environmental Services, Commercial Services and Business Development.

- The service has undergone some key development issues including: reconfiguration of the waste collection services to deliver efficiencies, consulting on reducing bin capacity and charging for replacement bins.
- Between 56-58% of household waste is recycled in the District. The service is now focusing on reducing residual waste. Household waste only accounts for 12-14% of waste in the country.
- Since the arrival of the Interim Head of Operations the management of Huntingdonshire District Council's (HDC) tree stock has become a priority.
- In the last year the service has taken over the management of the Corporate Estate.
- As a result of not profiting from the markets in Huntingdon and St Ives, the service is looking at reconfiguring the layout of the markets to make them more appealing to traders and customers.
- The Business Support Team has downsized in order to make it more focused.

Following a question from a Member regarding the forwarding of non-HDC enquiries from a HDC operative to an external agency it was confirmed that the Operations Service had been liaising with the Call Centre in order to aid an easy handover. Members were advised that the difficulty is ensuring that the customer's enquiry will be dealt with once it is passed over to the external agency.

Concerns were raised as to whether recycling does get recycled and in response Members were reassured that the recycling goes to a treatment centre where it is sorted. A following question was asked in relation to the cleaning of recyclates before recycling to which the Panel were advised that the Council recommends the cleaning of recyclates for the following reasons: to prevent harmful bacteria from growing and to enable the Council to receive the best gate fee it can when the recycling is presented to the treatment centre.

In response to a question on the contamination of recycling Members were informed that the service had an issue with garden waste contamination which it addressed by reissuing guidance to residents. In addition the practice of photographing the contaminated bin had been introduced in order to provide the resident with a reason as to why their bin had been rejected. In the majority of cases the resident has then accepted the explanation however in a minority of cases the Council is required to work further with the resident before the ultimate sanction of the removal of the bin is imposed.

Officers agreed to circulate the Operations Service presentation slides (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to Members of the Panel following a request by a Member to do so.

A concern was raised by a Member that it is possible that the District would see an increase in black bin bags left beside bins or fly tipping as a result of reducing the size of residual waste bins. In response Members were informed that in order to prevent fly tipping it is important for the service to consult with residents and achieve 'buy in'. In addition the scheme will be targeted to those households that are deemed able to cope with a reduced bin capacity.

The Panel was advised, following a question regarding commercial and industrial waste, that the solution to commercial and industrial waste would be found at national level. HDC does however provide a chargeable waste collection service for local businesses.

Following a concern regarding litter on a skate park in St Neots and the suggestion of the introduction of a recycling bin the Panel was advised that such a bin could be introduced and the best way to manage the waste was to work with a voluntary organisation. Currently HDC needs to work with users in order to constitute a formal group.

After a question on bin collections Members were reassured that the waste collection operatives would be retrained to return the bins to the curtilage of the property after it had been emptied.

In response to a question asked in relation to the use of Microhydro Electricity the Panel were informed that currently HDC does not generate any electricity through Microhydro Electricity however the Council has been working on heat source pumps in order to assist the reduction of the Council's energy bill.

With the aid of a report by the Interim Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Review of the Ownership and Maintenance of Orphan Sites was presented to the Panel.

Following a brief introduction of the report a Member asked if the Council would continue maintaining privately owned sites at the request of the owners. In response the Panel was informed that the Council would continue to maintain the land at the request of the owner however they would be charged the market rate plus a margin of profit. Members were also advised that the Council would continue to maintain non-HDC land as long as HDC had an interest in doing so for example to prevent the spread of pests.

After a query regarding the location of orphan sites the Panel was informed that where requested Members would receive maps of orphan sites for their ward.

The Panel asked if there was scope to charge retrospectively for historical maintenance however Members were informed that retrospective charging would be difficult to manage. In addition case law provides the example of another Local Authority who attempted to charge retrospectively for historical maintenance. In the case it was accepted that the Local Authority did carry out maintenance however there was no contract and therefore no grounds for a claim.

