

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, 13th June 2017.

PRESENT: Councillor T D Alban – Chairman.

Councillors P L E Bucknell, B S Chapman, S J Criswell, J W Davies, Mrs A Donaldson, Mrs P A Jordan, L R Swain, Mrs J Tavener and D Watt.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors G J Bull, S Cawley and R Fuller.

5. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 4th April 2017 and 17th May 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

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 2017 to 30th September 2017.

8. CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL HEALTH COMMITTEE

RESOLVED

that Councillor P A Jordan be appointed as a non-voting co-opted substitute Member to the Cambridgeshire County Council Health Committee.

9. CLOSURE OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRES IN RAMSEY, YAXLEY AND ST NEOTS

With the aid of a report by the Head of Customer Service (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Closure of the Customer Service Centres in Ramsey, Yaxley and St Neots was presented to the Panel. The Executive Councillor for Transformation and Customers was in attendance to present the report to Members.

Members were informed that the report lays out the background and analysis of why the Council has taken the decision to close the Customer Service Centres. The decision was made at the Zero Based Budgeting process and then ratified by the budget which was passed at Council.

In response to the question is there any way that a resident can access Council services locally if they cannot reach Pathfinder House, Members were informed that a high percentage of customers engage with the Council online. Some do not and the Head of Customer Services is working with his staff to reach those people who don't have access to the internet. The Council are working towards a home delivery service to reach those who can't reach Pathfinder House.

A Member stated that Members and residents keep getting told that the Council are looking after customers however the Council are now not providing a service for its customers. The Executive Councillor stated that the decision to close the customer service centres was made in 2015 and ratified by the budgetary process and that the time for making objections was then. In addition it is clear from the data that customers want to contact the Council via the internet and by phone.

Following a question, in regards to any guarantees that the Council has with the County Council that they won't close the libraries and therefore restricting access residents have to PCs, the Panel was informed that there is no guarantee that the County Council will stay open but the Council can put arrangements in place if PCs are not available.

A Member stated that they do not accept that the plan to close the customer service centres was clearly stated in the budget. In response the Panel were informed that planned closures were in the budget and was agreed by Council as part of the budgetary process. The Executive Councillor stated that it is not his fault that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel have not done their job properly. He added why is it fair that the residents of Huntingdonshire subsidise services in these areas.

In response to the Executive Councillor, a Member stated that if it was clear in the budget the Executive Councillor must be very surprised that this is coming up now. The Member added that he could not understand why 25% of population of Huntingdonshire does not justify a customer service centre. The Executive Councillor replied that the service is aware of all individuals who need assistance accessing Council services and can't travel to Huntingdon.

The Executive Councillor was asked could the Council fund someone to work part time, providing Council services from the County Council library. In response the Head of Customer Services stated that the customer service centres are being closed because they do not get the throughput. He added he can't make the decision to employ someone to work from the library as it is political decision, however operationally it would not be worthwhile as there is not the flow through the door.

Following the question how are you going to advertise to vulnerable residents that there is a home visiting service, the Panel were informed that the Council can meet customers' needs through the channels already open.

In response to the question in the intervening period will there be

training to assist customers' transition to internet and telephone based services, Members were informed that yes there will be training from highly trained customer service staff.

The Panel have requested that the Executive Councillor for Transformation and Customers returns to the Panel in April 2018 to provide Members with an update on the changes.

10. HUNTINGDONSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP SIX MONTH UPDATE

With the aid of a report by Head of Community Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership – Six Month Update was presented to the Panel.

The Head of Community Services informed Members that there has been a slight increase in the number of crimes recorded and it is suspected, although not proven, that the increase is due to the changes resulting from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) report in 2014.

The Panel were informed that two strategic assessments have been commissioned, one into Child Sexual Exploitation and the other into violence. In addition the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has recently set its priorities for 2017 to 2020.

Members were informed that a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) is in place in St Neots in order to stop a small minority of drivers using their vehicle in an anti-social manner.

It was noted that the recommendation the Panel has to consider is to agree to receive future updates on the Community Safety Partnership annually. It was explained that if an item of note arises between updates then the Panel's representative on the Partnership, Councillor Mrs J Tavener, will feedback to Members.

A Member stated that they support the work of the CSP and that they welcome the updates.

