

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE SUPPORT) held in Meeting Room 1, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 20 February 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor J A Gray – Chairman.

Councillors M G 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.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors K M Baker and P H Dakers

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors I C Bates and P L E Bucknell.

84. MEMBERS INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

85. CAR PARKING STRATEGY PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

(Councillor I C Bates, Leader of the Council and Councillor P L E Bucknell, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Environment and Transport were in attendance for this Item).

The Panel received a report by the Leader of the Council (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) outlining a series of suggestions in response to the issues raised.

Further to Minute No. 07/67 Members were reminded that at their meeting held on 15th January 2008, they had decided to raise no objections on a proposed car parking action plan formulated by the Car Parking Working Party but had invited the Cabinet to take into account a number of issues when the Action Plan was considered. As those matters had not been accepted by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 31st January 2008, eight Members of the Panel had called in the Cabinet's decision on the action plan.

The Chairman expressed the Panel's concern and disappointment that its recommendations had not been accepted by the Cabinet. Having considered the revised draft action plan, the Panel remained of the view that the proposed 25% reduction in the cost of a car parking season ticket for vehicles with emissions below 120g/km was not sufficiently ambitious to produce a noticeable impact on the District as this would apply to no more than a handful of vehicles. The Panel reiterated that the Cabinet should take a more innovative approach in creating positive incentives to encourage motorists to purchase and use lower emission vehicles.

The Leader of the Council informed the Panel that the Cabinet had felt that no further information was required on the implications of the Panel's support for greater incentives for the public to use low emission vehicles. In addition this would be influenced by the emerging Environment Strategy and the Leader suggested that any change should be dealt with as part of a wider review of environmental issues.

In the ensuing discussion, the Team Leader for Transportation advised Members of the current administration process for purchasing car parking season tickets by residents in Huntingdonshire and how this could be adapted to meet the needs of a proposed "green badge" scheme with a discount for lower emission vehicles.

In relation to the use of surplus income generated from car parking charges, the Panel drew attention to the statement in the current car parking strategy that the Council would direct surplus income derived from car parking charges to the furtherance of securing measures to promote integrated, sustainable and accessible transport. Having been advised of the Cabinet's view that flexibility should be retained to enable budgets to be managed within a policy adopted by the Council of not ring fencing income, the Panel highlighted the inconsistency between the strategy statement and Council policy. The Leader of the Council acknowledged the anomaly but reaffirmed the view of the Cabinet that income should not be ring fenced in order to maintain flexibility in delivering service improvements.

Following questions by Members regarding the clarity as to how the income from car parking charges was spent, the Leader of the Council suggested that a detailed analysis of all Council expenditure on car parking was likely to demonstrate that the Council did not generate any surplus income from charges. Moreover expenditure on highways and transportation generally by the Council exceeded income from car parks.

The Chairman made reference to the previous meeting of the Panel when Members had been of the view that the Car Parking Working Party's recommendations should be approved in the interest of delivering the action plan, but that a review should commence immediately after their implementation. The Chairman suggested that the Cabinet's decision to undertake a review after 12 months, would effectively mean that the action plan would remain in force until the autumn of 2010 given the time that would be taken in carrying out the review. As the Environment Strategy was due to be approved shortly, technology was changing rapidly and concerns over climate change were rising, the Panel reiterated its view that a delay of this length would be too long.

In the course of the discussion, Members' attention was drawn to a paper circulated by the Leader of the Council on the suggested courses of action to address the Panel's concerns.

RESOLVED

that the decisions of the Cabinet on the Car Parking Action Plan be referred back to Cabinet for further consideration in the light of the following recommendations by the Panel:-

- (a) the introduction in the forthcoming car parking order of a proposal to permit free parking for vehicles with CO₂ emissions of 120g/km or less (equivalent to Bands A and B to the current vehicles excise duty rates) in all Council car parks (a “green badge” scheme), the parking to be limited to the normal maximum stay in the respective car parks;
- (b) the wider issues of encouraging the use of low emission vehicles be dealt with in the forthcoming Environment Strategy and in the next review of the car parking action plan;
- (c) removal of the current inconsistency in the Car Parking Strategy vis-à-vis Council policy in terms of the ring fencing of surplus income from car parking charges for integrated, sustainable and accessible transport;
- (d) implementation of the car parking action plan proposals as amended in (a) above during the forthcoming summer;
- (e) the commencement of a review of the car parking action plan with effect from January 2009 to enable the impact of the forthcoming changes to be assessed for six months after their implementation; and
- (f) the acceptance of an invitation by the Leader of the Council for a representative of the Panel to consider with the appropriate Executive Councillor and relevant Officers the initial scoping of the review of the car parking action plan referred to in (e) above.

Chairman