Members expressed concern that resident's concerns could be a secondary factor whilst the Council, County Council and Parish Councils discuss how different segments of land should be maintained. Members were informed that the matter had to be resolved and all efforts were being made to resolve the matter with resident's needs as a priority. The Panel,

RESOLVED

to recommended that the Cabinet should agree to completing the recommend actions of the report in relation to the 240 orphan sites.

(At 7.46pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor J A Gray left the meeting).

(At 7.48pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor J A Gray entered the meeting).

(At 8.10pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor J A Gray left the meeting and did not return).

9. ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS UPDATE REPORT

With the aid of a report by the Interim Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Environmental Matters Update Report was presented to the Panel. Members were informed that the report provides updates on the following areas: graffiti and flyposting removal; environmental enforcement activities, annual management plans for Countryside assets and the delivery of the new grounds maintenance service delivery arrangements.

Following a question in regards to the removal of offensive graffiti from private property the Panel was informed that the Council have an obligation to remove offensive graffiti from public and private property and bear the full cost for doing so. In relation to the removal of non-offensive graffiti from public buildings the service have issued wipes to the street cleansing teams so that low level graffiti can be removed.

In response to a question regarding enforcement for dog fouling and fly tipping Members were advised that environmental enforcement is dealt by the Community Division as they have responsibility for the Corporate Enforcement Policy. The Panel were informed that enforcement for fly tipping offences is time intensive so convictions are not quick to come by.

Local initiatives to tackle environmental nuisance was raised and it was noted that such initiatives do work. The Panel was informed that some parishes spray paint dog faeces to highlight that it has been left by the owner. The reaction from residents during the implementation of such schemes are positive. Members would like the Council to assist Parishes with targeted enforcement action.

Following a question regarding Public Rights of Way the Panel was informed that a joint report will be written with the County Council for the September or October 2016 meeting of the Panel. A County Council Officer will also be invited to attend the meeting.

In regards to the management of highway assets the County Council are prioritising maintenance of hard services however they are committed to cutting verges twice a year. For some verges, particularly those in urban areas, it is recognised that they require cutting at minimum seven times a year. The Council are negotiating a transfer of ownership for some verges in order to enable a greater maintenance programme. The Panel,

RESOLVED

- 1) to receive a report on Corporate Enforcement which will include dog fouling at its meeting in July 2016, and
- 2) to invite the relevant Officer at Cambridgeshire County Council to attend a Panel meeting in September or October 2016 to discuss Public Rights of Way.

(At 9.04pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor R B Howe left the meeting and did not return).

10. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel received and noted a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of studies being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Economy and Growth and Performance and Customers.

In response to a question regarding the Cambridgeshire County Council Budget Scrutiny Members were informed that the Managing Director and Executive Leader had met with the Chief Executive Officer and Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council and following the meeting a report will be submitted which will feedback into the Overview and Scrutiny Panels. It was confirmed that the process of budget scrutiny will take place again this Municipal Year.

(At 9.08pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor R C Carter left the meeting and did not return).

11. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROGRESS

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel reviewed the progress of its activities since the last meeting.

The Chairman reminded Members that a Special Meeting of the Panel will be held on 28th June 2016, 7pm to consider the issue of Hinchingbrooke Hospital's proposed merger with Peterborough Hospital. After consideration the Panel would make a recommendation to Cabinet how the Council should respond.

The Panel was updated with the progress of the Voluntary Sector Grant Funding Working Group. The Working Group is due to meet on 14th June 2016 after which a final report will be submitted to the next meeting of the Panel to held on 12th July 2016.

Members were informed that the final report of the Registered Social Providers Working Group fed into the Panel's consideration of the draft Housing Strategy 2016-2019 at its meeting held on 5th April 2016. Currently the Housing Strategy has been paused due to allow Cabinet to consider the use of Council assets in order to meeting housing objectives.

Following a query from the Panel the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) will endeavour to find out the representatives on the

Children and Young People Thematic Group and inform Members of the Panel.

Chairman