

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SOCIAL WELL-BEING) held in the Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 2 November 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors P L E Bucknell, S Cawley, B S Chapman, Mrs K E Cooper, J J Dutton, Mrs P A Jordan, P G Mitchell, P D Reeve and R J West.

Co-opted Member – Mr R Coxhead.

APOLOGY: An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Mrs M Nicholas.

50. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 5th October 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

51. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor S J Criswell declared a personal interest in Minute Nos. 10/54, 55 and 56 by virtue of his membership of Cambridgeshire County Council and Somersham Parish Council.

Councillors J J Dutton, P D Reeve and R J West declared personal interests in Minute Nos. 10/54, 55 and 56 by virtue of their membership of Cambridgeshire County Council.

Councillor P G Mitchell declared a personal interest in Minute No. 10/56 by virtue of his association with the Stilton Skate Park.

52. 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 November 2010 to 28th February 2011.

53. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY: CONSULTATION DRAFT

(Councillor A Hansard, Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health, was in attendance for consideration of this item).

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Housing Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) seeking the Cabinet's endorsement of a draft Homelessness Strategy for the purposes of consultation. By way of background, Councillor A Hansard, Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health,

informed the Panel that the Homelessness Act 2002 placed a statutory duty on the Council to review the previous Strategy every five years and that the review was now due.

The Panel were advised that the Strategy outlined a future strategic direction for homelessness prevention, which was a matter of growing concern for the Council. Members noted that increased financial and resource pressures and changes by the Government to the housing benefit system, which would take effect from April 2011, would add to increasing levels of demand for housing advice and of homelessness within the District.

The Panel's attention was drawn to the trends in homelessness experienced locally over the previous ten years. Members were advised that the reductions in homelessness that had been achieved were largely attributable to the use of a number of preventative measures, including the Court Advocacy Service, the Young Persons Mediation Service and the Rent Deposit/Rent In Advance Scheme. Members were advised that the latter had proved to be the most effective and opportunities to maximise its use were currently being explored by the Council. In response to questions by Members it was reported that the only cost to the Council associated with the Scheme arose from customer defaults on loans but that their use was limited by the debt allowance.

The Panel discussed the financial and other resources required to achieve the Strategy's Action Plan. It was noted that Government funding for the Homelessness Prevention Budget might not continue beyond 2010/11. The Panel registered concern that funding had not been identified for a number of actions contained within the Action Plan. In response, the Head of Housing Services reported that the document had been compiled in advance of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review announcement, at a time when a number of uncertainties surrounding the Council's budget process and efficiency programme existed. The Panel were assured that the Strategy would be updated to take into account these developments; however, the challenge to identify resources would remain.

Other matters that were discussed included the types of accommodation available, migrant workers and the factors that constrained the Council from using exception sites within the District to tackle homelessness. Having expressed their satisfaction with the content of the Strategy, the Panel

RESOLVED

- (a) that subject to the comments outlined above, the content of the draft Homelessness Strategy be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet; and
- (b) that the Cabinet be recommended to approve the draft Homelessness Strategy for wider consultation with partners, stakeholders and customers.

54. CAMBRIDGESHIRE LOCAL INVESTMENT PLAN

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

With the aid of a joint report by the Heads of Housing Services and of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel gave consideration to the draft Cambridgeshire Local Investment Plan (CLIP) on which the Council had been consulted. The Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport informed the Panel of the background to the Plan, which had been prepared for submission to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) by Cambridgeshire Horizons in conjunction with Cambridgeshire local authorities. The Plan was intended to facilitate the delivery of investment in a range of housing, infrastructure, regeneration and community activities taking into account locally determined priorities and a number of existing Countywide strategies and plans. It identified investment needs across Cambridgeshire and would primarily be used as evidence to support bids to draw external funding into the area.

With regard to the complex structure of partnerships that existed across the County, the Panel was informed that the establishment of a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) would assist with streamlining the current framework as well as with promoting the adoption of cross boundary working practices. While some Members were of the view that the funds allocated by the HCA should be devolved to local authorities, others argued that there were advantages to undertaking co-ordinated work on a geographical basis greater than that covered by individual local authorities. In noting that, as a result of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, the HCA's funding would be reduced by 50%, Members acknowledged the importance of the CLIP in enabling the Council effectively to compete for financial resources. In addition, the Panel drew attention to potential problems associated with variations in boundaries according to the context and level of activity.

