

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, 6th November 2007.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

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

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors E R Butler, J E Garner and J M Sadler.

36. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd October 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

37. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors K J Churchill, S J Criswell and D Harty declared personal interests in Minute Nos. 39, 41 and 42(c) by virtue of being Members of Cambridgeshire County Council.

38. A SUSTAINABLE LOCAL ECONOMY STRATEGY FOR HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The Panel gave consideration to a report by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached a draft Sustainable Local Economy Strategy for Huntingdonshire. Members were informed that the Strategy looked beyond the boundary of the District borders and involved partner organisations. The strategy was designed to shape the local economy by concentrating on promoting key sectors, which was in line with regional and national trends. It also took account of a number of local and regional studies and had been subject to a series of consultation events. The overall aim was to develop a strategy that could contribute towards achieving 20,000 additional jobs that were needed in the District in the period to 2021 in line with the draft Regional Spatial Strategy.

The Panel discussed each of the six strategic priorities in detail which had been developed to focus future activities. With regard to the outcome of providing Business Support, Members commented on the need for the Council to support the installation of infrastructure facilities in areas of land identified for industrial development in order to make them more attractive to businesses. Following a further comment on the need to promote existing sites for development, it

was suggested that older units should be refurbished for this purpose.

In response to a question by Councillor D A Giles, Members were informed that the 20,000 new jobs would be in addition to the 68,000 existing jobs in the District. Members requested that they be kept informed of changes to the designation of industrial land for planning purposes and commented that there was unmet demand for “move on” premises and that small companies needed support to make the transition.

Members noted that the Physical Infrastructure Development strategic priority referred to the importance of ensuring that infrastructure requirements were reflected in the Regional Spatial Strategy and, in particular, the need for an effective transport network.

In respect of the Skill Development strategic priority, Members commented that, in addition to providing training, priority housing also should be provided for key workers. Having been acquainted with an example of how similar assistance had been provided to a company relocated to the District, Members noted that the Regional College consulted industry on its training needs and developed courses to support creative industries.

The Panel was informed of the objectives of the Town Centre support and the Visitor Development strategic priorities. With regard to the latter, Members requested and received details of the sub-regional approach it was intended to adopt. A regional brand would be developed and a Tourism Officer for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough would be appointed and managed by the District Council to support partners across the County to deliver projects for the benefit of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

The final strategic priority covered the industry sectors it was intended to promote. The Panel referred to the need for planning policies to allow diversification in the use of redundant buildings in rural areas for this purpose and for measures to attract industries, including assistance with start-up, transfer and technical matters. Members went on to outline their views on the desirability of providing adequate and sufficient services to serve the increased population. It was explained that an extra 10,000 jobs were currently needed locally to balance the levels of inward and outward commuting to and from the District.

In the context of recent job losses in manufacturing in St. Neots, the Panel stated that particular emphasis should be placed in this area by encouraging new types of industry, building housing and resisting the re-designation of industrial sites for residential purposes.

Having noted that the Strategy and Action Plan would be submitted to the Panel in the New Year, it was

RESOLVED

that the draft Sustainable Local Economy Strategy be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet.

39. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 - FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered the current Forward Plan of Key Decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which had been prepared by the Leader for the period 1st November 2007 to 29th February 2008. Members were informed that a report on the Consultation and Engagement Strategy would be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel and that an item on Decent Homes for Vulnerable People in the Private Sector dealt with the allocation of grant by the District Council.

40. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP STUDY – SCOPING REPORT

Pursuant to Minute No. 06/11 (a), the Panel gave consideration to a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the potential scope of a study on the Strategic Partnership. By way of background, the Head of Policy and Strategic Services informed Members that the Community Strategy and Strategic Partnership structure was in the process of being reviewed. National studies had stressed the importance of involving Councillors in the process.

The Panel recognised the need for Executive Councillors to be involved at all levels of the Strategic Partnership and for it to be scrutinised. As a result, it was agreed that the Corporate Plan Working Group should be tasked with monitoring the Strategic Partnership's progress and that reports on its allocation of funding should be received by the Panel as appropriate.

41. WORKING GROUPS

(a) YOUTH FORUM

Councillor Mrs P A Jordan introduced the final report of the Youth Forum Working Group. She stated that the Working Group had not identified a need to introduce a Youth Forum at the present time and drew Members' attention to ongoing bids for funding and the successful Partnership Action in Rural Communities (PARC) project. The Head of Policy and Strategic Services informed Members that existing work was dependant on external funding continuing.

Having endorsed the view that session workers were essential for Town and Parish Councils, Members were acquainted with the timetable for the funding bids referred to in the report to be considered. Whereupon, it was:

RESOLVED

- a) that the Corporate Governance Panel is recommended to note the work being undertaken to involve young people and not to introduce a Youth Forum at this time but to remain open to re-considering this as and when circumstances permit;
- b) that the promotion of the Countywide model

for involving children and young people in decision-making be supported;

- c) that the submission of a bid for funding to the National Volunteering Charity "V" for work with 16-24 year olds be supported;
- d) that the bid to the Local Public Service Agreement Board Reward Money for funding for developing strategic work, including how the involvement of children and young people can be embedded into the work of organisations and coordinating/promoting partnership working, be supported;
- e) that the recommendation that application is made to the Local Public Service Agreement Board for funding to provide training for members of Town and Parish Councils on involving young people and to provide "session" workers to support Town and Parish Councils be supported;
- f) that quarterly reports be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) on the outcomes of the Council's engagement work with children and young people;
- g) that measures to raise awareness of current work in this field including, but not limited to, those referred to in paragraph 4.7 of the report now submitted be supported; and
- h) that a progress report be submitted to the Panel in 12 months time.

(b) STATE OF THE DISTRICT CONSULTATION

The report of the meeting of the State of the District Consultation Working Group held on 18th October 2007 was received and noted. Councillor K J Churchill drew attention to the potential benefits of holding consultation events and a suggestion that a trial was held. Members endorsed a suggestion by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services that the Working Group should look at using different consultation methods as part of the trial.

(c) ADOPTION OF ROADS AND SEWERS

The Report of the meeting of the Adoption of Roads and Sewers Working Group held on 22nd October 2007 was received and noted.

42. 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 and progress of actions taken in response to recent discussions and decisions and reviewing the programme of studies.

Members requested details and progress of the decision by the Cabinet in respect of the study on Promoting Better Health in Older People Through Physical Activity.

Councillor J D Ablewhite reported that some of the recommendations of the Working Group on Town Centre cleaning had been implemented.

Councillor P G Mitchell informed Members that the Grant Aid Working Group had met and asked for further information to inform the next phase of this work.

Councillor J D Ablewhite confirmed that he supported the Panel's decision to conclude the study on the Council's markets service (Minute No. 06/32 refers).

43. SCRUTINY

The Panel received and noted the 77th Edition of the Decision Digest.

Chairman