

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) held in the Council Chamber, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 3rd July 2007.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, Mrs M Banerjee, K J Churchill, Cooper, J E Garner, D A Giles, D Harty, Jordan, P G Mitchell, J M Sadler, P K Ursell and J S Watt.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs C A Godley.

13. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 5th June 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors K J Churchill, S J Criswell and D Harty declared personal interests in Minute No. 16 by virtue of being Members of Cambridgeshire County Council.

15. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 - FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered and noted the current Forward Plan of key decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) scheduled for consideration by the Cabinet and which had been prepared by the Leader of the Council for the period 1st July to 31st October 2007

In relation to continuing interest in the subject, Members requested that a copy of the Local Economy Strategy be submitted to the Panel prior to its consideration by the Cabinet. Following discussion on the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the Central Services Manager undertook to circulate a copy of a LACoRs Briefing Note on the Animal Welfare Bill for further background information.

16. STUDIES

(a) Review of Small Scale Environmental Improvements Grant Scheme

Further to Minute No. 07/5a, the Panel considered the final report of the Small Scale Environmental Improvements Scheme Working Group (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). The Panel noted the Working Group's

activities, which had culminated in a series of site visits, where applications for funding had been made for various scales of projects.

The Panel were acquainted with the key findings of the Group in relation to the Council's corporate objectives and community aims, arrangements for involving town and parish councils and the scheme's criteria. In addition, Members were presented with a series of conclusions of the Working Group which it was hoped would help streamline the process as well as limit the Council's contributions to such schemes in view of a limited budget.

Following discussion, the Panel

RESOLVED

- (a) that the total of £15,000 in conclusion 7 of the report now submitted be amended to £22,500;
- (b) that conclusion 12 be amended to read, "that a town or parish council be required to contribute £1 per elector to a maximum contribution of 25% of the total cost of the scheme";
- (c) that, subject to the amendments outlined above, the report of the Working Group be approved for consideration by the Cabinet; and
- (d) that, subject to its consideration of the Working Group's conclusions, the Cabinet is invited to authorise the Director of Operational Services, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Environment and Transport to prepare an amended Small Scale Environmental Improvements Grant Scheme.

(b) Adoption of Roads and Sewers

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) providing background information on a study into the adoption of roads and sewers. Members were advised that the issues of adopting roads and sewers appeared to be a national problem and often arose due to a lack of communication between local authorities and developers. Particular attention was drawn to recent building regulations, which included sewers, setting an industry standard together with the procedure, legal agreements and timescales for the adoption process.

In noting the ongoing problems encountered by Officers and Members when investigating reasons for the potential causes of delay or disruption to the adoption of various roads and sewers, the Panel were keen that a Working Group be established to begin to understand the processes and procedures involved and to improve the speed of the adoption process.

Having agreed to remove historical private roads from the

scope of the study, it was

RESOLVED

that a Working Group be established comprising Councillors J D Ablewhite, D A Giles, Mrs C A Godley and P K Ursell, to undertake a review on the process of adopting estate roads and sewers with an aim to put measures in place that could streamline the process and make the procedures more transparent, initially by an investigation of introducing a District-wide register of un-adopted roads and sewers.

17. STATE OF THE DISTRICT CONFERENCE

(Councillor P J Downes was in attendance for this item).

Further to Minute No. 11(a), consideration was given to a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the feasibility of introducing a State of the District Conference and on the findings of an investigation into how other local authorities engaged with their communities.

In noting that a similar exercise had been undertaken by the Corporate Governance Panel in 2005, the Panel were acquainted with the responses to a consultation with Members on the subject. Generally at the time few Councillors supported a proposal to hold a State of the District Conference; however, support was expressed for improved publicity of the existing Debate.

In discussing a way forward Members acknowledged the difficulty in engaging with the public, particularly on such a wide District level, and as a result the Panel were keen to investigate the use of smaller area consultation groups involving all tiers of local government in the process. To enable the Panel to focus upon the suggestions and a way forward, it was

RESOLVED

that a Working Group be established comprising Councillors K J Churchill, P J Downes and Mrs M Banerjee to discuss the concept of local area forums, together with consideration of potential subject areas, for discussion at a future meeting of the Panel.

18. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) - PROGRESS

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of actions taken in response to recent discussions and decisions and reviewing the programme of studies.

The Panel were advised that it was hoped that a report on the health implications of the Council's activities would be considered by the Cabinet in September 2007.

With regard to Town Centre cleaning regimes, the Central Services Manager reported that a meeting with the Head of Operations had been requested but due to ongoing work and imminent move of the Operations Division to their new site, progress had been delayed.

It was reported that an update on recycling credits would be submitted to the meeting of the Panel in September.

Having been acquainted with a draft copy of the disability questionnaire to be circulated to Town and Parish Councils, Members made a number of amendments to and suggestions on its content prior to its despatch.

Further to Minute No. 07/16(a) ante, it was suggested that the remit of the Small Scale Environmental Improvement Scheme Working Group be extended to include an investigation of all grant schemes provided by the Council and that the External Funding Officer be invited to its next meeting to discuss the issues in more detail.

In response to a comment by a Member, the Central Services Manager provided an overview of a response received from the Housing Division and the Executive Councillor for Housing and Health on concerns expressed by the Panel at the delays in processing Disabled Facility Grant applications as a result of a backlog of Occupational Therapy assessments.

19. SCRUTINY

The 74th edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

Chairman