

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY AND RESOURCES) held at Pathfinder House, St. Mary's Street, Huntingdon on 1st April 2003.

PRESENT: Councillors K Reynolds (Chairman)

Councillors M G Baker, E R Butler, Miss N Elliott, J E Garner, Mrs C A Godley and A Hansard.

APOLOGY: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors D A Giles, Mrs S J Vanbergen and Mrs N F Wagstaffe.

### **02/80 CONSULTING YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT THE ARTS IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE**

The Chairman welcomed representatives of the Ramsey area, Huntingdon, Sawtry and Wyton who had been invited to the meeting to present the findings of consultations with young people about the arts in Huntingdonshire. The Smart People Like Arty Things (SPLAT) project was commissioned by the Arts Services Manager at the District Council and had been designed to inform future planning of the arts in the District. Ten researchers aged between 14 and 18 years had been recruited through the Youth Service, schools and other local organisations and had undertaken training in research techniques. They had then interviewed 100 of their peers on the arts and young people, the results of which were in the process of being analysed. The initial findings revealed, inter alia, that music and dance were the most popular activities and the reason given for selecting them were enjoyment and future career ambitions. The barriers to participation in other forms of the arts included cost, the unsuitability of venues, a lack of publicity for events and the need to travel. A number of suggestions were made for improving participation rates and Members noted that the final report on the research findings would be published in May 2003.

In response to a question by Councillor M G Baker regarding the role of schools in arts provision, it was suggested that alternative forms of provision were required for those young people not associated with schools and those reluctant to join organised groups. Following a further question by the Chairman concerning possible actions by the Council to encourage availability of the arts, the view was expressed that reducing the cost of activities would be of most benefit. Other measures included the provision of subsidised transportation, awareness raising and programming of activities at more appropriate times, particularly during the summer holidays. Members were informed that, in the short term, a range of mediums were to be used to promote the arts and these, together with the final report containing the findings of the research, would be widely publicised in the local press and on the District Council's website.

The Chairman thanked the speakers for their informative presentation and contribution to the arts services of the District Council.

**02/81 BUILDING CONTROL SERVICE – ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS**

Pursuant to Minute No. 02/51(iii), the Panel received and noted a report by the Building Control Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding progress with the introduction of electronic means by which applicants could submit Building Regulation applications to the Council for determination. Having undertaken initial investigations a number of drawbacks had emerged, consequently an alternative was being considered via the recently introduced 'Planning Portal', which had been launched to accept the electronic on-line submission of planning applications. Members endorsed the decision not to proceed as planned and requested a progress report in twelve months time.

**RESOLVED**

- (i) that the intention to await developments with the 'Planning Portal' before introducing electronic processing of Building Control applications be noted; and
- (ii) that a further progress report be submitted to the Panel in 12 months time.

**02/82 DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY STRATEGY FOR HUNTINGDONSHIRE**

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Policy (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which outlined the programme for the development of a Community Strategy for Huntingdonshire. Members noted that the development of a Strategy was a legal requirement and were advised of the work that had been undertaken to-date in establishing the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership (HSP). The HSP had been designed to promote the development of the Strategy and provide a focus to co-ordinate local activity. The Cabinet had requested that the Overview and Scrutiny Panels be consulted on the Strategy and at their meetings in June, the Panels would be asked to consider the detailed proposals and to make recommendations on the Council's priorities.

Having noted the timetable for consideration and adoption of the draft Strategy, it was

**RESOLVED**

- that the proposed timetable for and involvement of the Panel in the development of the Community Strategy for Huntingdonshire be noted.

**02/83 REVIEW OF THE HOUSING REGISTER AND NOMINATIONS POLICY**

With the aid of a report by the Head of Housing Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel reviewed a revised Housing Register and Nominations Policy, in the light of changes in legislation and to ensure that the Council assisted those households in greatest need of housing. Mr J Collen, Housing Needs and Resources Manager, drew Members' attention to two main areas of concern with the current Policy specifically the lack of provision for over-crowded households and households under occupying family sized properties. The review addressed

three areas of the policy namely who was eligible for inclusion on the Housing Register, a classification and prioritisation of housing need and matching of need to property types and sizes. Having discussed the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and the availability of new social housing, the Panel was pleased to note that the Policy had been produced following consultations with Members and consideration by a Member Review Group. Having commended the review the Panel also suggested that the Policy should be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure that the Council's policies continue to assist those residents in greatest housing need.

**RESOLVED**

- (i) that the revised Housing Register and Nominations Policy be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet;
- (ii) that the Panel place on record their appreciation of the level of Member involvement with the revised Nominations Policy; and
- (iii) that the Cabinet be recommended to review the Nominations Policy at regular intervals.

**02/84 STUDIES**

**(a) Service Provision for the Elderly**

Pursuant to Minute No. 02/50 (ii), the Panel gave consideration to a letter from Cambridgeshire County Council (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), which contained details of future plans for the Occupational Therapy service. From 1st April 2003 the Huntingdonshire Primary Care Trust would assume responsibility for the service and an anticipated additional £100,000 would be available to sustain the recent increases in provision. Members also noted the likely effects for the Disabled Facilities Grant budget of a reduction in the time taken to complete assessments.

