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## Overview and Scrutiny (Service Delivery and Resources)

Report of the meeting held on 1st March 2005

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### Matters for Information

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#### **41. HEAR BY RIGHT**

In pursuit of its study on Services for Young People, the Panel has received a presentation by Mr B Badham of the National Youth Agency on Hear By Right. Mr Badham has outlined the legislative framework in which young people's services operate and, in particular, the areas where improvements are required to ensure their equal standing in society. Whilst the District Council has few legal duties in this area, Mr Badham has expressed the view that it has a moral obligation towards young people. The Council's services can better meet their needs if a learning culture exists and young people are given the skills to participate effectively in the service planning process.

The District Council's Policy Officer – Young People, Ms G Hanby, has updated the Panel on developments with regard to young people since she last addressed them on this matter. A programme of workshops has been held with officers to identify the Council's existing work with young people, to review progress and to suggest areas for change. The workshops have established that the current arrangements are ad-hoc and rely on the commitment of key personnel. It has further been found that the potential exists to involve young people in decision making in most areas of the Council's activities. As a result an Action Plan has been devised, designed to improve the Council's classification against the Hear By Rights Standards.

Mr Badham concluded the presentation by stressing the flexible nature and proven value of the Hear By Right Framework, the importance of taking small measurable steps rather than introducing large formal structures, which are perceived as threatening by young people and the tangible benefits to be derived from Hear By Right.

The Panel has established that Hear By Right applies to young people of all ages, including in some cases those up to 21 years. The methods through which young people can be consulted also have been considered and include presenting information in interesting and practical ways and engaging partner organisations to involve them. Consultation varies according to the issue involved, but might form

part of the school's curriculum, work carried out by Parish Councils or the remits of dedicated workers. The Panel has concluded that participants should routinely be given feedback on the results of consultation to demonstrate the value of their contribution.

The Panel has been informed that Hear By Right aims to be inclusive so as to build stronger communities and actively seeks the involvement of parents. The Panel also has received details of the way the Council endeavours to encourage practical citizenship, engage those on the fringes of society and ensure that changes introduced as a result of Hear By Right are sustainable.

The Panel has reviewed the Hear By Right Action Plan for Working Towards Emerging Status for Huntingdonshire District Council and requested that it is amended to include timescales and priorities and submitted to a future meeting when it will be considered further in the context of evidence previously presented by Connexions.

#### **42. EQUALITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY AND RACE EQUALITY SCHEME**

The Panel has endorsed for submission to the Council a revised and enhanced Equality and Inclusion Strategy, which includes an updated Race Equality Scheme. The Panel has been acquainted with the particular circumstances in Huntingdonshire, the hot spots of diversity, the Action Plan and the main outcomes that the Strategy is designed to achieve.

The Panel has discussed the position with regard to Officers and Members; however, as the document applies only to service provision, it has been concluded that such references should not be included in the Strategy.

The Panel also has discussed consultation and engagement with communities, low level crime, travellers, vetting of contractors and elderly people, following which further information has been requested on the Council's rating against the Equality Standard for Local Government and on the difficulties the Council faces becoming compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act.

#### **43. REVIEW OF THE HOUSING REGISTER AND NOMINATIONS POLICY**

The Panel has endorsed a revised Housing Register and Nominations Policy for submission to the Cabinet, which has been revised to take greater account of over-crowded conditions and residents wishing to move to smaller accommodation. The Panel has also been informed of the impact of the Housing Register Policy and its associated points system since its introduction in September 2003.

The Panel has discussed levels of occupancy in the District, the private housing sector and requirements for social housing as part of new developments.

The Panel has requested details of the operation of choice-based letting systems, which are likely to be imposed on the Council by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

**44. YOUNG PERSONS' HOUSING STRATEGY 2005 – 2007**

The Panel has endorsed for submission to the Council the Young Persons' Housing Strategy for 2005 – 2007. The Panel has been informed that the Strategy relates to those aged 16 – 29 years and of its resource implications, which include maximising the development of affordable housing, provision of additional supported housing and provision of adequate support services.

The Panel has discussed the funding of additional affordable housing and the systems in place with social services to identify those likely to become homeless.

**45. REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION**

Pursuant to Item No. 35 of their Report to the meeting of the Council held on 16th February 2005, the Panel has further discussed the Council's Constitution as part of the Annual Review. The Panel has reiterated their previous recommendations for changes to the way overview and scrutiny is carried out and requested the Corporate Governance Panel to consider the introduction of four overview and scrutiny panels aligned to portfolio responsibilities comprising fewer Members than at present, to clarify the remits of the Panels so as to ensure they are mutually exclusive and to introduce provision for joint meetings where appropriate.

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**Other Matters of Interest**

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**46. FORWARD PLAN**

The Panel has been acquainted with details of the Forward Plan of forthcoming key decisions which has been prepared by the Leader of the Council.

**47. SCRUTINY**

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

K Reynolds  
Chairman