
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery and Resources)

Report of the meetings held on 3rd February and
2nd March 2004

Matters for Information

41. STUDIES

(a) The Rural Economy and Services

The Panel has commenced its study on the rural economy and services. Representatives of various interested organisations have been invited to advise the Panel on their work in this area. The Council's Economic Development Manager began proceedings by discussing the nature of the business activity and relevant socio-economic characteristics of the District and the Council's policy framework. She also has outlined the Economic Development Service's strategic and operational activities and current projects and the involvement of the Development Control Service. She concluded by describing the initiatives being pursued to encourage the renewal of Ramsey and its surrounding area and the work of the Town Centre Partnership, which is financially supported by the Council.

Members were informed that the Medium Term Plan contained economic development projects costed at £500,000 and that the Economic Development Service has a budget of £125,000. External funding has also been received for specific projects, which include the refurbishment of Huntingdon Marina and the Ramsey Barge Dock project. The Panel then discussed the publication of the Business Directory, the importance to businesses of broadband, skills shortages, the Council's priorities on rate relief and links between complimentary businesses.

The Panel has received contributions from elected representatives as part of the evidence gathering stage of the study. Councillor M G Baker has commented on the loss of rural amenities such as post offices and in response the Council's policy on relief from National Non-Domestic Rates for post offices, the Countryside Agency's Vital Villages programme and the service providing information on available funding and other assistance was outlined. Councillor A Augstein, Warboys Parish Council raised the need to provide

information for businesses on the development control process as it relates to agricultural buildings and on the available funding.

Mr M Lyons, Chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses informed the Panel that his organisation, at the national level, has been examining the issue of rural development and he has undertaken to provide Members with the findings. He also expressed the view that better coordination between training agencies could help reduce the current skills shortage.

Mrs K Bennett, Chief Executive of Cambridgeshire ACRE stressed the importance of encouraging individuals and groups to establish community businesses. She also highlighted the importance for rural communities of planning for the future. The production of parish plans is being promoted as the best way of achieving this objective, particularly when linked to the Community Plan.

Mr D Margetts, Rural and Family Business Adviser, informed Members of the one stop shop approach being taken by Business Link for Cambridgeshire in order to provide businesses with information on the advice and assistance available to them. Businesslink is also able to offer business support and training. Finally, Members were alerted to the Rural Shops Alliance, which holds a database of rural businesses, provides training and helps with the preparation of business plans.

Mrs C Keck, Rural Renewal Officer, provided the Panel with details on the Ramsey Area Partnership Forum, including its involvement with the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) Market Towns Initiative and the uses to which the Forum has put the funding it has been successful in obtaining. The forum has close links with the Ramsey Town Centre Partnership and Mrs J Drummond, Ramsey Town Centre Manager reported on the project work undertaken by the Partnership which includes work on the barge dock, organising farmers' markets and lobbying to improve access for the disabled. The Partnership also has endeavoured to act as a conduit for the business services in the Town.

Mr N Dick, Ramsey Town Council outlined the funding available from EEDA through its Leader + programme for social/community enterprises and Mr O Easteal, St Neots Town Centre Manager, has expressed the view that surrounding villages are an important factor in the economic health of towns, which is why he is working to improve rural/urban links.

At the conclusion of the presentation of evidence, the Panel agreed that the next stage of the study should focus on the Council's development control policies by taking evidence from the Executive Councillor with responsibility for Planning Strategy and the Head of Planning Services and on NNDR

relief policies with evidence from the Executive Councillor with responsibility for Finance and the Head of Revenue Services.

In pursuit of the study the Panel, in the future, intends to seek evidence from the Countryside Agency, the National Farmers' Union, the Enterprise Agency, the Great Fen Project and the Learning Skills Council.

(b) **Services for Young People**

The Panel has commenced a study on services for young people. Representatives of a number of organisations have been invited to present evidence to the Panel. Ms G Hanby the District Council's Policy Officer – Young Peoples' Participation began by stressing that whilst the District Council does not have a statutory responsibility for youth services, she works closely with a range of agencies in this area to engage young people in its work. One of her main aims is to try to bring about the organisational change necessary within the District Council to make this possible. She also has informed Members of the projects in which she is involved, which includes research into how young people prefer the Council to communicate with them. The findings are to be used to inform the development of the Customer First programme and made available to partner organisations.

