

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) held in the Corporate Training Suite, Eastfield House, 6 Latham Road, Huntingdon, PE29 6YE on Thursday, 16 July 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor J Ablewhite – Chairman.

Councillors J T Bell, L M McGuire, M F Shellens, G S E Thorpe, Councillor Mrs M J Thomas and R G Tuplin

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs J A Dew and A N Gilbert

14. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 11th June 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors L M McGuire and G S E Thorpe declared a personal interest in Minute No.16 as Members of Cambridgeshire County Council and St Neots Town Council respectively. Councillor L M McGuire also declared a personal interest in Minute No.17 as a Member of Cambridgeshire County Council.

16. 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 2009.

In response to questions by the Panel over the timing and viability of proposed new industrial units in Caxton Road St Ives, the Estates and Property Manager confirmed that the new units were forecast to generate net income for the Council over the life of the project and that the growth of small and medium sized businesses was in line with the objectives of the Huntingdonshire Sustainable Community Strategy. Copies of the business plan would be circulated to all members of the Panel but the report to Cabinet would only be included on the agenda for the Panel's September meeting if requested.

Concern was raised by a number of Members that the sale of the former fire station and waste recycling site in Huntingdon Street, St Neots had appeared on the Forward Plan for the first time in the current month prior to submission of a report to Cabinet for the meeting on 23rd July 2009. As a result the Panel had not had the opportunity to request sight of the report before its consideration by

Cabinet. The Estates and Property Manager stressed that a final decision on disposal would not be made by Cabinet at its forthcoming meeting but was intended merely to request authorisation to prepare a new development brief and commence the marketing of the site, the Panel nevertheless asked that the Leader be reminded that items should appear on the Forward Plan in the month in which they are to be considered only in cases of emergency and that the Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy be invited to the September meeting to address the Panel on the report.

17. LAND ADJACENT TO THE GRAND CINEMA RAMSEY

Following a request at its previous meeting, the Panel was updated on the situation regarding the sale of land adjacent to the Grand Cinema, Ramsey. With the aid of a plan (a copy of which is appended to the Minute Book) the Estates and Property Manager explained that the District Council had been approached by Luminus in 2007 with a scheme to redevelop the area. The proposal was for the land, including an area of car parking owned by the District Council in New Road to be redeveloped to comprise a library, flats and new public conveniences. Negotiations were also taking place to seek to include the relocation of the District Council's Community Information Centre. A report containing terms for the sale of the Council's land would be submitted to Cabinet when the negotiations had been completed, although some concern was raised by Members over the loss of car parking in the town.

18. TOURISM

Further to Minute No. 09/12, the Head of Democratic and Central Services introduced a report (as appended in the Minute Book) containing a suggested approach by the Panel to a study on tourism. Initial discussions with relevant Officers had suggested that, in the circumstances, there was limited scope for development of tourism initiatives locally. Following consideration by the Panel, it was agreed that as part of their discussion on further studies at the September meeting, Members would consider an investigation into tourism in its wider context, possibly in relation to the vibrancy of the town centres.

19. SCRUTINY OF HUNTINGDONSHIRE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

With the aid of a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was provided with background information on the areas that fell within its responsibility, particularly in relation to the scrutiny of Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership, the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Economic Prosperity and Skills thematic group established under the HSP.

It was reported that a joint event involving representatives of Overview and Scrutiny and the Strategic Partnership would be held to enable both parties to help establish working relationships. The Panel also received details of a County-wide conference which would be held on 7th September 2009 which would focus specifically on the scrutiny of Local Strategic Partnerships.

In reviewing the contents of the Sustainable Community Strategy in

relation to the economic prosperity and skills strategic theme, the Panel asked for the submission of a report for a future meeting on the operation of the CreativeXchange at St Neots.

20. GRANT AID STUDY

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (as appended in the Minute Book) advising of the Cabinet's response to the final report following completion of an extensive study on Grant Aid carried out by the working group of the former Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery). The Panel was pleased to note that the Cabinet had concurred with the view of the working group that the current process was working well though some areas relating to service level agreements and external funding schemes would benefit from further investigation. The Panel expressed its thanks to the working party for its work on the study and agreed that to follow up the Cabinet decisions, an annual report be sought on organisations supported by grant through service level agreements.

21. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) PROGRESS

In considering a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing details of the Panel's current programme of studies, it was agreed that Councillor Shellens should be appointed to the working group that met representatives of the local business community in order to promote local procurement.

22. WORKPLAN STUDIES

In considering a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services on the studies being undertaken by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels, (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Panel noted that the majority of studies that had been transferred to the Panel had reached their conclusion. In discussing possible future studies it was suggested that it might be prudent to request sight of any financial reports prepared on behalf of the District Council Leisure Centres prior to their submission to Cabinet.

The Panel also agreed to request a report on the new HQ and accommodation project to learn from experience once the project had been completed.

23. SCRUTINY

The latest edition of Decision Digest was received and noted.

Chairman