

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT) held in Meeting Room 0.1a and 0.1b, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 6th February 2018.

PRESENT: Councillor T D Alban – Chairman.
Councillors J W Davies, D A Giles,
Mrs P A Jordan, P Kadewere, L R Swain and
Mrs J Tavener.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors P L E Bucknell, B S Chapman, S J Criswell and D Watt.

66. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9th January 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

67. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor L R Swain declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in relation to Minute Number 69, as he is acquainted with Dr Dungerwalla due to previous volunteer work carried out.

68. 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 February 2018 to 31st May 2018.

The Head of Community gave the Panel an update of the feedback received regarding the Corporate Enforcement Policy.

69. CITIZENS ADVICE RURAL CAMBS PRESENTATION

Dr Batul Dungarwalla, Chief Executive Officer of Citizens Advice Rural Cambs and Trevor Evans, Trustee and Chair of the Citizens Advice Rural Cambs Board was in attendance to give a presentation on the work of the organisation to the Panel.

Before Dr Dungerwalla and Mr Evans spoke the Head of Community, with the aid of a briefing note (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) gave the Panel an update of the background on Citizens Advice Rural Cambs (CARC) and their working relationship with the Council.

The Panel was informed that, according to a survey by BritainThinks, Citizens Advice is the third most recognised brand in the UK after the BBC and the NHS. CARC have 30 members of staff equating to 13

full time equivalents and 115 trained volunteers of which half are based in Huntingdonshire.

In Huntingdonshire, for quarters 1 to 3 2017/18, CARC had helped 2587 unique clients, each requiring, on average, 4 hours of support. CARC provide a face to face service in Huntingdonshire's four market towns and 80% of calls are resolved at the first point of contact, there is also contact with customers through the website via a web chat facility. In addition, CARC subcontract Disability Huntingdonshire (DISH) to carry out home visits on their behalf.

CARC has enable Huntingdonshire residents to claim an additional £71k and renegotiated £96k of debt. They have assisted many clients with financial skills and CARC now incorporates financial skills into every appointment. Dr Dungerwalla stated that two out of three clients have had their problems solved within six months. The Panel was provided with a case study.

Members were informed of the transformation journey CARC had undertaken. The service had found the most cost effective locations to operate from, to this extent CARC has mapped where their clients are located and what service they most need. CARC try to mobilise staff and deliver services to people, where they want, when they want and how they want.

In response to a question, the Panel was informed that CARC receives £115,700k per annum, of which £15k is paid to DISH, who are subcontracted to carry out home visits. In addition to this CARC receives funds from various Parish and Town Councils within the District. It was confirmed that the money CARC receives from the Council is spent in Huntingdonshire. Dr Dungerwalla added that the benefit of subcontracting home visits to DISH has been approximately £389k.

Members were informed of the opening times for CARC's offices in Huntingdon and St Neots and were informed that CARC pays rent for both the office spaces.

The Panel was informed that CARC often discover vulnerable residents through GP surgeries. Currently CARC are piloting a scheme in Ramsey and if it is successful will then go to the Clinical Commissioning Group to request funding. A Member added that they thought the pilot was worthwhile as isolation is an issue and any scheme that enables CARC to interact with those who require assistance, but who wouldn't necessarily ask for it, is welcomed.

Following a question on the preparation for universal credit, Dr Dungerwalla confirmed that CARC had been prepared for a year, the volunteers have been trained and that prevention work has been carried out in the form of financial skills. The Panel also received an explanation of what Universal Credit is. Members were also informed that CARC are actively advising people to tackle their debts.

Dr Dungerwalla agreed with the statement that of those people who use food banks, many have late benefit payments. Dr Dungerwalla added CARC hands out food bank vouchers to those who need them and will hand out a maximum of three.

A discussion on homelessness ensued, where the Panel was informed that CARC has prevented homelessness on 137 occasions over a 9 month period. Currently 5% of the Council's budget is spent on homelessness and that that Officers are working on a whole system approach to prevent homelessness. It was noted that 137 does not necessarily mean 137 individuals and could mean 137 families. It was added that mental health issues can be a contributing factor and cause of homelessness.

The Panel was informed that when presented with cases of homelessness, CARC can be faced with several issues however, there is usually a presenting issue. The advisors are skilled at assessing clients, reviewing the problems they have and discovering the cause of the problem.

It was added that there is an issue with people presenting themselves as homeless but are not, however the Council is aware of who those people are and is taking the appropriate action. In addition, some individuals make themselves intentionally homeless.

A discussion ensued regarding office space and delivery of services. Members were informed that, in addition to Huntingdon and St Neots, CARC delivers services in St Ives, Ramsey and Yaxley. CARC's office in St Neots is a portacabin located in Tan Yard Car Park. In terms of providing services to residents and non-residents, Citizens Advice would initially carry out a triage and then, if the client isn't local, they would get redirected to their local branch.

A Member suggested that CARC receives premises in Pathfinder House and St Neots rent free. Regarding St Neots, the Panel was informed that CARC pays the Council who in turn pays Portacabin UK for the use of the portacabin. It was suggested that Members work with Officers to provide a solution.

Responding to a question on how beneficial being located in Pathfinder House has been for CARC, Dr Dungerwalla stated that being co-located with the Council is a good thing. When the Department for Work and Pensions locates to Pathfinder later this year that will also be beneficial. In addition, Members were informed that there is no wrong door and whoever the client approaches first will be redirected to the most appropriate service. Sharing office space has the added benefit of the ability to easily share intelligence, wherever possible.

The Panel,

RESOLVED

- 1) To request that the Council should investigate ways of assisting CARC with benefits in kind.
- 2) That Members will work with Officer to come up with creative solutions to assist CARC.

70. CAMBRIDGESHIRE HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY FUNDING

The Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) provided a verbal update

on the questions that were sent to Cambridgeshire County Council following the meeting on 9th January 2018. In the update, the Panel was informed that no response was received. Members expressed disappointment at not receiving a response and requested that the questions are sent to Mr Hayward again but that his line manager is copied into the correspondence.

71. 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 Panels' work programmes.

Councillor Mrs J Tavener gave the Panel an update on the work of the Tree Strategy Working Group. Members were informed that the Group has had three meetings with the last one taking place on 5th December 2017 and the next one on 22nd February 2018.

Councillor Tavener informed the Panel that at the Group's last meeting, Members had met with the Head of Development and discussed the following: Conservation Area or Tree Preservation Orders, trees at new developments, planning for the inclusion of trees, Highways England and County Council Policy on planting trees, trees in industrial areas, trees used in gateway approaches, landscaping, training of tree wardens and networking of tree wardens.

Regarding training for Tree Wardens, the Panel was informed that the Tree Council is a national charity that provides training for prospective Tree Wardens.

In addition, the Panel was informed that the Executive Councillor for Community Resilience, Well-Being and Regulatory Services will devote some time, at the next Parish and Town Council Forum to discussing the work of tree wardens. Members were keen that the names of tree wardens are distributed to all Members.

Councillor Tavener added that the Executive Leader stated, via a written statement, that "the budget thereby released [by the removal of the Tree Warden post] will be redirected into the Landscape Officer post that we desperately need. This will happen later this year. On the more general point, support for the tree strategy, and liaison with the Town and Parish Councils, will continue as we now have a full time Tree Officer in Planning together with other tree officers in Operations".

Upon request, the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) gave Members an update on the work of the Strategic Review of Car Parking Task and Finish Group.

Chairman