

**UPDATE ON PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE AND METHOD OF
OPERATION – COUNTRYSIDE GROUP
(Report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At their meeting on 10th October 2008, the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group considered a report which described the current position in relation to the terms of reference and method of operation for the Group. The report had been written in response to uncertainty expressed by Members as to the remit and status of the Group, since an earlier Cabinet decision to reconstitute the body from the Countryside Joint Group to the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group in May 2008.
- 1.2 As this issue has caused considerable debate over a number of meetings, the Group agreed to meet informally with the Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services to seek to prepare a report to the Cabinet. This meeting took place on 5th November 2008 and District Councillors M G Baker (Chairman of the Joint Group), Mrs M Banerjee and C R Hyams and County Councillor Mrs E Kadic were present.

2. VIEWS OF THE GROUP

- 2.1 At the informal meeting, Members were reminded of the constitutional position and the provision, within the membership of the Hinchingsbrooke Group, of representation by a local County Councillor. With these issues in mind and having again discussed their role and function at great length and the programme of activity which had been proposed, the meeting was of the view that Members should be able to continue to monitor the performance of other Countryside Services as well as that of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park. Therefore it was concluded that the former Countryside Group should be reinstated in addition to the existing Hinchingsbrooke Group, with a remit to monitor the performance of the other Countryside Services across the District.

3. THE PROPOSAL

- 3.1 Bearing in mind the concept of the original Countryside Joint Group and having regard now to its method of operation, the meeting proposed that the new Group should meet on the rising of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group in March and October each year and should comprise the same membership as the Hinchingsbrooke Group with the exception of a County Council representative (currently – Cllrs M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, C R Hyams and Ms M J Thomas).
- 3.2 The formal meetings would continue in a way similar to that of the former Countryside Joint Group, with biannual reports to be submitted to Members by the Countryside Services and Service Development Managers of the District Council. Meetings would take place immediately after the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group on Fridays in March and October each year and would be administered by the Democratic Services team. Reports to meetings would provide an overview of countryside, parks and open space matters allowing Members to monitor performance across the Council's countryside portfolio. These meetings would continue to take place in meeting rooms at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park.
- 3.3 Informal meetings of the Countryside Group would be held twice a year in January and June. These would be delivered in the form of site visits across the District. The District Council's Countryside Services and Service Development Managers will be required to provide an itinerary for each visit. Arrangements for these events will be made centrally by the Democratic Services Team. It is proposed that visits would be offered in the first instance to Group Members, and thereafter to new and local Members for induction and training purposes. The first of these took place successfully on Tuesday 20th January 2009 and included visits to Barford Road Pocket Park (Eynesbury), St Neots Riverside and Little Paxton Nature Reserve.

4. CABINET MEETING – 29TH JANUARY 2009

- 4.1 A report encompassing these proposals was considered by the Cabinet at their meeting on 29th January, 2009. The Cabinet decided that the proposed new method of working be deferred pending consideration of the outcome of an ongoing review of management arrangements for Leisure Centre Management Committees.
- 4.2 The Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services may wish to provide further comment at the meeting.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group is asked to note the latest development.

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