The Panel discussed the local road network infrastructure and expressed concern at the way upgrades or improvements to the A14, A428 and the A1 were being prioritised. The implications of this in encouraging housing and economic growth also were considered. Members were of the opinion that the road network infrastructure should be viewed in the national context. Having specific regard to the A428, the Panel were advised that work to compile a Master Plan for the St Neots area would be undertaken in the future in conjunction with the Highways Agency and East Coast Mainline Rail Services. The Panel also highlighted the need to upgrade the A14 as it played a significant part in the road network infrastructure on the local, national and European levels.

In response to a question on the targets contained in the Plan for the completion of housing schemes in Huntingdonshire scheduled for 2010/11 to 2013/14, Members were informed that the purpose of the HCA was the delivery of affordable housing. The Panel suggested that a more realistic approach should be adopted given that the figures presented were considered to be low. The reliability of the data generally presented by the County Council contained within the

CLIP in respect of population projections for the District was also questioned and Members suggested that the data employed should be updated.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Panel requested that a further report was submitted to a future meeting on the implications of the CLIP for local housing, including the potential shortfalls in the delivery of affordable housing within the District. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that subject to the comments outlined above, the Cambridgeshire Local Investment Plan be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet.

55. MONITORING OF SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS (PLANNING OBLIGATIONS)

(Councillor C R Hyams, Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services, was in attendance for consideration of this item).

The Panel gave consideration to a report by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which provided an update on the receipt and expenditure by the Council of money negotiated under Section 106 Agreements.

The Scrutiny and Review Manager reported that the Section 106 Agreement Advisory Group had considered the Panel's suggestion that a project plan should be produced for each scheme but had concluded that they were satisfied with the availability of information already contained within the existing monitoring report. The Advisory Group also had discussed whether scrutiny of Section 106 Agreements was being duplicated in the current arrangements.

The Panel reiterated the view that a project plan should be adopted to enable more effective monitoring to take place, which would better assist Members in understanding projects. Having discussed a way forward, Councillor P G Mitchell undertook to report the Panel's views at the next meeting of the Development Management Panel. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

56. PROVISION OF PLAY FACILITIES

(Councillor C R Hyams, Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services, was in attendance for consideration of this item).

Pursuant to Minute Nos. 10/31 and 10/37, the Panel received and noted a report by the Service Development Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on expenditure incurred by the Council on the maintenance of outdoor youth facilities together with

details of where the funds had been allocated. It was noted that estimated annual revenue costs amounted to £22,300, which was spread across six skate park facilities within the District.

Following discussion on the cost of inspection, assessments and insurance, the Scrutiny and Review Manager undertook to circulate to the Panel details of other organisations that could provide these services.

57. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

With the aid of a report by the Cabinet (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel were acquainted with Executive Members' deliberations and decisions in response to a joint report by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels on the Council's performance against its priority objectives (Minute No. 10/34 refers). Members were advised that the recommendation concerning external consultants had been referred back to the Corporate Plan Working Group for further review including the criteria used in the appointment of consultants and an assessment of the cost and value gained from using them. It was likely, however, that this work would be undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being).

58. CAMBRIDGESHIRE ADULTS WELLBEING AND HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor R J West reported that a meeting of the Cambridgeshire Adults Well-Being and Health Scrutiny Committee had recently been held at which consideration had been given to the Older Peoples' Mental Health Strategy. The Committee's in this respect were currently ongoing.

59. WORK PLAN 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 studies currently being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels. Members were reminded of the opportunity they had to participate in any of the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels' studies.

60. 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 an announcement by the Strategic Health Authority on which bidder would take over management of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital would be made later in the month.

The Scrutiny and Review Manager was requested to establish with Hinchingsbrooke Hospital's Head of Facilities the process through which the Panel would have an input into the Hospital's review of its revised car parking pricing structure and concessions scheme. The Panel were advised that the Consultation Processes study would be

pursued further at the next meeting and that an invitation to attend would be extended to the Policy and Strategic Services Manager.

The Chairman reported on a forthcoming meeting organised by the County Council for crime and disorder Scrutiny Chairmen to discuss opportunities for joint scrutiny working. Following a suggestion made by a Member, the Chairman agreed to raise CCTV as a possible study area at the meeting.

61. SCRUTINY

The 108th Edition of the Digest of Decisions was received and noted.

Chairman