

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE SUPPORT) held in the Council Chamber, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 11 December 2007.

PRESENT: Councillor J A Gray – Chairman.

Councillors M G Baker, K M Baker, J T Bell, J W Davies, P J Downes, P M D Godfrey, D Harty, Ms S Kemp, L W McGuire, M F Newman, R G Tuplin and R J West.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors R W D Bailey and C R Hyams.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor A N Gilbert.

55. COUNCILLOR D HARTY

The Chairman welcomed Councillor D Harty to his first meeting of the Panel in place of Councillor R W D Bailey.

56. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 13th November 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

57. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

58. 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, which had been prepared by the Leader of the Council.

The Chairman reported that the Consultation and Engagement Strategy, Communications and Marketing Strategy and revised Customer Service Strategy items would now be considered by an additional meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny (Corporate and Strategic Framework) Panel on a date yet to be confirmed but anticipated to take place late January/early February 2008.

59. MONITORING OF SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS

(Councillor C R Hyams, Executive Councillor for Operations, Parks and Countryside and Councillor R W D Bailey, Buckden Ward, were in attendance for this Item)

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Panel were updated on the receipt and expenditure of money negotiated under Section 106 Agreements by the Council.

The Executive Councillor for Operations, Parks and Countryside acknowledged concerns raised by Members regarding the lack of clarity involved in the distribution and allocation of S106 funding. The Panel were advised that a meeting with the Leader of the Council and officers to review the current process, with a view to introducing changes to establish greater transparency, clearer responsibilities and better communication with Ward Members.

Members expressed disappointment over the time taken to expend money received and the lack of any individual expenditure on schemes over the past quarter. In response the Head of Operations explained that the present situation had improved compared with previous years and that progress had been made to achieve expenditure of the sums listed in the report.

With the permission of the Chairman, Councillor R W D Bailey raised questions about the scale of funding yet to be received by the Council under completed Section 106 Agreements and whether this would be spent in Huntingdonshire. Questions also arose about the role and involvement of Ward Members and Town and Parish Councils in the allocation and expenditure process.

The Chairman welcomed the positive approach displayed by the Executive Councillor for Operations, Parks and Countryside who was requested to consult with the Panel on any proposals that emerged from his investigations before they were implemented. In addition, it was suggested that the quarterly monitoring report also include details of any non-monetary receipts as well as income in future.

60. LOCAL PROCUREMENT REVIEW

Further to Minute No. 06/87, the Panel received a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) summarising the discussions that had taken place at a previous meeting held between Panel representatives and the local business community to monitor the actions contained in the Panel's review of local procurement. The Chairman of the meeting, Councillor M G Baker, expressed his satisfaction that a positive and constructive discussion had taken place which had resulted in agreement upon a number of further measures to be explored to facilitate the awareness of local businesses in future Council contracts and to improve opportunities for local procurement.

Members were acquainted with details of technical difficulties that were being experienced in establishing the electronic alert for additions to the on-line Contracts Register but the Panel were advised that the work required to resolve this problem was expected to be completed satisfactorily over the next few days.

In noting the suggestions made by the representatives of the business community, the Panel were advised that a further meeting would be held in the new municipal year to review progress and

consider the implications of the Council's emerging Environment Strategy.

The Panel extended their appreciation to Councillor Baker and the Working Group for their continued efforts in developing the relationship between the Council and the local business community.

61. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel considered and noted a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the Panel's programme of studies.

Members noted that meetings of the Cycling and Town Centre Initiatives working groups had been held. With regard to the former, the Head of Administration advised that it was hoped that a report on the findings of the Working Group would be submitted to the Panel's January meeting. Members were informed that meetings of the working groups looking at the Council's travel plan and town centre initiatives would be held shortly.

The Panel identified areas for future potential studies which included a review of the Council's housing needs assessment process and internal communication with Members. Following comments by Councillor P M D Godfrey on the District Council's involvement in the listing and de-listing of buildings of special architectural or historic interest, the Panel requested that a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel on the process involved.

The Panel also requested that the individual progress reports for each study be submitted on a monthly basis in future.

62. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE SUPPORT)

The Panel considered and noted a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the Panel's progress to date on issues that had been discussed previously.

63. SCRUTINY

The Panel considered and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest, summarising the Council's decisions made in the previous month.

Chairman