

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE SUPPORT) held in Council Chamber, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 11 March 2008.

- PRESENT: Councillor J A Gray – Chairman.
- Councillors M G Baker, K M Baker, P L E Bucknell, P J Downes, P M D Godfrey, D Harty, Ms S Kemp, L W McGuire, M F Newman, T D Sanderson, L M Simpson, R G Tuplin and R J West.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J T Bell, P H Dakers, J W Davies and A N Gilbert.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors P L E Bucknell, T D Sanderson and L M Simpson.

86. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Panel held on 12th and 20th February 2008 were approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

87. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors P J Downes, D Harty and L McGuire declared personal interests in Minute Nos. 90, 94, 95, and 96 as Members of Cambridgeshire County Council.

88. 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 Regional Spatial Strategy Gypsy and Traveller Policy report should be considered at a future meeting of the Panel to discuss concerns regarding site specific action and the allocation of pitches.

The Panel were informed of a meeting of the Corporate and Strategic Framework Panel on 1st April 2008 to discuss the emerging Environment Strategy and to which all Members of the Service Delivery and Service Support Panels would be invited.

89. CALL CENTRE QUARTERLY REPORT: OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2007

(Councillor L M Simpson, Executive Councillor for Headquarters and

Information Technology, was in attendance for this item).

Consideration was given to a report and statistics presented by the Head of Information Management and Call Centre Manager (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book), outlining performance by the Call Centre during the period October to December 2007.

Further to Minute No. 07/47, the Call Centre Manager was pleased to report the recent achievement by the Call Centre team in gaining a Charter Mark in recognition of continuous improvement, value for money and investment in people. The Panel was informed of the measures undertaken to achieve the award, including training, recruitment, feedback and development and was pleased to note that motivation levels had reached 94% in the previous quarter.

Members discussed the previous high volume of calls received by the Centre in September 2007 as a result of changes in refuse collection days and the Oxmoor fly-tipping campaign. They were also reminded that, at their November 2007 meeting, the Panel had requested that appropriate measures be introduced to ensure that customer-facing services were provided with sufficient notice to enable them to plan accordingly for any resource implications. On reviewing the implementation of this mechanism, the Call Centre Manager reported that the introduction of weekly bulletins had improved communication throughout the Council and in some instances Call Centre staff had received additional training in preparation for customer queries.

The Panel expressed their congratulations to the Call Centre team for their continued efforts and achievement of the Charter Mark award.

90. MONITORING SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS

(Councillor T D Sanderson was 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.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor T D Sanderson expressed his concern regarding the current monitoring of Section 106 Agreements and his view that further clarification and action was required in the expenditure of Section 106 money received to prevent increasing delays in the delivery of services. The Chairman informed the Panel that the matter was currently being investigated by a number of Divisions throughout the Council in an effort to improve the present arrangements.

In the ensuing debate, the Panel questioned the involvement of parish and town councils in the distribution and procedural process regarding Section 106 Agreements and Members were acquainted with the policies and technicalities in the negotiation and expenditure of the sums involved. In discussing the question of funding for transportation, the Panel was informed that a meeting had been arranged between a County Council representative and the District Council's Director of Environmental and Community Services to explore the current situation with regard to Section 106 expenditure.

The Panel welcomed the improving communication between officers and agreed to await the outcome of the meeting.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

91. GROWING SUCCESS : PERFORMANCE MONITORING

(Councillor L M Simpson, Executive Councillor for Headquarters and Information Technology was 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 considered the performance of the authority against the priority objectives identified in "Growing Success", the corporate plan adopted by the Council in April 2007.

In response to a question regarding the Call Centre's under-achievement in the percentage of calls answered within 20 seconds, Councillor Simpson informed the Panel that this was due to the extension of the welcome message to include an automated bus pass option, thereby increasing the length of the message to exceed 20 seconds. The measure had been formally suspended in October 2007 and Councillor Simpson advised that customer satisfaction levels had not been affected adversely.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

92. SHARED SERVICES

(Councillor T V Rogers, Executive Councillor for Finance, was in attendance for this item).

Consideration was given to a report by the Director of Commerce and Technology (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) updating the Panel on current progress regarding shared services initiatives, with the assistance of a grant of £50,000 from the Regional Centre of Excellence towards the project work involved.

