

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) held in the Corporate Training Suite, Eastfield House on Thursday, 10 December 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor J D Ablewhite – Chairman.

Councillors J T Bell, E R Butler, A N Gilbert, L W McGuire, M F Shellens, Ms 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 G S E Thorpe.

53. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 12th November 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

54. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

55. OVERVIEW OF NEW WEBSITE - FEATURES AND BENEFITS

The Panel received a presentation by Mr C Hall, the Council's the Head of Information Management, and Mr J Bedingfield, IT Development Team Leader, on the Council's new website. Members were advised that the change had been prompted by the need to introduce a new technical infrastructure for the website. In the circumstances, the opportunity had been taken to update and improve its appearance and the way it operated. The changes had taken into account survey information, analysis of past use of the Council's website and the views of Executive Members and Heads of Service. It was stressed that the information presented would remain the same.

Members were informed that 63% of the District's residents had access to the internet and that the Council's website currently received in excess of 2000 visitors per day. Users of the website had access to over 2000 on-line documents and could submit electronically to the Council over 80 forms. In addition, it was possible to book services and make payments via the website. The latter resulted in significant cost savings for the Council. Finally, it was reported that an area would be added where the Council could carry out consultations together with a further area in association with Cambridgeshire.net containing information on local events.

Members were advised that specialist advice had been received on the website's design. In response to a request by a Member, Mr Hall undertook to provide the Panel with details of the cost of the advice.

In discussing the enhancements that had been made, Members questioned how accessible the site was. It was explained that it had received an AA rating from the Society of Information Technology Management for the accessibility of its content. However, the view was expressed that efforts should be made to encourage those who currently did not use the website to make use of the facilities that were available.

With reference to financial aspects of the website, it was reported that online transactions were estimated to cost the Council 27p each compared with £4.20 for face-to-face services. The feasibility of raising finances through third party advertising was being investigated and it was suggested by a Member that this might be extended to include details of reliable local tradesmen.

Having noted that a soft launch would take place in January followed by more formal publicity in February, Members were advised that enhancements would continue to be made throughout 2011 with Phase 2 of the upgrade including further new features and the ability to personalise the website. At the conclusion of the discussion the Panel expressed support for the introduction of the new website design.

56. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Panel considered a report by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing details of the Council's performance against its priority objectives in the quarter to 30th September 2009. The Notes of the meeting of the Corporate Plan Working Group held on 19th November 2009 were also received.

With regard to matters raised by the Corporate Plan Working Group, the Panel noted that leisure centre income was 9% below the target and an improvement in Quarter 3 was not expected. Given this situation, the Panel requested that a more detailed report on the leisure centres' finances, including the marginal cost per hour for opening, was submitted to a future meeting. During further discussion on the leisure centres, comment was made on the difficulties being experienced in addressing matters raised by Sawtry School Governors following the loss of the leisure centre management committees. Members were informed that the new leisure forums were advisory committees and that specific issues should be discussed with Leisure Centre Managers and, where appropriate, directed to the Executive Councillor for Leisure.

With regard to the "amber" rating of the objective for the Strategic Partnership Thematic Groups to review their performance and delivery, Members noted that they would have an opportunity to scrutinise the performance of the Thematic Groups later in the year.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the report be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet; and
- (b) that the Cabinet be notified of the Panel's views on the

contents of the report.

57. 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 acquainted with the content of a draft protocol, which had been devised to guide how the Council fulfilled its statutory duty to scrutinise the Strategic Partnership. Members were reminded that the Council had allocated responsibility for scrutinising different aspects of the Strategic Partnership to the full Council and the three Overview and Scrutiny Panels, with the Economic Well-Being Panel having responsibility for scrutinising the Economic Prosperity and Skills Thematic Group.

It was reported that the protocol was intended to provide partners with clarification and assurances about the process that would be adopted. It had been considered and endorsed by the Strategic Partnership's Executive earlier that day and would be submitted to the Strategic Partnership Board in January.

The Panel was advised that an event for Members to discuss the mechanism through which scrutiny of the Strategic Partnership would take place had been arranged for 2nd February 2010 and that the Chairmen of the Thematic Groups were likely to be present. After that the scrutiny process would begin when the Thematic Groups' action plans were submitted to the Scrutiny Panels. Having requested that the scrutiny protocol on inter-authority co-operation was circulated to Members, it was

RESOLVED

that the Huntingdonshire Scrutiny / Strategic Partnership Protocol appended to the report now submitted be endorsed.

58. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELLBEING) PROGRESS REPORT

In considering a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the Panel's current programme of studies, it was noted that a report on the effects of the night-time economy on health services was currently being prepared for submission to the Strategic Partnership's Health and Well Being Thematic Group and that when it became available it would be presented to the Panel. Members also accepted a suggestion that the Council's solicitor should be invited to speak at a future meeting on covert surveillance.

59. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing details of the studies being undertaken by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

60. SCRUTINY

In receiving and noting the latest edition of the Decision Digest, comment was made on the positive report received by the Council under the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

Chairman