
Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being)

Report of the meeting held on 2nd November 2010

Matters for Information

31. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY: CONSULTATION DRAFT

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory duty on the Council to produce a Homelessness Strategy and to review it every five years. The review is now due. In conjunction with the Cabinet (Item No. 45 of their Report refers) the Panel has been appraised with the contents of the draft Strategy, which has been produced for consultation.

Homelessness is of growing concern for the Council and increased financial and resource pressures and changes prompted by the Government to the housing benefit system will further add to the increasing levels of demand for housing advice and homelessness within the District. While considering the trends in homelessness experienced locally over the previous ten years, Members have been advised that a number of preventative measures employed by the Council have contributed towards the achievement of a reduction in the number of homeless people in the District. The most successful of these measures is the Rent Deposit/Rent In Advance Scheme; however, there are limitations on the debt allowance for this Scheme. This is to allow for the fact that some customers may default on their loan payments, resulting in a cost to the Council.

Owing to the fact that funding from the Government's Homelessness Prevention Budget might not continue beyond 2010/11, the Panel has registered concern at the need to identify funding and resources for a number of actions contained within the Strategy. The Strategy will be updated to take into account recent developments such as the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review and the Council's future budget process and efficiency programme. It is, however, acknowledged that the challenge to identify resources will remain. Other matters discussed by the Panel include the types of accommodation available, migrant workers and the factors that constrain the Council in using exception sites within the District.

Subject to their comments, the Panel has recommended the Cabinet to approve the draft Homelessness Strategy for wider consultation with partners, stakeholders and customers.

32. CAMBRIDGESHIRE LOCAL INVESTMENT PLAN

In conjunction with the Cabinet (Item No. 44 of their Report refers) the Panel has considered the Cambridgeshire Local Investment Plan (CLIP) which has been prepared for submission to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) by Cambridgeshire Horizons in conjunction with Cambridgeshire local authorities. The CLIP is currently subject to consultation. It is 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. The CLIP identifies investment needs across Cambridgeshire and will primarily be used as evidence to support bids to draw in external funding to the area.

The Panel has discussed the complex structure of partnerships that exists across the County. It has been acknowledged that the establishment of a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) will help to streamline the current framework, whilst also encouraging cross boundary working. Some Members are of the view that the funds allocated by the HCA should be devolved to local authorities, but others have argued that collaboration has advantages and will bring benefits to the area. The importance of the CLIP in competing for financial resources has been acknowledged by the Panel, particularly as the Homes and Communities Agency has experienced a 50% reduction in its funding following the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review.

The Panel has registered their concern at the way upgrades or improvements to the local road network infrastructure have been prioritised. The implications of this in encouraging housing and economic growth in the area have been stressed. Members are of the opinion that the road network infrastructure should be viewed in the national context. Particular reference has been made to the A14 and the A428 and they have highlighted the need to upgrade the A14 as it plays a significant part in the road network infrastructure on the local, national and European levels.

Discussion has taken place on the housing schemes within Huntingdonshire that have been identified for completion between 2010/11 to 2013/14. The Panel has suggested that the data employed by the County Council should be updated, particularly as the population projections for the District appear to be too low.

Finally, the Panel has requested a further report on the implications of the CLIP for local housing including any potential shortfalls in the delivery of affordable housing within the District.

Subject to the comments that have been reported, the Panel has endorsed the CLIP for submission to the Cabinet.

33. MONITORING OF SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS (PLANNING OBLIGATIONS)

Members have received an update on the receipt and expenditure by the Council of money negotiated under Section 106 Agreements. In the course of their deliberations Members have been informed of the Section 106 Agreement Advisory Group's response to their recommendations on the way monitoring is carried out. The Advisory Group has not accepted the Panel's suggestion that a project plan should be adopted for each scheme as it is felt that the current arrangements are satisfactory. As the Panel is still of the view that such a plan will enable more effective monitoring to take place, Councillor P G Mitchell has agreed to raise the matter at the next Development Management Panel meeting.

34. PROVISION OF PLAY FACILITIES

Pursuant to Item No. 14 of their Report to the meeting of the Council on 29th September 2010, the Panel has been acquainted with the revenue costs associated with the maintenance of the outdoor youth facilities for which the Council is responsible. Members have noted that the Council currently spends an estimated £22,300 per year on six skate park facilities located within the District. This covers weekly inspections, surface painting, other repairs and ROSPA inspections. Members have requested that details of external organisations that provide this kind of maintenance service are circulated before they take any further action on the study.

35. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The Panel has been acquainted with the outcome of the Cabinet's deliberations in response to the Overview and Scrutiny Panels' report on the Council's performance against its priority objectives and other matters relating to performance management. The recommendation relating to the Council's use of external consultants has been referred back to the Corporate Plan Working Group for further review including the criteria employed in the appointment of consultants and an assessment of the cost and value gained from using them.

36. CAMBRIDGESHIRE ADULTS WELL-BEING AND HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Panel has received an update on matters currently being considered by the Cambridgeshire Adults Well-Being and Health Scrutiny Committee including the Older Peoples' Mental Health Strategy.

Other Matters of Interest

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

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies. Hinchingsbrooke Hospital is shortly due to commence a review of its revised car parking pricing structure and concessions scheme. Members previously have carried out an investigation on this subject and submitted its findings to the Hospital. The Hospital has given an undertaking that the Panel will be asked to contribute to the review. Clarification is being sought of how Members will be involved in it.

The Panel will be pursuing its study on the Council's consultation processes at its next meeting.

38. WORK PLAN STUDIES

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

39. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 – FORWARD PLAN

The Panel has been acquainted with details of the current Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

40. SCRUTINY

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

S J Criswell
Chairman