
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery and Resources)

Report of the meetings held on 2nd December 2003,
6th January and 3rd February 2004

Matters for Information

31. STUDIES

(a) Post Offices

The Panel has followed up its study on the Post Office network and services and received details of the work being undertaken by Postwatch in this field.

In addition, the Panel has been consulted on a proposal to delete the budget for the monitoring of CCTV systems in rural post offices which had been established following a recommendation by the Panel. As there has been no uptake of the Service Members have concurred with the proposal.

(b) The Tourism Industry in Huntingdonshire

Following completion of an earlier examination of the Council's tourism service, the Panel has received additional information on the tourism industry in Huntingdonshire. Members have been acquainted with the national context, the economic impact of tourism in the District and the work of the Tourism Section. Further details have been provided on the nature of local tourism with particular reference to the type of accommodation occupied by tourists, the purpose of visits and the level of expenditure.

Members have discussed the service provided by the Council's Tourist Information Centres. In trying to meet the desire for tourist information in St Ives a publicly available electronic kiosk shortly will be installed in the town to help fulfil this need.

It is not intended to pursue this study further.

(c) Leisure Centres

The Panel has received details of the performance of the Council's Leisure Centres in 2002/03 compared with

2001/02. The information presented is regularly monitored by the Leisure Management Committees. This arrangement has been established in the light of the review of the operation of the Leisure Centres which had been conducted in 2001.

On the question of the Centres representing value for money, the Panel has been informed that whilst their overall aim is to achieve a healthy population they also contribute towards producing safe and active communities. Nevertheless, the high cost of their provision meant that a limited number of Centres are provided which will result in a need for travel by some users to benefit from the facilities.

With regard to the Council's pricing policy, the Panel has been assured that the Centres are competitive with and compare favourably with the private sector in customer retention. In addition, the Panel has acknowledged that the pricing policy means that access to facilities generally is affordable and that any reduction in charges would require a greater level of subsidy by the Council. The current level of uptake suggests that an appropriate level of fees has been achieved.

The Panel also has been acquainted with details of the exercise referral schemes operated by the Leisure Centres.

(d) **The Rural Economy and Services**

The Panel has commenced its study of the rural economy and services in Huntingdonshire. Owing to its relevance to the area and in accordance with the Panel's decision to meet outside Pathfinder House, the February meeting was held in Warboys. By way of background information Members have received information on the nature of business activity and relevant socio-economic characteristics of the District. They also reviewed the Council's activities in this area, including the policy framework, the Economic Development service's strategic and operational activities and current projects and the involvement of the Development Control service. Information also has been considered on the initiatives being pursued to encourage the renewal of Ramsey and its surrounding area and on the work of the Town Centre Partnerships, which are financially supported by the Council.

A range of agencies were represented at the meeting including -

- ◆ Business Link for Cambridgeshire
- ◆ Cambridgeshire ACRE
- ◆ Ramsey Town Council
- ◆ Ramsey Town Centre Partnership
- ◆ Ramsey Area Partnership Forum

- ◆ Federation of Small Businesses
- ◆ St Neots Town Centre Manager
- ◆ Warboys Parish Council

Each presented information to the Panel and a number of key areas for further study have emerged. Particular importance was attached to the Council's Development Control policies and procedures. The Panel will be pursuing these with the Head of Planning Services. Other matters highlighted in the course of the discussions which the Panel intends to address, include skills shortages, the Council's policies on rate relief, the availability of Broadband, links between complementary businesses, the co-ordination of agency working in this area and encouraging pro-active approaches to community businesses.

The next stage of the study will be to obtain evidence from -

- ◆ Countryside Agency
- ◆ National Farmers' Union
- ◆ Enterprise Agency
- ◆ Great Fen Project
- ◆ Learning Skills Council

The Panel intends to return to Warboys on future occasions to pursue the study and to visit Ramsey following its decision to meet in locations other than in Pathfinder House.

32. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

In conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance), the Panel has reviewed the Council's progress in implementing the Best Value Service Improvement Plans and performance against the Best Value Performance Indicators. In order to monitor the Council's performance the Panel has selected a range of indicators which it considers should be monitored on a regular basis. These will be reported on at each meeting and the first two reports have already been presented.

33. HUNTINGDONSHIRE CAR PARKING STRATEGY 2004-2016

The Panel, together with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance), has reviewed a draft Car Parking Strategy for Huntingdonshire to 2016. In so doing Members have discussed a range of issues including future levels of demand, on-street parking, the economic impact of parking policies in towns, income and expenditure, enforcement and the Rapid Transit System.

In order better to inform their comments the Panel requested sight of the outcome of the public consultation exercise on the Strategy. Following receipt of this information Members focused their discussion on the policies proposed for Ramsey to support the

economic regeneration of the town and the hypothecation of income to the provision of public transport.

At the conclusion of its discussions the Panel was of the view that the proposed reduction of on street parking should be clearly reflected in the Strategy and that greater detail of the parking needs of villages such as Yaxley and Kimbolton, referred to as “hub villages” should be included.

34. THE COUNCIL’S PRIORITIES

The Panel has endorsed the vision and a set of priorities, which have been developed following a review of the Council’ Corporate Plan. While Members understood that the revised Corporate Plan represents the Council’s broad vision and that local priorities were contained in departmental service plans they have expressed concern at the Corporate Plan’s lack of reference to the particular circumstances in Huntingdonshire. They also have suggested that the Council’s priorities should be communicated well both internally and externally to the wider community.

The Panel will receive performance monitoring reports on a quarterly basis.

35. COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT: PEER CHALLENGE AND SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Panel has reviewed the final report of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment Peer Challenge Team, which stressed that the Council should focus on its future plans, developing as a learning organisation and achieving its improvement plan.

The Panel also has reviewed the Councils CPA Self-Assessment and has commented upon the self-scoring levels proposed in the document concluding that the Council should self-score itself as a “good” authority overall.

36. REVIEW OF CONSTITUTION

As part of the annual review of the Constitution, the Panel has recommended that the Standards Committee should consider introducing a third Overview and Scrutiny Panel, reviewing the terms of reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels and introducing job descriptions for all Members who have been appointed to posts within the political management framework of the Council.

Other Matters of Interest

**37. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
(SERVICE DELIVERY AND RESOURCES) – PROGRESS**

The Panel has reviewed the progress of its studies and has added the Council's markets service to its ongoing programme.

38. FORWARD PLAN

The Panel has been acquainted with details of the Forward Plan of Key Decisions, which has been prepared by the Leader. In so doing Members have expressed continuing concern over both the inclusion in the plan of new items scheduled for the next Cabinet meeting, which has prevented them from being scrutinised prior to determination and the absence of background documents.

39. HUNTINGDONSHIRE HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY PANEL

The Panel has received the Minutes of two meetings of the Huntingdonshire Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panel.

40. SCRUTINY

The Panel has considered the latest editions of the Decision Digest. A number of queries raised with regard to items appearing in the Digest have been answered to their satisfaction.

K Reynolds
Chairman