

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, 3rd June 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, P J Downes, J E Garner, D Harty, P G Mitchell, M F Newman, M F Shellens and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J A Gray and P K Ursell.

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 1st April 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

3. BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM PLAN (MTP) PROCESS 2009 - 2014

(Councillor T V Rogers, Executive Councillor for Finance and Environment, was in attendance for this Item).

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the approach, process and timing for the review and approval of the financial strategy, the 2009/10 budget and the 2010/14 Medium Term Plan (MTP).

By way of introduction, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Environment referred to the Council's financial performance in previous years, likely future inflation trends and Executive Councillors' role in compiling the budget in the current year. The Panel then were informed of the order of required additional income or reduced spending in 2009/10 and in subsequent years, in order to balance the budget. The Executive Councillor for Finance and Environment emphasised the need for ongoing efficiency savings to be identified throughout the Council and made assurances that Executive Councillors would consider all future MTP bids critically in light of the Council's current financial position.

The Director of Commerce and Technology drew Members' attention to future years' forecast variations from the current year's budget and the reasons therefore. He also outlined the projected income, planned

use of resources and additional savings that would be required in the period to 2012/13. A number of anticipated financial receipts were expected over the course of the year, which had been included in next year's budget. The Panel were advised that these funds meant that the Council would not have to change its service plans.

In response to a question by the Chairman on the financial implications of the Council's Environment Strategy, the Head of Financial Services reported on the provision for it that had been included within the MTP for the current year and in the following two years.

Following a question by a Member concerning the impact of increased fuel costs on the Council, the Panel were advised that efforts were being made across the Council to enhance energy use efficiency. Changes in the cost of fuel would be factored into inflation calculations in September for use in future forecasting.

The Chairman encouraged Members to forward to Officers suggestions for spending adjustments before September 2008. Having been informed of the process for the review of the financial strategy, the Panel expressed support for the proposed budget and MTP. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to:

- (a) approve the timetable and stages for considering amendments to service plans, the financial strategy, budget and MTP; and
- (b) confirm the importance of identifying efficiency savings across the Council.

4. HUNTINGDONSHIRE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY & LOCAL ECONOMY STRATEGY

(Councillor A Hansard, Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy, 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 acquainted with the background to the production of the Huntingdonshire Sustainable Community Strategy and the work that had been undertaken to refine the outcomes and objectives contained within the document and to develop delivery plans for each of the strategic themes.

By way of introduction, the Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy reported that the Action Plans had yet to be finalised and that comments by Members on them were invited. He also reported that the Strategy had links to regional initiatives. Additionally, the Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy informed Members that following their request at a previous meeting to review the Action Plan associated with the Local Economy Strategy for Huntingdonshire, new statutory powers had become available with

which to pursue this work and that the Plan would be used to attract funding and to influence regional activities.

The Head of Policy and Strategic Services reported that completed Action Plans would be presented to the Panel in September and that any comments on their content should be submitted before that date. Furthermore, it was reported that the Local Strategic Partnership structure was currently under review and that Members would be informed of the resulting changes at a seminar in July 2008.

With regard to the strategic theme for Growth and Infrastructure and in response to a comment by a Member on the need to improve the provision of school and health facilities, the Panel were advised that it was intended to produce an Investment Strategy for Huntingdonshire, which would be used to address such areas for development. Members noted that the Strategy would be based on evidence and would include likely costs for proposed schemes. Having reviewed the content of the Action Plan for this particular theme, Members commented on the need to include surface drainage water under Item 6 of the Plan. In response to a question by the Chairman, the Panel were advised that communities not experiencing growth would be addressed through parish plans.

In terms of the Action Plan for the Environment strategic theme, the Panel were advised that the Plan was the same as the Council's Environment Strategy.

In respect of the Children and Young People's strategic theme, comment was made on the fact that contact with some statutory organisations, such as Connexions, was not compulsory for young people. Following questions, the Panel were advised that the Inclusive, Safe and Cohesive Communities strategic theme included reference to community transport and that the Council had appointed Councillor Hansard as its Champion for Children and Young People. Members were encouraged to note the range of work already undertaken by the Council to incorporate children and young people's views into its policies and services. Questions were raised regarding the cost of schemes in the Plan. In response, the Head of Policy and Strategic Services reported that, in the short term, funding for certain projects would be available from external sources and through the Council's Medium Term Plan. In the longer term, consideration would be given to this matter following the adoption of the Strategy.

Further comment was made under the Action Plan for the Inclusive, Safe and Cohesive Communities strategic theme on the need for the provision of advocacy services for migrant workers to be included within the Plan. In response, the Panel were advised of the likely financial implications for the Council. Members were also reminded of a previous Scrutiny Panel recommendation regarding a bid for funding which was being pursued via the Regional College.

The Panel were advised that the Action Plan for the Economic Prosperity strategic theme aimed to add value to a range of work currently undertaken in the District and to promote joint initiatives which would lead to sustainable growth in the local economy. Additionally, the Panel noted that work with partners to deliver sub-regional and regional initiatives would directly relate to the priorities

contained in the Local Economy Strategy. Members requested that pump priming for community sites be included in the Plan. They also discussed the agricultural industry in the District. As it represented only a small proportion of economic activity and of employment locally it had not been included as one of the sectors that the Plan intended to promote. It would, however, be promoted through the local procurement network. Members were reminded that there would be a further opportunity to examine the Action Plans at the seminar in July and also that comments could be submitted directly to Officers.

Chairman