

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in the Wren Room, Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, on Tuesday, 9 March 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor P M D Godfrey – Chairman.

Councillors M G Baker, K M Baker,
Mrs M Banerjee, P J Downes, P Godley,
D Harty, A Monk and M F Newman.

Messrs D Hopkins and M Phillips.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor J S Watt.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor D B Dew

94. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 9th February 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

95. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors Mrs M Banerjee declared a personal interest in Minute No. 98 as a member of the Development Management Panel.

96. 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 were advised that it had been decided that the Green ICT Strategy and Action Plan would not be submitted to Cabinet or Scrutiny but would be circulated to Panel Members when completed.

In response to a question, Members were informed that the timescale for the Site Options Gypsy and Travellers Development Plan Document had been re-assessed and this would be available for the Panel to scrutinise once the consultation exercise had been completed.

The Panel requested sight of the report on 'street naming and numbering - charging for some services' which it was hoped would be available for the Panel to scrutinise in April.

97. 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 31st December 2009. Having noted the comments of the Corporate Plan Working Group, the Panel questioned how the number of tonnes of CO² saved through the installation of energy efficiency measures and renewables in domestic properties could be calculated. Members also queried why there was no forecast data included in the schedule and were informed that answers would be reported to a future meeting of the Panel.

Having had their attention drawn to the Council's position in relation to the Making Cambridgeshire Count initiative, the Panel expressed the view that the Council should take a more active part in the programme. In this light, the Panel requested that the Leader of the Council and the Director of Central Services be invited to the next meeting of the Panel to provide an update on the Council's involvement in making Cambridgeshire Count.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended -

- (a) to note the content of the report by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships; and
- (b) to investigate whether there are any opportunities for jointly employing expert staff with a view to achieving savings for the Council.

98. DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROCESS WORKING GROUP

(Councillor D B Dew, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport was in attendance for this Item.)

Further to Minute No. 09/23 and with the assistance of a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillor M G Baker acquainted the Panel with the outcome of the deliberations of the Working Group which had been established to investigate the process for the determination of planning applications and make recommendations where appropriate.

In considering the Members' report, attention was drawn to the key issues that the Group had addressed and its recommendations. The Panel acknowledged that development management was a contentious subject which, by its nature, could generate strong feelings and concerns which could influence the views of users of the service. The Working Group had found overall that the development management process worked well in Huntingdonshire, and they had commended Planning Officers accordingly. Nevertheless, the Working Group felt that the treatment of amendments to applications and communication between case officers and residents could benefit from further improvement. In response, the Head of Planning Services explained the way in which amendments were dealt with and advised that if a case officer viewed an amendment to be of

significance, then a new application would be required.

Having regard to communication with applicants and others, the Working Group had recommended that the Council consider implementing a duty planning officer system which would enable the public and agents an opportunity to access planning advice of a general nature with specific queries being directed to the relevant case officer. However, the Panel felt on balance that there was sufficient opportunity to contact planning officers and others for advice. Members therefore did not support this recommendation.

The Panel was informed that the Head of Planning Services was already investigating the possibility of charging developers for pre-application planning advice.

With regard to the recommendation that the Council reinforce the message, wherever possible that development that took place without permission would be discouraged and for the Council to take a robust approach concerning the retention of development where permission was subsequently refused, it was reported that the Council issued press releases where enforcement action was taken and that work was ongoing with the Council's land charges section whereby inquirers were notified where development had taken place without permission. Having regard to comments made, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Panel's appreciation be expressed to the Members of the Working Group for the extensive nature of their review;
- (b) that subject to the deletion of recommendation (d) relating to a duty planning officer system and suitable amendments to the report to reflect this decision, the Working Group's report and recommendations be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet and the Development Management Panel; and
- (c) that the Cabinet be requested to notify the Panel of the response to the report by June 2010.

99. WORK PLAN STUDIES AND WORKING GROUP TEMPLATES

The Panel considered and noted a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the Panel's programme of studies and informing members of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

Having suggested Planning Enforcement as a possible topic for a future study, the Panel received a report which had been considered recently by the Development Management Panel, summarising the Council's enforcement activity for 2009. As a result, the Panel was satisfied that enforcement activity was being sufficiently monitored by Members and therefore discounted this as a potential study subject.

Members suggested that possible other subjects for investigation were flood protection measures in Huntingdonshire and land use for agricultural purposes in the context of planning policies and its contribution to the local economy. Under the circumstances the Head of Democratic and Central Services was asked to submit proposals for studies on the subjects identified for the next meeting.

Having regard to waste disposal arrangements which had previously been suggested as a subject for investigation, the Panel requested information showing the waste disposal arrangements for the District.

100. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS

The Panel considered and noted a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the Panel's progress on issues that had been discussed previously.

In so doing, Councillor Mrs M Banerjee was appointed as a substitute member to the Joint Accountability Committee.

101. 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