

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, 12 February 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor J A Gray – Chairman.

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

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor P H Dakers.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors P L E Bucknell and D B Dew.

72. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 15th January 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

73. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Ms S Kemp declared a personal interest in Minute No. 75 as an employee of Anglian Water.

Councillors P J Downes, D Harty and L McGuire declared a personal interest in Minute No. 79 as Members of Cambridgeshire County Council.

74. 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.

Members agreed that the Shared Services report should be considered at the March meeting of the Panel and the Chairman indicated that he would liaise with the Chairman of the Service Delivery Panel on the mechanism for scrutinising the report on the Environment Strategy when this became available.

75. PETITION BY ST AUDREY LANE AREA RESIDENTS, ST IVES

(Councillor D B Dew and Mr J Sayer were in attendance for this Item).

A petition signed by 26 persons was presented by Mr J Sayer of St Audrey Lane, St Ives drawing attention to problems experienced by residents in that area in times of heavy rainfall.

The Panel welcomed the opportunity for Members of the public to speak at a Scrutiny Panel meeting and Members asked Mr Sayer a number of questions with regard to the difficulties which he and his neighbours were encountering. Mr Sayer explained that, in times of even moderate rainfall, the foul sewerage system backed up and discharged in gardens and inside houses. The matter had been raised with Anglian Water Services Ltd. but the problem continued.

Councillor J W Davies drew attention to the latest reply from Anglian Water to the Council's Project Manager in which the company claimed to be unaware of the extent of the problem and that this was caused by surface water entering the system for which the company had no responsibility. On the basis of the information available and in light of the difficulty in identifying the cause of the incidents and how this was to be rectified, the Panel asked for a robust reply to be sent to Anglian Water. In addition, the Panel requested the submission of a report on the respective responsibilities of the relevant agencies with a view to the possible invitation to Anglian Water for a representative from the company to attend a future meeting of the Panel.

76. SPEAKING AT DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PANEL MEETINGS

Consideration was given to the procedure for public speaking at meetings of the Development Control Panel, with the Chairman reminding Members that this had been implemented in January 2007 with the intention of the process being reviewed after twelve months.

Members felt that the system, which had been introduced after a Scrutiny Panel investigation, had worked very successfully in engaging the public in the decision making process on development control applications. As the process had been instigated by the Panel, it was felt appropriate that the review also should be co-ordinated by this Panel. It was agreed therefore that comments be invited from all Members and co-ordinated for submission to the Development Control Panel.

77. FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS TO RIVERSIDE PARK, HUNTINGDON

(Councillor P L E Bucknell, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Environment and Transport was in attendance for this Item).

Following an introduction by the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Environment and Transport, consideration was given to a report by the Heads of Planning Services, Operations, Environmental Management, Legal and Estates (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached a draft Management Plan for Huntingdon Riverside Park - Eastern End.

The Development Plans and Implementation Manager informed the Panel of the three key areas proposed for improvement within the park to take advantage of its location and encourage visitors to Huntingdon.

In view of previous public concern regarding changes to the football pitches at the park which it was now proposed to replace with two mini-soccer pitches, the Panel was assured that research had

indicated that there was sufficient capacity elsewhere in Huntingdon for full size pitches and that the demand for informal games could be met by the smaller pitches. However, Members suggested that the current proposal for tree planting to separate the two pitches be withdrawn so that, if the need were to arise, a larger pitch could be reinstated.

In answer to further questions, the Head of Planning Services advised that part of the funding for the project was included in the current Medium Term Plan and that the purpose of the management plan was to provide a more co-ordinated approach to a number of changes that would affect the park in the coming years such as the guided bus project.

Having been informed that the proposals would be the subject of a wide ranging consultation exercise with residents and other users, the Panel endorsed the report for submission to Cabinet for approval.

78. CYCLING WORKING GROUP

(Councillor P L E Bucknell, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Environment and Transport was in attendance for this Item).

Further to Minute No. 06/88 and with the assistance of a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), Councillors K M Baker, P J Downes and P M D Godfrey acquainted the Panel with the outcome of deliberations of the Working Group which had been established to investigate the Council's expenditure on cycling in Huntingdonshire and its effectiveness in providing dedicated cycle paths and promoting cycling as a means of transport. In doing so, the Panel noted that the Group had been unable to establish a clear link from Section 106 contributions for transport to its expenditure on individual cycleway schemes in Huntingdonshire. Councillor L W McGuire advised that, as the relevant portfolio holder at the County Council, he had been investigating the matter with Officers and that his enquiries were continuing.

The Chairman expressed his appreciation for the work undertaken by the Group and requested that the study recommendations be placed on the progress report for future monitoring.