Mr S White, Cambridgeshire County Council's Head of Youth Services, informed the Panel that he is responsible for all aspects of youth service provision by the County Council, for which a budget of £400,000 is available in Huntingdonshire. 80% of this budget is devoted to 13-19 year olds organised around a government initiative entitled "Transforming Youth Work" containing three main priorities namely raising achievement, enabling social inclusion and lifelong learning.

Ms S McCrorie, Huntingdonshire Youth Work Manager informed Members that youth services in Huntingdonshire are in the process of being reorganised. She currently is reviewing staffing with a view to achieving a wide skills base in order to meet the challenges of "Transforming Youth Work". She also is engaged in developing partnership working with the District and Parish Councils.

Mr M Davey Chief Executive of Connexions outlined the background to his organisation. He also presented information on its structure, how the budget of £6 million is utilised, the area covered and how the service is delivered. He went on to discuss Connexions' performance, which shows that having exceeded its targets the service rates third compared with others in Britain. Mr Davey then referred to the government initiatives on youth services, which have resulted in the formation of a partnership in Cambridgeshire to coordinate all youth services with sub groups responsible for various areas of work. He concluded by suggesting the Council participates in a

pilot exercise to pursue the “Hear By Right” government initiative, which seeks to improve engagement with young people.

The Panel has requested an update on services for young people together with a presentation on the “Hear By Right” pilot project at a future meeting.

42. EMERGENCY PLAN

The Panel has reviewed the draft Emergency Plan. The Flooding Advisory Group had recommended the development of a comprehensive Emergency Plan and the opportunity has been taken to incorporate the provisions of the Civil Contingences Bill. On the recommendation of the Advisory Group, the Plan contains provisions relating to practical measures to be taken during an emergency and the resourcing implications of civil emergencies.

The Panel has received confirmation that under the Plan both Members and Officers will receive training on how to act during civil emergencies. Members also have been acquainted with the links between the Environment Agency and the Council established to deal with flooding and have discussed the provision of sandbags during instances of flooding.

43. WASTE PFI

Following a request by the Panel, Members have received an update on progress of a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) bid by Peterborough City Council and Cambridgeshire principal authorities to fund investment in a new disposal and, potentially, collection infrastructure to divert more waste from landfill. The Panel has also been advised of the background to the proposal, the national policy context relating to waste, the process involved in securing and managing the contract and its service delivery implications.

44. REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION

Having been asked for suggestions for amendments to the Council's Constitution as part of its annual review process the Panel has commented that in view of their excessive workload, the Standards Committee should give consideration to introducing a third Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Members, furthermore, have come to the conclusion that, as a result of the overlap between the two Panels, the terms of reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels should be reviewed. Finally, they have expressed the opinion that job descriptions for all Members who have been appointed to posts within the political management framework of the Council should be introduced and that consideration should be given to the appointment of substitutes to the Panel.

45. GROWING SUCCESS: A CORPORATE PLAN

In conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance) the Panel has reviewed the draft Corporate Plan, which forms a key part of the Council's policy framework. Members have been informed that whilst baseline data is available on the Council's main public facing priorities, which makes target setting relatively straight forward, work still is required to devise targets for the remaining priorities. Having then been informed of the timetable for the publication of the Plan, Members have commented that they would have preferred to have been able to consider the targets prior to their submission to the Council for formal adoption. Members also have commented on the high cost associated with collecting data for some of the targets and that the Council should be able to demonstrate that the Plan is linked to the decision making process.

46. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN: SUMMARY

In conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance) the Panel has reviewed the Council's performance against a range of Best Value Performance Indicators. In response to a comment regarding a decline in performance in a number of areas, the Panel has been informed that the results may have been influenced by the design of the Customer Satisfaction Survey and that the situation will be clarified once the analysis of the Survey has been completed. The Panel has requested a report to a future meeting on the latter.

47. SCRUTINY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The Panel has been acquainted with proposals by the County Council to change the way the scrutiny of health and social care is carried out in Cambridgeshire. Whilst the view has been expressed that they are premature, Members recognise that the statutory duty for the scrutiny of health matters rests with the County Council and so have raised no objection to the proposed changes.

48. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Panel has continued to monitor the Council's progress against a range of performance indicators, which had previously been selected from the Council's Best Value Performance Plan.

**49. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
(SERVICES DELIVERY AND RESOURCES) – PROGRESS**

The Panel has been apprised of the progress of actions required as a result of its previous decisions. The Chairman has been authorised to amend the timetable for the Panel's studies.

50. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 – FORWARD PLAN

The Panel has been acquainted with details of the Forward Plan and forthcoming Key Decisions, which had been prepared by the Leader of the Council.

51. 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