
Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being)

**Report of the meetings held on 2nd March 2010 and
6th April 2010**

Matters for Information

54. RURAL STRATEGY FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE 2010 - 2015

In conjunction with the Cabinet (Item No. 77 of their report refers) the Panel has considered the draft Rural Strategy for Cambridgeshire 2010-2015. In receiving background information on the Strategy, the Panel has noted that the Cambridgeshire Together Board commissioned Cambridgeshire ACRE to prepare the Strategy in order to identify the challenges of living and working in a rural community. The Panel's attention has been drawn to the actions and "Ambitions" identified under the three themes of living in the countryside, economic well-being and land and environment.

The Panel has received details of the consultation undertaken to date with statutory agencies, community organisations, rural businesses and residents. Referring to comments made by District Council Officers to the Strategy, whilst these have been endorsed by the Panel, Members have registered concern at the lack of ownership and prioritisation of the actions and of identification of funding to implement the Strategy.

The Panel has stressed the importance of recognising that rurality is an equalities issue. Members also have commented that the Strategy sometimes lacks evidence of partnership working where it is required and that work carried out under the Strategy should be carefully co-ordinated as it appears there is potential for duplication in service provision. Particular recognition has been given to the fact that Town and Parish Councils will be important in delivering many of the actions.

Having regard to the theme of living in the countryside, specific comment has been made on the need for retirement homes to be provided on "exception sites" in rural areas. This will enable elderly individuals to remain close to their families and communities. However, with regard to the actions identified within the "Widening transport options" priority, the Panel is of the view that this matter requires action at national level.

Finally, comment has been made on the difficulties faced by residents living in rural areas who do not have their own transport and who are

reliant on other transport providers to attend health service facilities. While there are some local providers, including volunteer car schemes, it is evident that there are gaps in provision and this is something that could be addressed through the Strategy.

**55. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT:
THE CRIMINAL LAW ACT 1977 & THE PROTECTION FROM
HARRASSMENT ACT 1997**

The Panel has endorsed a proposal that the Cabinet should authorise Officers to use powers under the Criminal Law Act 1977 and the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 to deal with allegations of harassment and illegal eviction in the private housing sector.

Each year 8 to 10 reports of potential cases of harassment or illegal eviction are reported but, at present, the Council does not have the necessary powers to undertake investigations and prosecute offenders. The new powers are only now being sought as recent demographic changes in the private sector housing market have led Officers to believe that these powers are necessary and could effectively be utilised to protect potentially vulnerable tenants. They will enable Officers to regain possession of property on tenants' behalf, enabling them to reside there until the correct legal procedures for possession have been followed.

56. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

In conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Environmental Well-Being and for Economic Well-Being, the Panel for Social Well-Being has reviewed the Council's performance against its priority objectives, which are contained in "Growing Success" - the Corporate Plan. An update on developments relating to the Council's involvement in Making Cambridgeshire Count has been received and a suggestion by the Corporate Plan Working Group that the Cabinet should be recommended to investigate whether there were any opportunities for jointly employing expert staff in order to avoid the greater costs of using specialist consultants has been endorsed by the Panel.

57. STUDY – PARKING AT HINCHINGBROOKE HOSPITAL

The Panel has finalised its report into car parking at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital and submitted it to the Hospital for consideration. Subsequently, at the meeting in April, Members have been informed that the Hospital's Senior Executive Group has taken the decision to reduce the minimum length of stay to 2 hours for which a charge of £2 will be made. The charge will rise by £1 for every hour thereafter. Although Members are disappointed that this decision was reached before the Panel's report was received they are of the view that no change would have been made if they had not decided to investigate this matter and that the charge that has been introduced will be of benefit to visitors to the Hospital. At the same time the Panel has been made aware that further reducing the minimum length of stay would have significant financial implications for the Hospital. Visitors

will, however, be further helped by the fact that the Hospital will introduce more spaces for stays up to 30 minutes at no charge. The Panel's other recommendations will be subject to consideration by the Executive Group in the future. The Hospital's Business Facilities Manager will be invited to attend a future Panel meeting to report upon their decisions and progress made.

58. HUNTINGDONSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

The Panel has been reminded that under the Police and Criminal Justice Act 2006, it is required to scrutinise the work of the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership. The Partnership was established in response to a requirement of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and aims to reduce crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour within the District. A number of strategic links have been established by the Partnership, particularly to the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership (HSP), as well as to other District and County-wide groups. The Panel has acknowledged the complexity of the way in which the Partnership is required to operate to meet the challenges faced by the District and has concluded that it is effective in its work.

The Panel has reviewed the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Plan 2010-11 and Members have been advised that a Strategic Assessment is conducted each year to inform the priorities that are included within the Plan. Members have discussed a number of matters including the publication of crime statistics, the contribution made by all Partners to the work of the Partnership, various projects/initiatives undertaken and the role of the two Anti-Social Behaviour Case Workers.

In concluding their discussions, the Panel has expressed their satisfaction that the Partnership has appropriate monitoring and accountability mechanisms in place. Additionally, the Panel has been reminded of the programme of events that has been devised to assist all Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels in complying with the duty to scrutinise the HSP.

59. PROVISION OF PLAY FACILITIES WORKING GROUP

The Provision of Play Facilities Working Group has submitted a report on its findings to the Panel. The Working Group had been tasked with examining the availability of play facilities across the District and the ongoing revenue costs associated with such facilities. As the provision of activities for teenagers was identified in the 2008 Place Survey as the highest priority area in need of improvement in Huntingdonshire, the Working Group decided to focus primarily on the provision of facilities for teenagers.

Investigations have been undertaken into a number of areas associated with operating play facilities, including the maintenance and insurance of facilities, the inspection of facilities for maintenance purposes, Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents inspections and the costs associated with these activities. Having analysed each of these areas, the Working Group has made a number of

recommendations, which are intended to ensure that there is adequate provision for teenagers in Huntingdonshire. Whilst these have been endorsed, the Panel has decided that owing to the current financial pressures on the Council, the feasibility should first be investigated of introducing a maintenance agreement in which responsibility for meeting town facilities' revenue costs is divided between the District Council, Town Councils and users before consideration is given to extending the Council's own commitments in this respect.

The Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services has been involved in the Working Group's deliberations from the outset and Councillors P G Mitchell and R J West will be presenting the report to the Cabinet at its meeting on 22nd April 2010.

60. CAMBRIDGESHIRE HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor R J West has provided Members with an update on matters discussed at recent meetings of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee, which include an overspend in Adult Support Services, the County Council's 2010 Budget Plan and the overall financial position of NHS Cambridgeshire. Other matters that have been discussed include Occupational Therapy waiting times, pressures on Cambridgeshire's acute hospitals as a result of the severe winter weather, service quality and staffing at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital and primary care out of hours services. Councillor West also has drawn attention to issues discussed surrounding mental health and the inequalities in service provision that exist within the District. In pursuit of the latter, Councillor West has been appointed to a Working Group to investigate dementia services. The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 13th May 2010.

Other Matters of Interest

61. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SOCIAL WELL-BEING) - PROGRESS

The Panel has reviewed its work programme at each of its meetings. Members have received an update on the outcome of a recent meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Hospital Stakeholder Panel. The Chairman is a member of a Sub-Group of the Stakeholder Panel that has been appointed to meet with bidders in a private session to discuss their proposals.

The Panel has requested the Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services to attend a future meeting to discuss their previous recommendations regarding town centre cleaning on Sundays. The District's towns have become very busy at weekends and now that a new Operations Manager has been appointed Members are of the view that it might be timely to initiate

consultations with the Town Councils in accordance with the Cabinet's previous decision.

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Panel have agreed to raise the question of whether further work will be undertaken on the findings of the Place Survey at the next meeting of the Corporate Plan Working Group.

62. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel has reviewed its work plan and received details of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

63. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 – FORWARD PLAN

The Panel has been acquainted with details of the current Forward Plan of Key Decisions. Members have requested sight of items entitled Home Improvement Agency Review – Future Delivery Model Consultation and Homelessness Strategy prior to their consideration by the Cabinet.

64. SCRUTINY

The Panel has considered the latest editions of the Decision Digest and discussed matters contained therein.

S J Criswell
Chairman