

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SOCIAL WELL-BEING) held in the Wren Room, Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, PE29 6DB on Tuesday, 6 April 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors Mrs K E Cooper, J E Garner, Mrs P A Jordan, P G Mitchell, J M Sadler and R J West.

R Coxhead and Mrs M Nicholas.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J W Davies and J J Dutton.

108. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 2nd March 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

109. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors P G Mitchell and J M Sadler declared personal interests in Minute No.112 by virtue of their involvement with the Stilton Skate Park and Stukeley Meadows Skate Park respectively.

Councillor J M Sadler also declared a personal interest in Minutes No. 111 by virtue of being a member of the Huntingdonshire Business Against Crime Steering Group.

110. 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) which had been prepared by the Leader of the Council for the period 1st April to 31st July 2010. Members requested sight of the items entitled Home Improvement Agency Review – Future Delivery Model Consultation and Homelessness Strategy prior to their consideration by the Cabinet.

111. HUNTINGDONSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

(Councillor K J Churchill, Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health was in attendance for this item).

With the assistance of the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Plan 2010-11 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel were acquainted with the background to the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership and the scope of its work. Members were reminded of the requirement created by the Police and Criminal

Justice Act 2006 that the Council should scrutinise the work of the Community Safety Partnership. They were advised that the Partnership had been established in accordance with the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, with the general aim of reducing crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour within the District. The Partnership had established a number of strategic links, particularly with the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership (HSP), as well as with other District and County-wide groups. Members acknowledged the complexity of the way in which the Partnership was required to operate to meet the challenges faced by the District.

In reviewing the content of the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Plan 2010-11, Members were advised that a Strategic Assessment was conducted each year to inform the priorities that were included within it. Members discussed a number of matters raised in the Plan. Positive trends in levels of criminal damage, theft from vehicles, theft of vehicles and anti-social behaviour had contributed to an overall decrease in total crime in 2009/10. There had, however, been an increase in shoplifting in St Neots. As a result this had been made a Police priority and an attempt would be made to establish the Huntingdonshire Business Against Crime initiative in St Neots.

In response to a question on the effect on crime of the Stukeley Meadows Skate Park, it was reported that the aim of the Skate Park was to provide young people with an alternative place to the town centre in which to skate and, in this respect, it had been successful, though a resulting reduction in crime could not be demonstrated.

Members discussed the structure of the Partnership. Having noted that an extensive number of agencies were involved in both the Partnership and the Inclusive, Safe and Cohesive Communities Thematic Group of the HSP, a question was raised whether the structure was unwieldy and resulted in duplication of work. Furthermore, a Member questioned why the Partnership was necessary when the Police had a statutory duty to tackle crime and disorder. In response, the Panel was informed that there was a legal requirement to have a Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and that the Partnership focussed on matters that fell beyond the scope of the Police and other responsible agencies. Following a further question on how the Partnership publicised the effectiveness of its work, it was reported that regular use was made of the Council's website, District Wide and press releases for this purpose.

With regard to rural crime, the Panel was informed that the Police were responsible for this area of work. Comment was made that while a number of other agencies also were involved, they were not always effective in deterring persistent criminals operating in rural areas. Although it was acknowledged that this was sometimes the case, combined efforts were having a positive effect on the overall levels of rural crime and that, therefore, this work should continue.

Following a comment by a Member on the effectiveness of the traffic light scheme which was currently being used by the Police to promote good management of public houses in St Neots, the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services undertook to discuss with the Partnership whether the scheme should be rolled out to other areas of the District.

In concluding their discussions, the Panel expressed satisfaction with the performance achieved by the Partnership and the view that appropriate monitoring and accountability mechanisms were in place. Additionally, the Panel were reminded of the programme of events devised to assist Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels in complying with their duty to scrutinise the HSP. It was decided that the Panel should review how it scrutinises the Partnership and the Thematic Groups after these events had been held.

RESOLVED

that the content of the report be noted.

112. PROVISION OF PLAY FACILITIES WORKING GROUP

The Panel considered the final report of the Provision of Play Facilities Working Group (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). Members were reminded that 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 2008 Place Survey had identified the provision of activities for teenagers as the highest priority area in need of improvement in Huntingdonshire, the Working Group had decided to focus primarily on play facilities for teenagers.

The Panel was informed of the Working Group's activities and noted that investigations had 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. A number of recommendations had been made by the Working Group, which were intended to improve the level of provision for teenagers in Huntingdonshire. Whilst the Panel was supportive of the Working Group's aims, Members 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 with any savings being redeployed in Parishes before consideration is given to extending the Council's own commitments in this respect.

Having noted that the Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services had been involved in the Working Group's deliberations from the outset and that Councillors P G Mitchell and R J West would present the report to the Cabinet at its meeting on 22nd April 2010, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the recommendations being amended to include reference to investigations being undertaken into the feasibility of introducing a maintenance agreement in which responsibility for meeting Town facilities' revenue costs are divided between the District Council, Town Councils and users of facilities with any savings being redeployed in Parishes

before consideration is given to extending the Council's own commitments, the report of the Provision of Play Facilities Working Group be approved for consideration by the Cabinet.

113. CAMBRIDGESHIRE HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor R J West reported that the next meeting of the Cambridgeshire Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee would be held on 22nd April 2010 and that he and Councillor J J Dutton had been appointed onto a Working Group to investigate dementia services.

114. WORK PLAN STUDIES

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 their programme of studies and informing Members of the studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

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

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), which contained details of actions taken in response to recent discussions and decisions. The Chairman reported that a meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Hospital Stakeholder Panel Sub-Group would be held on 13th April 2010 to meet with the three remaining bidders for the Hospital's management contract.

The Scrutiny and Review Manager also provided an update on the study into car parking at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital. The Hospital's Senior Executive Group had decided to reduce the minimum length of stay to 2 hours for which a charge of £2 would be made. The Panel was informed that further reducing the minimum length of stay would have significant financial implications for the Hospital. It was further reported that additional visitor spaces for stays of up to 30 minutes for which there would be no charge would also be introduced and that the Panel's other recommendations would be subject to consideration by the Executive Group in the future. The Hospital's Business Facilities Manager would be invited to attend a future meeting of the Panel to report on progress.

116. SCRUTINY

The 103rd Edition of the Digest of Decisions was received and noted.

117. COUNCILLORS J E GARNER AND J M SADLER

In thanking Members for their work on behalf of the Panel during the year, the Chairman drew particular attention to the contributions made by Councillors J E Garner and J M Sadler who would not be standing for re-election at the forthcoming election.

Chairman