Having been informed of meetings held with East Cambridgeshire, South Cambridgeshire and Fenland District Councils and Peterborough City Council regarding the establishment of a shared services organisation, the Executive Councillor reported that progress had been made on the sharing of finance and payroll services. In discussing the financial implications of introducing the initiative, Members' attention was drawn to the potential savings to be made as a result of sharing software and the increased resilience of systems and staffing resources.

RESOLVED

that the content of the report be noted.

93. BUILDINGS OF SPECIAL ARCHITECTURAL OR HISTORIC INTEREST

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

By way of a report by the Development Plans and Implementation Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Panel was acquainted with the consultation and notification procedures for the listing and de-listing of historic buildings.

The Heritage and Conservation Team Leader reported that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) was currently reviewing the procedure for the listing and de-listing of buildings of special architectural or historic interest and English Heritage had become responsible for the administration of the listing system. The Panel was informed of the White Paper, "Heritage Protection for the 21st Century" which was expected to result in legislation in 2010 to introduce clearer documentation for the listing and de-listing of buildings making the protection system simpler, more transparent, and easier to use.

In discussing the implications locally for the de-listing of buildings, Members' attention was drawn to the Pike and Eel Public House at Needingworth where the special interest of the building had been significantly eroded by numerous extensions and alterations which had meant that it no longer met the criteria for inclusion on the list. In the ensuing discussion, the Heritage and Conservation Team Leader acquainted Members with the specialised process and knowledge required for the de-listing and listing of buildings and explained that although an increased involvement of parish and town councils would be welcomed, it was unlikely that they would have the specialist capabilities to become more actively involved. In response to a question by Councillor P M D Godfrey in relation to the previous consultation processes involved in the de-listing of the Pike and Eel, the Head of Planning Services undertook to supply him with detailed information on the reasons behind the decision in response to his concerns.

The Chairman thanked the Executive Councillor and Officers for their work in producing a comprehensive report.

94. CAR PARKING STRATEGY - CALL IN

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

Further to Minute No. 07/85, the Panel received a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the outcome of the Panel's call in of decisions by the Cabinet on the Car Parking Strategy Action Plan which had been considered at a meeting held on 21st February 2008.

Members were reminded that they had previously raised no objection on the proposed car parking action plan formulated by the Car

Parking Working Party at their meeting held on 15th January 2008 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 and had invited Councillors I C Bates and P L E Bucknell to attend as Leader of the Council and appropriate Executive Councillor respectively a meeting of the Panel held on 20th February 2008. As a result, the Panel had made a number of further recommendations to Cabinet in relation to incentives for low emission vehicles, the ring-fencing of surplus income, and the commencement of a review of the car parking action plan with effect from January 2009.

The Executive Councillor explained that, with the aid of further research regarding incentives for drivers with vehicles of CO₂ emissions of 120g/km or less, the Cabinet had resolved to introduce a reduction of 50% in the cost of a car parking season ticket and resident permit. Taking into account inflation, the Executive Councillor informed the Panel that a revised Option 1 charging structure was to be submitted to the meeting of the Cabinet on 13th March 2008 upon which the views of the Panel were invited. Following questions by Members in relation to whether the focus of car parking charges reflected environmental issues or revenue generation, the Head of Planning Services explained that it was important to find a balance between economic and environmental factors. In the ensuing debate, the Head of Planning Services informed the Panel that detailed analysis of Council expenditure on car parking was likely to demonstrate that the Council did not generate any surplus income from charges and that expenditure on highways and transportation generally by the Council exceeded income from this source.

In discussing the revised Option 1 charging structure, Members noted that the proposals put forward for parking for 2 and 3 hours in inner, mid and Waitrose car parks would both provide for a £1 charge and felt that there should be a differential in charge for parking for those lengths of time. In addition, the Panel did not consider that the charge for parking on street for one hour should be increased to 60p and should be limited to 50p as originally proposed in Option 1.

In relation to the issue of ring fencing surplus income generated from car parking charges, the Panel reiterated that the Cabinet's view was at variance with the policy approved as part of the existing Car Parking Strategy and suggested again that this anomaly be rectified to remove any confusion.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be informed that the Panel would welcome a rescission of the Cabinet's decision to introduce Option 2 parking charges and welcome a return to Option 1 as originally agreed, subject to the comments referred to above on the revision now proposed to that charging structure.

95. 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. 07/78, the Panel was reminded that they had previously approved the recommendations of the Cycling Working Group's report at their meeting held on 12th February 2008 for submission to Cabinet.

