

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, Mrs M Banerjee, E R Butler, Mrs K E Cooper, J A Dew, J E Garner, P Godley, Mrs P A Jordan, P G Mitchell, M F Shellens, Ms M J Thomas and J S Watt.

APOLOGY: An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor P K Ursell.

8. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 14th May 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

9. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

10. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000: FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered the current Forward Plan of key decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which had been prepared by the Leader of the Council for the period 1st June to 30th September 2008. In noting the addition of an item on Community Engagement, the Panel were advised by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services that the Cabinet had requested a report on a number of issues surrounding community engagement, one of which was the Panel's proposals for State of the District Engagement Events.

Members were also apprised of the background to items entitled Insurance Test Case – Zurich Municipal/MMI, Response to Consultation on Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Grant Aid to Voluntary and Community Organisations.

11. CAMBRIDGE SUB-REGION STRATEGIC HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT

(Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds, Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health, was in attendance for this Item).

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Housing Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel were acquainted with details of the Cambridge Sub-Region Strategic

Housing Market Assessment and its implications for the District.

By way of background, the Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health reported that the document set out the evidence of need and demand for market and affordable housing based on seven local authority areas within the region. In noting that the document would replace the need for local Housing Needs Assessments, the Panel were advised that it would be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

The Panel discussed housing register trends, migration in to and out of the District and the availability of affordable housing in light of current economic trends throughout the country. Members were informed that to date there had not been an increase in homelessness and that the government was discussing with the Housing Corporation the possible relaxation of restrictions, which might enable registered social landlords to utilise unoccupied private sector housing. The Panel were advised that the specification for these buildings was not the same as that required for social housing.

RESOLVED

that the content of the report be noted.

12. CORPORATE EQUALITY POLICY - ACTION PLAN PROGRESS

(Councillor A Hansard, Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy, was in attendance for this Item).

With the aid of a report by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel were acquainted with progress made to date in respect of the Council's Corporate Equality Policy Action Plan.

In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy reported on the achievements under the Plan that had been made by the Council over the previous year, which included the attainment of Level 2 of the Equality Standard. The Council would now work towards achieving Level 3 of the Standard.

The Panel were informed that a random sample survey carried out by an independent market research company had revealed that 84% of local people believed that the Council offered services that met their needs. Following a question by a Member, the Head of Policy and Strategic Services reported that for 2008/09 the target for this indicator was 85%.

A question was raised concerning the availability of bilingual staff and literature on Council services in other languages. In response, the Panel were advised that the Council maintained a directory of employees fluent in other languages and that an interpretation service, both face to face and via the telephone, was available if required. In terms of literature, Members noted that documents were made available in the four main languages spoken in the District. Whereupon, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to:

- (a) note the progress made with the Corporate Equality Policy Action Plan;
- (b) endorse the new Corporate Equality Action Plan;
- (c) note the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment conducted during 2007/08; and
- (d) endorse the revised Equality Impact Assessment timetable set out in Appendix 4 to the report now submitted.

13. GROWING SUCCESS: PERFORMANCE MONITORING

(Councillor A Hansard, Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy, was in attendance for this Item).

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing details of the Council's performance against its priority objectives.

The Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy reported that the annual review of Growing Success would be completed over the ensuing months and that the views of the Corporate Plan Working Group would be taken into account in the process.

Having drawn the Panel's attention to two areas identified within the report where the Council had not achieved its targets, the Head of Policy and Strategic Services reported that with regard to the key measure concerning attendance at school, outreach and holiday activity programmes, the quarterly targets that had been set did not reflect seasonal variations. Additionally, Members noted that the programmes offered by the five Leisure Centres across the District had not yet been incorporated within the measure. However, it was reported that these factors would be incorporated into the key measure in the future.

In terms of the key measure relating to the delivery of a proportion of affordable housing (commitments) on qualifying sites, Members noted that the actual performance had been affected by the fact that limited affordable housing had been allocated in the particular area that had been constructed during that period.

Having expressed their satisfaction with the levels of performance achieved in the year to date, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the report be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet.

14. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY) - STUDIES

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the Panel's programme of studies and providing an opportunity for Members to plan their work programme for the forthcoming year.

In noting the potential internal and external study areas, the Panel were reminded that a study template had been adopted following an internal audit of the Overview and Scrutiny function in the previous year. Furthermore, Members noted that both Scrutiny Panels had a budget of approximately £6,000 with which to pursue their study aims.

Having reviewed their existing programme of studies and the membership of Working Groups, Members were of the view that as the study on Grant Aid was nearing completion, it would not be necessary to appoint any Members on to the Working Group. However, owing to their interests in the study, Councillors M F Shellens and J S Watt were appointed to the Adoption of Roads and Sewers Working Group.

In acknowledging that the study on Disability Access would be concluded shortly, the Panel discussed potential future study areas, including the Community Safety Partnership, the Great Fen Project and the impact of the new A14 in terms of air quality and noise pollution. In noting that a meeting on the Great Fen Project would be held shortly, Councillor P G Mitchell undertook to report back thereon at the July Panel meeting with a view to deciding whether a study should be undertaken.

RESOLVED

- (a) that progress in relation to ongoing studies be noted;
- (b) that Councillors M F Shellens and J S Watt be appointed to the Adoption of Roads and Sewers Working Group; and
- (c) that a scoping report on Community Safety Partnerships be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel.

15. SCRUTINY

The 84th edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

Chairman