

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in Holme Village Hall, Short Drove, Holme, PE7 3PA on Tuesday, 13 July 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor D Harty – Vice-Chairman in the Chair.

Councillors M G Baker, K M Baker,  
Mrs M Banerjee, J W Davies, P J Downes,  
P Godley, M F Newman and J S Watt.

Mr D Hopkins.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor P M D Godfrey and Mr M Phillips.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors D Dew, C R Hyams and J Gray.

### 16. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 17. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors D Harty and P J Downes declared a personal interest in Minute No. 21 in respect of their membership of Cambridgeshire County Council.

### 18. 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.

In so doing, Members requested sight of the St Neots Urban Design Framework when available. The Panel was informed that a report on the Environment Strategy was expected at the September or October meeting of the Panel.

### 19. CABINET FEEDBACK

The Panel received and noted reports from the Cabinet detailing their deliberations on the Ramsey Market Town Strategy, Performance Management and Car Parking Orders respectively in response to the Panel's recommendations.

### 20. THE GREAT FEN

The Panel expressed their thanks to those responsible for the organisation of a tour of the Great Fen that had taken place prior to that evening's meeting.

Following questions the Panel was reminded that the Council had entered into a 5 year agreement with the project with a £20,000 contribution per annum towards project management costs. Members were advised that the collaboration agreement was renewable after 5 years. Although the income from the 4,700 acres owned by the project would assure its future should the agreement not be renewed, Members were informed that the Council had a broader interest than other partners and would benefit by having influence over the project's future. Members also were informed that the Council's involvement had played a major part in enabling the project to secure lottery funding.

In discussing plans for a visitor centre, Members were advised that a temporary information point at Halfway Farm would be opened later in the year while plans for a permanent centre that could be extended and adapted as visitor numbers increased were developed.

The Director of Environmental and Community Health Services indicated that updates would be presented to the Panel at 6 monthly intervals.

## **21. CIVIL PARKING ENFORCEMENT**

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

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Planning Services and Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) outlining the options open to the Council for pursuing civil parking enforcement (CPE) in a co-ordinated approach as encouraged by the Department for Transport.

The Panel was advised that the potential for a countywide CPE operation had been discussed between the County and District Councils and various service delivery options had been considered.

Members were informed that while there was a general view that better enforcement, particularly with respect to on street parking, would be beneficial, further work was required regarding the financial impact on the authority before any formal decisions could be taken with regard to the concept of extending CPE. This would also be subject to an application to Government for the delegation of the necessary powers.

Members were reminded that the enforcement of both charged and non-charged car parks was currently carried out by the Council's Street Ranger service along with small areas of charged on-street parking managed via an agency agreement with the County Council. It was likely that a move to CPE within Huntingdonshire would result in a need to significantly increase on-street parking charges which could have an effect in increasing the demand for off street parking provision.

The Panel was acquainted with the different scenarios available, with the County Council indicating their preference for managing both on and off-street arrangements which would have the potential drawback of requiring the transfer of some District Council staff.

The Panel was informed that whichever method of administration was adopted the difference in terms of income would be an approximate loss of £37,000, although this might be offset by the potential for increased Council revenue from the increased use of off street car parks. It was therefore

**RESOLVED**

that Cabinet be recommended to support the continuation of negotiations with the County Council regarding the possible introduction of CPE in Huntingdonshire.

**22. PUBLIC CONVENIENCES**

*(Councillor J Gray, Executive Councillor for Environment and Information Technology and Councillor C R Hyams were in attendance for this item).*

The Panel considered a report by the Director of Environmental and Community Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) updating the Panel on the Council's position with regard to public conveniences following the submission of petitions in response to the Council's decision to reduce expenditure on their ownership and maintenance. Members were reminded that this had been a decision of the Council when the budget had been approved for the current year.

The Panel was reminded that the Council owned and maintained 9 public conveniences within the district plus those at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park and Paxton Pits visitor centres. The Council also contributed £1,500 towards the maintenance of conveniences in St Benedict's Court which would remain open.

Members were updated on the situation regarding discussions with town councils to transfer responsibility for the maintenance of the conveniences in the market towns. Some of the conveniences in St Neots were being transferred to the Town Council and the District Council was continuing to maintain the facilities of the St Ives and Huntingdon Bus Stations. However the other facilities had been closed as the town councils had been unwilling to accept a transfer in responsibility. The only exception was a temporary facility funded by Ramsey Town Council pending the redevelopment of the Grand Cinema site.

Members were reminded by Councillor Gray that facilities were not funded by the District Council elsewhere in Huntingdonshire, with public conveniences having been removed from the larger villages some years previously. He drew attention to the facilities available in public buildings and retail outlets in the market towns and reiterated that the Cabinet felt that the provision of the public conveniences was best dealt with by the town and parish councils. However in response to discussion, Councillor Gray indicated that he was prepared to facilitate negotiations with venues to make facilities available to the public, on the understanding that any financial incentive had to be provided by the town and parish councils concerned.

As ward Councillor, Councillor C Hyams acquainted the Panel with details of complaints he had received in respect of the closure of the public conveniences in Godmanchester and he suggested that other cost cutting measures should be considered prior to the closure of the public conveniences.

The Panel, having been acquainted with the content of the petitions received, and whilst agreeing on their value, concurred that provision should not be the financial responsibility of the District Council. In that light it was suggested that a package of help and guidance, including a possible template to illustrate available options should be explored by officers of the Council and offered to town and parish councils if they wish to ensure the availability of public conveniences in their area.

#### RESOLVED

that Cabinet be requested to consider the possibility of exploring a package of help and guidance to town and parish councils to enable them to provide conveniences available for use by the public.

#### **23. JOINT SCRUTINY**

The Panel was acquainted by way of a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) with recent developments concerning the introduction of greater joint scrutiny between Cambridgeshire councils.

In considering the benefits that could be derived by focusing on both geographic issues tying scrutiny to leadership of place and the key outcomes of importance to local communities, the Panel agreed that focusing on the scrutiny of subject areas would be the way forward.

#### **24. SCRUTINY OF PARTNERSHIPS**

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 an opportunity to consider the structure of future scrutiny of the partnerships in which the Council is involved.

#### **25. 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.

In so doing, it was reported that useful comments had been received from the Planning Department's Conservation Team and the first meeting of the working group would be held shortly.

Councillor Davies agreed to provide the Panel with sight of a letter he had received from Anglian Water in response to his correspondence with them on St Ives residents' flooding issues taken up by the Panel in a previous study.

**26. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS**

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel considered its role and remit.

The Panel was advised that an update on the Council's carbon footprint reduction was expected at the September meeting of the Panel.

**27. SCRUTINY**

The Panel considered the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest summarising the Council's decisions since the previous meeting.

Chairman