RESOLVED

that the Working Group's report and recommendations as set out below be approved for submission to the Cabinet for consideration:-

- a) that the offer by the County Council to update the Council's existing cycling strategy and to prepare an action plan for its implementation be welcomed and officers requested to conclude this work within the next six months;
- b) that, following completion of the strategy and action plan, specific contributions be sought in Section 106 agreements for cycleway provision in Huntingdonshire in appropriate cases;

- c) that contributions negotiated under (a) above be retained by the District Council for expenditure on implementation of the cycling strategy action plan;
- d) that the district council seek the allocation of specific funding through the Local Transport Plan for cycleway provision in Huntingdonshire; and
- e) that the approval of individual cycleway schemes continue to be the responsibility of the Huntingdonshire Traffic Management Area Joint Committee with District Council expenditure continuing to be allocated on a scheme by scheme basis.

(In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 14.5, Councillors D Harty and L W McGuire requested that their names be recorded as having abstained from voting on the above resolution).

79. TRAVEL PLAN WORKING GROUP

(Councillor P L E Bucknell, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Environment and Transport was in attendance for this Item).

Further to Minute No. 06/88 and with the assistance of a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), Councillors M G Baker, P M D Godfrey, J A Gray and R J West acquainted the Panel with the outcome of the deliberations of the Working Group which had been established to investigate the Council's Travel Plan and the question of travel allowances and incentives/disincentives for Members and Officers to use more environmentally sensitive means of transport. In doing so, the Panel noted the Group's belief that the Council should be innovative in its approach to the question of mileage allowances and that incentives should be made available for employees and Members to reduce the use of, in particular, heavily polluting cars as an example of good practice.

The Panel expressed their appreciation and support for the work undertaken by the Group in investigating the Council's Travel Plan.

In response to concern expressed by Councillor P J Downes that the maximum payable under any mileage allowance should not exceed the level set by H. M. Customs and Revenues for taxation purposes, the Chairman pointed out the need for sufficient differentials to encourage the purchase of low emission vehicles and that a Member did not have to claim the maximum allowance permissible.

It was therefore

RESOLVED

that the Working Group's report and recommendations as set out below be approved for submission to the Cabinet for consideration:-

- a) that an alternative form of mileage allowance be introduced for Members of the Council as set out in

paragraph 4.6 above based upon exhaust emission;

- b) that the new mileage allowance be optional for existing Members but compulsory for all newly elected Members with effect from 1st May 2008;
- c) that the Members' Independent Remuneration Panel be requested to confirm their agreement to the changes to the mileage allowance for Members;
- d) that the necessary changes be made to the Members Allowance Scheme;
- e) that employees travelling to work by means of car share be permitted to park in Bridge Place car park at a concessionary rate if car parking charges are introduced for that car park by the Council and suitable arrangements be made to enable those who car shared to travel home in an emergency if they are left without suitable means of transport;
- f) that enquiries continue to be made regarding potential funding for the implementation and publicity of the proposed changes to the mileage allowances to Members;
- g) that regular reports be produced highlighting the savings in both emissions and costs to the Council from the use of pool cars; and
- h) that further consideration be given to incentives for employees to use public transport, cycling and walking by the Working Group in the future.

80. LOCAL PETITION AND CALLS FOR ACTION

A report by the Head of Administration was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding the implications of recent legislative change affecting the overview and scrutiny function. Members were informed that further information would be submitted to the Panel when guidance had been issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

The Panel's attention also was drawn to the publication by DCLG of a consultation paper on local petitions and Councillors' "calls for action" which would enable them to place appropriate items on Committee agenda. Suggested responses to the questions posed in the consultation paper were contained in an annex to the report. In commenting on the responses, Members felt that a minimum of 100 should be required for a local petition but that some local flexibility should be permissible.

In addition, Members suggested that the potential additional workload for Members and Officers if the new measures were used extensively by the public should be reflected in the Council's revenue support grant settlement from the Government.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted and the suggested answers to the consultation paper set out in the annex to the report now submitted be endorsed, subject to amendments to incorporate the above comments by the Panel.

81. WORKPLAN 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 were informed by the Head of Administration of the progress made by the Working Group on Town Centre Initiatives and that it was hoped a report on the findings of the Group would be submitted to the Panel's March meeting.

Further to Minute No. 07/69 the Panel felt that in order to progress a number of new issues, Working Groups be established to investigate aspects of the Council's Section 106 Agreement and Heavy Goods Vehicle parking throughout the District.

RESOLVED

- (a) that a Working Group comprising Councillors P J Downes, D Harty, M F Newman and R G Tuplin be established to investigate the current Section 106 Agreement mechanism for the negotiation of agreements and the distribution of money received; and
- (b) that a Working Group comprising Councillors K M Baker, P H Dakers, P M D Godfrey and L W McGuire be established to identify and review the issue of Heavy Goods Vehicle parking throughout the District.

82. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (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 raised previously.

83. SCRUTINY

The Panel considered and noted the latest edition of the Council's decision digest, summarising the Council's decision made in the past month.

Chairman