**RESOLVED**

that the contents of the letter from Cambridgeshire County Council on the future of the Occupational Therapy service be noted.

**(b) Rural Post Office Network and Services**

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Policy (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was acquainted with progress made against the recommendations by the former Overview and Scrutiny Panel (External) following the conclusion of the study of the Post Office Network and Services (Minute No. 01/12 refers). The recommendations subsequently had been endorsed and enhanced by the Cabinet. Members were informed that since the measures were introduced a number of potential closures of Post Offices in the District had been prevented but that this was largely owing to changes introduced at the national level. The Head of Policy expressed the view that these changes had been partly influenced by lobbying by the Council.

In response to a question by the Chairman, the Head of Policy confirmed that the previous study had concentrated on rural Post Offices and that any work on urban Post Offices would require a new study to commence. Having discussed the potential impact of changes in legislation on the Post Office Service, Members suggested that any future changes nationally be brought to the attention of the Panel.

RESOLVED

that the study of the rural Post Office Network and Services be concluded.

(c) **Play Equipment**

Further to Minute No. 02/70 and with the aid of a report by the Executive Director of Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel reviewed the evidence submitted to-date in the course of the study of play equipment. In so doing, particular emphasis was placed on the contribution made by Town and Parish Councils to the study. Consequently it was suggested that they be circulated details of how they could benefit from the assistance provided by the Council's Procurement Officer and how they could contribute to the Local Plan process on play equipment provision. The Head of Community Services advised the Panel that following their meeting in December 2003 a reminder of the advice had been circulated and they would continue this provision of information as part of the annual grants process in June/July each year. Having decided that the study could now be concluded, it was

RESOLVED

- (i) that the study of play equipment be concluded; and
- (ii) that Town and Parish Councils be informed of the assistance available from the Procurement Officer in providing play equipment and of the opportunities available to participate in the Local Plan process.

(d) **Achievements of the Tourism Service**

Pursuant to Minute No. 02/20 (a), consideration was given to a report by the Head of Community Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which summarised the findings of the Tourism Working Group established to investigate progress with the implementation of the Tourism Strategy. The majority of the actions contained in the Strategy had been carried out and some of the more significant achievements were highlighted.

The Lead Member of the Working Group, Councillor J E Garner, drew Members' attention to the roles of the East of England Tourist Board and Huntingdonshire Association of Tourism, the ongoing research undertaken in order to ensure the continuous improvement of the industry, the Welcome Host training, the quality assurance scheme and the importance of the availability of public conveniences. He also

referred to the efforts made to promote the area within the tourism industry and the literature produced on attractions in the District.

Having discussed the lack of brown tourist signs in the District, the Head of Community Services explained that it was likely that progress would be made in this area in the near future. The Panel also endorsed the decision to install a tourist information kiosk in St. Ives.

In response to a question by Councillor M G Baker, the Head of Community Services listed the types of activities that attracted visitors to the District, which included historical, active, water based and countryside pursuits. Discussion also ensued on the importance to the District of niche marketing to avoid direct competition with traditional tourist areas, spin offs from commercial activity and promotion of the District via the internet.

Having reviewed the information presented, the Panel were satisfied with the progress that had been made against the Tourism Strategy and agreed that the study could be concluded. Members requested a further update in 12 months and, in the meantime, a presentation on the impact of tourism in Huntingdonshire, including statistical information on the visitors to the District.

#### RESOLVED

- (i) that the findings of the Tourism Working Group be noted;
- (ii) that a progress report on the Tourism Strategy be submitted to the Panel in 12 months time; and
- (iii) that the Head of Community Services be invited to a future meeting to discuss the tourism industry in Huntingdonshire.

#### **02/85 BEST VALUE PROGRESS**

Members were acquainted by means of a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) with the progress of Best Value Reviews within their remit.

#### **02/86 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY AND RESOURCES) – PROGRESS**

Members received and noted a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) detailing action taken in response to recent discussions and decisions taken by the Panel and the former Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

With regard to the item on the NHS complaints procedure, a report was requested on the main provisions of the document “NHS Complaints Reform – Making Things Right” published by the Department of Health for the next meeting.

#### RESOLVED

that a report on Government proposals for the reform of the NHS complaints procedure be submitted to the next meeting.

**02/87 FORWARD PLAN**

The Panel considered the current Forward Plan of key decisions scheduled for consideration by the Cabinet (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which had been prepared by the Leader for the period 1st April – 1st July 2003.

The Chairman offered to make available copies of his findings on the Regulatory Reform Order and Councillor A Hansard informed Members that a report shortly would be submitted to the Panel on the Homelessness Strategy. Councillor M G Baker requested a copy of the findings of the Car Parking Strategy produced by TPI Limited and following a question by Councillor E R Butler, the Chief Executive advised him that progress with the garden waste trial could be obtained from the Head of Operations.

**02/88 SCRUTINY**

The Panel scrutinised the 31st edition of the Decision Digest and in so doing the Chief Executive acquainted Members with recent developments and press statement relating to the A14.

Chairman