

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE SUPPORT) held in the Council Chamber, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 14 October 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor J A Gray – Chairman.

Councillors M G Baker, K M Baker, J T Bell, P H Dakers, 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.

36. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 9th September 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

37. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

38. 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 requested that the report by the Planning Policy Manager regarding the Highways Agency pre-consultation on side road orders for the A14 improvements be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel.

39. PETITION

An on-line petition signed by 10 people was presented drawing attention to the problems experienced by local residents with regard to commuter parking in the Longsands area of St. Neots.

At the invitation of the Chairman St. Neots Town Councillor Mrs Ottolangui spoke to the petition, explaining that commuters were parking in residential areas near the railway station in St Neots from 6.30am on weekdays and that residents were asking for restrictions to be imposed on on-street parking in the area for one hour during the day which would effectively prevent all day stays.

Although the problem had been ongoing for a number of years, Members expressed doubts as to whether the introduction of restrictions near the station would simply displace commuter parking to other areas. It was reported that First Capital Connect was

planning to improve parking facilities at the station but the Panel was advised that residents suspected that while this might create additional capacity, commuters would continue to park in residential areas to avoid the charges.

Members were informed that a further petition containing 173 signatures recently had been presented to the Huntingdonshire Traffic Management Area Joint Committee and that a feasibility study would be undertaken by the County Council when funding became available from its minor traffic management budget. As there was no indication when the latter might be progressed, the Panel discussed how best action might be expedited to assist local residents. Under the circumstances, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Chairman be requested to write to the Chairman of the Huntingdonshire Traffic Management Area Joint Committee, inquiring how the matter might be progressed at an early opportunity; and
- (b) that a representative from First Capital Connect be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss the expansion plans for car parking at Huntingdon and St. Neots railway stations.

40. IMPROVING LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY CONSULTATION: CHANGES TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY POWERS

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel considered a suggested response on behalf of the Council to a consultation paper issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). Members were informed that the paper formed part of a series of consultation documents which had been produced to implement the proposals in the recent White Paper "Communities in Control". The comments made of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) which had also considered the paper were circulated for information at the meeting.

In considering the responses suggested to a series of questions posed by CLG, Members discussed in particular the proposals to create a dedicated scrutiny resource at county and unitary authority level, to require the Chairman of the Council and officers to attend public hearings to explain their actions and to introduce "virtual" meetings with remote voting by Members. The Panel noted that a number of the proposals in the paper had already been introduced by the Council and also that others would be addressed in the current review being undertaken by the working party under the Chairmanship of the Special Advisor to the Cabinet.

RESOLVED

that the suggested answers to the consultation paper set out in the annex to the report now submitted be endorsed for submission to CLG emphasising that the way in which the issues raised were implemented should be left to local

discretion rather than the prescriptive approach adopted in the paper.

41. LOCAL PROCUREMENT REVIEW

Further to Minute No. 07/60, the Panel received a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) summarising the discussions which had taken place at a recent meeting held between Panel representatives and the local business community to monitor performance against the actions contained in the Panel's review of local procurement. As chairman of the latter meeting, Councillor M G Baker expressed his satisfaction that a positive and constructive discussion had taken place. Updates had been given on developments within the economic development service, ongoing work to standardise the terms and conditions of procurement with other district councils and the implications of the Council's emerging Environment Strategy. Members were also informed that the electronic alert to external businesses for additions to the Council's Contracts Register was now working.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that a further meeting be held with business representatives on 12th March 2009.

42. 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. In doing so, Councillors D Harty and Ms S L Kemp reported on the investigations being undertaken by the working groups reviewing the Section 106 process and the social consequences of alcohol abuse respectively. With regard to latter investigation, it was suggested that the working group explore the Council's position with regard to the adoption and implementation of the countywide alcohol harm reduction strategy.

In discussing potential future studies, a suggestion was made concerning the possibility of reviewing the Council's investment strategy and the Head of Administration undertook to circulate information in advance of the next meeting to determine whether this would be appropriate study area.

43. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (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 discussed previously.

44. SCRUTINY

The Panel considered and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest, summarising the Council's decisions since the previous meeting.

Chairman