

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (CORPORATE AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK) held in the Council Chamber, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 1 April 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors K M Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, Mrs K E Cooper, P J Downes, J E Garner, D A Giles, P M D Godfrey, D Harty, Mrs P A Jordan, Ms S Kemp, P G Mitchell, M F Newman, J M Sadler, P K Ursell, J S Watt and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J D Ablewhite, K J Churchill, P H Dakers, J W Davies and A N Gilbert

(Owing to their membership on the Council's Environment Strategy Working Group Councillors M G Baker, J A Gray and R G Tuplin were unable to participate in the debate on the Environment Strategy).

25. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Panel held on 29th January and 6th February 2008 were approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

26. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

27. ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY

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

With the aid of a presentation and report by Mr P José, Head of Environmental Management, (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Panel was acquainted with the background to the production of the Environment Strategy for Huntingdonshire and the work that had been undertaken to produce the draft strategy. Members were advised that the Environment Strategy had been developed over a 12 month period and would be used to address the three environmental challenges of tackling climate change; using resources efficiently and protecting and improving the environment.

Mr P José directed Member's attention to the consultation process used and advised them that the strategy, through the development and implementation of a five-year action plan, would provide a platform for the District Council to pursue environmental objectives, enable it to influence others and lever in funding from outside organisations. It also would help the Council to become an exemplar for sustainable development and living.

Members discussed plans formally to launch the Strategy during Environment Week, between 2nd and 8th June 2008, and the need to produce materials in a variety of formats in order to make the Strategy accessible to a wide audience.

Members made reference to the value of environmental projects in terms of the carbon emitted and saved and their overall environmental impact compared with their cost. In response, Mr José assured the Panel that the intention was to promote cost-effective measures in the community and that the Strategy would attract funding from other sources ensuring value for money. Members suggested that the Council should endeavour to measure the carbon value of the project.

In discussing the educational aspects of the Strategy, Members stressed the importance of the advice provided by the Council to residents on home improvements. Having also referred to the need for suitably trained engineers to provide the home improvement measures, the Panel was informed of an accreditation scheme for installers operated by the Energy Saving Trust.

A comment was made that instead of "encouraging" certain actions, the actions referred to should be compulsory. The Director of Environmental and Community Services advised that the Council did not have the legal powers to make many of the items mandatory and that change was required at national level before this could be done.

Further comment was made on the need to protect agricultural land, to take measures to promote biodiversity in the District and to recognise the importance of road transportation to the economy. There was a need to balance these competing priorities and it was suggested that technology might provide alternatives to the use of fossil fuels.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended:

- a) subject to the comments outlined above, endorse the proposed Environment Strategy for submission to the Council for approval and adoption;
- b) to authorise the Director of Environmental and Community Services, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Environment and Transport, to agree minor textual changes and the final document format, and

- c) to approve the content and costs of the year on Project Plan.

Chairman