In response to a question regarding the ability of the CSP to enable communities Members were informed that the CSP had looked to build community resilience however it has taken partners a bit of time to get used to the concept. A community resilience scoping document will be presented in the autumn and then fed into the CSP.

Following a query in regards to drugs the Panel were informed that the CSP focusses on drugs from the aspect of victims. In addition the County Council's drug and alcohol team are involved with the CSP and a representative does attend CSP meetings.

A Member expressed frustration in regards to the Yaxley Working Group. They explained that at a recent meeting many ideas were put forward however the agreed actions have not been advanced. Members were informed that senior officers within Cambridgeshire Constabulary are required to advance some of the actions.

Members stated that if the CSP are working on things locally then it would be good to get the local ward Member involved at an early stage.

In response to a question regarding a PSPO, Members were informed that PSPOs can be used anywhere in the District where there is anti-social behaviour. They last for up to three years however they can be renewed. There is a cost to PSPOs, for example each order has to have signage and in regards to St Neots PSPO there are 250 signs. There will be more PSPO orders and they can cover anything so long as the anti-social behaviour affects the well-being of the community.

Following a questions regarding the funding the CSP has received from the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), the Panel were informed that the CSP has not received any funding for 2017/18 from the PCC. Historically the CSP has been given funding and then been asked to report back, however the current PCC wants to see what the funding will achieve before it is released.

A Member stated that they receive a lot of information from residents on issues that a team of multi-skilled community enforcement officers are responsible to respond to. The Panel

RESOLVED

to receive future updates of the Community Safety Partnership on an annual basis.

(At 7.47pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillors G J Bull and S Cawley left the meeting and did not return.)

(At 7.52pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor R Fuller left the meeting.)

(At 7.52pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor R Fuller entered the meeting.)

11. HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION ACT (HECA) FURTHER REPORT 2017

With the aid of a report by Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) Further Report 2017 was presented to the Panel. Members were informed that the HECA report is published every two years to report on the spending of the funds received from the Government's Green Deal Communities Fund.

In Cambridgeshire, local authorities work in partnership under the brand, 'Action on Energy'. The Panel were informed that the partnership is staying together in order to maintain the purchasing power.

Following the question of how the partnership is advertising what energy saving measures are available to residents, Members were informed that the partnership provides advice to households as well as signposts vulnerable residents to reputable installers.

In addition to the conversation on reputable installers the Panel were informed that the partnership have identified installers whom are financially sound and have signed up to a code of conduct. Members agreed with the approach as they recognise resident's anxiety over rogue traders.

12. PUBLIC HEALTH FUNERALS POLICY

With the aid of a report by Head of Community Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Public Health Funerals Policy was presented to the Panel.

The Panel were informed that the Policy puts in place a framework to cover funeral costs depending on the circumstances. The Policy will treat someone who is unable to pay for a relative's funeral the same as someone who is unwilling to pay, however Officers will consider on a case by case basis. The aim of the Policy is to close the potential loophole of the Council paying for a funeral because someone is unwilling to pay their relative's funeral.

In response to the question of who conducts the funeral service, the Panel was informed that the celebrant who conducted the previous funeral at the crematorium on the day of the funeral will conduct the funeral in order to save costs. Normally the celebrant is civil however where the deceased's wishes are known a religious celebrant will be appointed.

Members were informed that the Council will always use the local funeral directors where the deceased has died.

Following a question in regards to access to the Policy, the Panel were informed that the Policy will be displayed on the Council's website and residents can telephone the Council for a copy.

In response to the question what happens with the proceeds after the funeral costs have been recovered the Panel were informed that proceeds over £500, where there are no known family, goes to Government Legal Department. For all proceeds under £500, the money is retained by the Council and paid into the Chairman's Charity Fund.

The Panel were informed that in respect to grants, if the funeral takes place before the grant is paid then the grant won't be paid out.

Members expressed surprise that the Council has no legal obligation to provide a memorial or headstone.

The Panel endorse the submission of the Public Health Funerals Policy for approval by the Cabinet.

(At 8.28pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor J W Davies left the meeting.)

(At 8.29pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor J W Davies entered the meeting.)

13. 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 all the Panels' work programmes since the last meeting.

Members were reminded that there will be an additional meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Environment) taking place on Thursday 13th July 2017 to question Luminus regarding the Regulatory Judgement.

(At 8.48pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor R Fuller left the meeting and did not return.)

Chairman