Having discussed the Working Group's report, the Executive Councillor acquainted the Panel with the decisions of the Cabinet to request a further report addressing the wider issues of Section 106 funding and partnership working and to invite the County Council to enter into discussions regarding their offer to update the Huntingdonshire Cycling Strategy as detailed in paragraph 7.1 of the appended report. In responding to Members' questions regarding clarity over the wider issues of Section 106 funding highlighted by the Cabinet, Councillor Bucknell explained that discussion had focused on wider issues such as the need for workplace storage and shower facilities and increased safety measures. In response, Members drew attention to the original recommendations as set out in the appended report and pointed out that the Cabinet's request would be dealt with in recommendation (a) and that the focus at present should be to increase the number of cycling routes to link market towns and other areas in the District.

In noting that officers would be compiling a report in relation to Section 106 funding and partnership working, the Panel agreed to delay any response or further action until this had been circulated and discussed.

96. TRAVEL PLAN WORKING GROUP

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

Following an introduction by the Chairman, the Panel were reminded that they had approved the recommendations of the Travel Plan Working Group's report at the meeting held on 12th February 2008 for submission to Cabinet.

In Cabinet's consideration of the Group's report, Councillor Bucknell explained that questions had been raised regarding the change in mileage allowances for Members as opposed to employees and that it had been felt that further work was required into alternative methods of transport to discourage the use of private cars by employees in travelling to and from work. Having approved the Working Group's report, the Cabinet had requested that the recommendations be investigated in the context of the emerging Environment Strategy, car parking action plan and the Council's existing travel plan.

Further to Minute No. 07/79, Councillor P J Downes reiterated his concern that the minimum payable under any mileage allowance should not exceed the level set by H. M. Revenues and Customs for taxation purposes. In the ensuing debate, Members of the Panel were of the opinion that in order to put forward any innovative

approach, sufficient differential was required to encourage the purchase of low emission vehicles.

The Panel acknowledged that in order to take forward the recommendations in respect of Members Allowances it would be necessary for them to be considered by the Corporate Governance Panel in advance of their submission to Council. The Panel also agreed to draw the attention of the Head of Environmental Management to the Working Group's recommendations for his information. It was therefore,

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Corporate Governance Panel be requested to consider the content of recommendations (a) to (d) of the Working Group's report and, subject to the subsequent approval by the Independent Remuneration Panel, the recommendations be submitted to the Council for consideration be convened; and
- (b) that the Head of Environmental Management be invited to consider the implications of recommendations (e) to (h) of the Working Group's report in conjunction with the preparation of the Environment Strategy.

97. TOWN CENTRE INITIATIVES WORKING GROUP

Further to Minute No. 06/78 and with the assistance of a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), Councillors K M Baker, A N Gilbert and R J West acquainted the Panel with the outcome of the deliberations of the Town Centre Initiatives Working Group which had been established to investigate the purpose, cost and achievements of the town centre initiatives across the District. In doing so, the Panel was informed that uncertainty over funding was an issue for the individual Partnerships and detracted from their ability to achieve their aims and objectives.

Members were informed that, at present, the Partnerships each received an annual grant of £19,200 from the District Council in addition to direct officer support at Head of Service level, the servicing of meetings by the Democratic Services Section, and a donation of £600 towards printing costs. As this funding was largely used by each Partnership to cover the Town Centre Manager's post, the Panel was informed that other source of funding had to be pursued in order to support other operational and project costs.

The Panel expressed their appreciation to the Working Group, relevant Officers and the Sustainable Economic Development Section for their efforts in producing the report and it was;

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 District Council enter into an agreement with individual Partnerships for a period of five years to pay a grant annually updated for inflation, based on an existing level of support and with a suitable break clause to enable the agreement to be terminated in appropriate circumstances; and
- (b) that the District Council continue to provide officer support as outlined in this report to the Partnerships.

98. 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.

The Panel considered the template and terms of reference for the new Heavy Goods Vehicle and Section 106 Working Groups and requested a meeting with the Leader of the Council at an early stage of the latter study to seek strategic guidance to ensure that the work of the Group did not duplicate similar investigations by the Executive.

In discussing the studies identified for future Working Group's, the Chairman requested that Members provide feedback for the April 2008 meeting regarding the priority in which the studies should take.

99. 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.

100. SCRUTINY

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

Chairman