

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) held in MR0.1A AND 0.1B, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON PE29 3TN on Thursday, 14 April 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor J D Ablewhite – Chairman.  
Councillors E R Butler, S Greenall,  
N J Guyatt, M F Shellens and D M Tysoe.

Mr R Hall and Mrs H Roberts.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J T Bell, Mrs J A Dew and G S E Thorpe.

### **96. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **97. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

No declarations were received.

### **98. 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 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2011. Members were advised that a report on proposals for development at One Leisure, St Ives would be submitted to their June meeting, prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

### **99. GREATER CAMBRIDGE AND GREATER PETERBOROUGH LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP - UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS**

The Panel received a presentation by the Director of Environmental and Community Services updating Members on the progress that had been made in the establishment of the Greater Cambridge – Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

By way of background, the Director of Environmental and Community Services reminded Members of the economic geography of the Greater Cambridge – Greater Peterborough area and explained that discussions were ongoing as to whether East Northants District Council would join the Partnership. They were advised that the LEP's ambition was to achieve "100,000 major businesses and create

160,000 new jobs by 2025, in an internationally significant low carbon, knowledge based economy". Details of the membership of the shadow board, the approved priorities and the outcome of the first round of bids for Regional Growth Funding were also provided. Whilst none of the Greater Cambridge – Greater Peterborough LEP's bids had been successful in the first round, the Panel noted that consideration was being given to whether any would be prepared for submission in the second round of bidding.

Attention was drawn to the availability of funding for Local Enterprise Partnerships and the Panel were advised that all the authorities within the Greater Cambridge – Greater Peterborough LEP had agreed to make funding contributions and contributions "in kind". In addition, applications for funding had been made to two sources of money for capacity and transition funding. Whilst the outcome of these bids was not yet known, it was anticipated that they would be at least partially successful. Work would now be undertaken to prepare a business plan.

The Director of Environmental and Community Services informed the Panel about proposals to establish 21 enterprise zones across the Country. Members noted that one zone would be permitted per LEP and work was currently ongoing to identify potential zones within the Greater Cambridge – Greater Peterborough area. Whilst the criteria for the selection of zones had not yet been published, it was anticipated that successful bids would need to demonstrate that economic growth and employment would be generated, in addition to that which had already been achieved. To be eligible to be an enterprise zone, the local planning authority would have to declare an Order reducing planning requirements. Enterprise zone proposals would need to be submitted by June 2011.

Having been advised of the benefits of enterprise zones, which included full business rate discounts of up to £55k for up to five years, Members commented on their potential to promote economic development in their surrounding areas. However, concern was expressed about the dangers of business rate discounts for businesses in new areas if their terms were not tightly drawn to prevent existing commercial areas from losing traders and new zones being abandoned once the financial incentives had ended.

In response to questions raised by Members of the Panel, the Director of Environmental and Community Services explained that the LEP would have no specific powers in terms of transportation and that it would be necessary to consider further the spatial implications of the enterprise zone proposals.

## **100. WORKPLAN STUDIES REPORT**

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 that were being undertaken by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels. In so doing, Members received an update on the work being undertaken with regard to voluntary sector funding and noted that the One Leisure working group would meet at the end of the month. They then requested detailed information on the condition and maintenance of the A14

viaduct in Huntingdon.

Having regard to the figures, which had recently been circulated, for the number of social housing properties by size that had been let via the District Council's waiting list over the course of the previous year, the Panel agreed that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) should be asked to investigate the availability of larger houses for letting through the Council's housing register.

#### **101. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL BEING) - PROGRESS**

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing progress on matters that had previously been discussed by the Panel.

Pursuant to Minute No. 10/93, Mr R Hall and Councillor M F Shellens updated members on the outcome of their investigations into the business case for the multi-storey car park in Huntingdon. They commented on the absence of reference in the paper previously presented to the key risks associated with the project, the need for further sensitivity analysis of the assumptions for inflation, the period over which the project had been costed and the monies which had been set aside for major maintenance works. Councillor M F Shellens drew attention to the risks associated with the timing of the development, the level of discount rate which had been selected for the car park project and suggested that provision should be made for social benefit in the assessment of any future investments.

Having suggested that the Council should introduce a more detailed methodology for the assessment of projects that it was considering, it was agreed that a report should be submitted to a future meeting on proposed project assessment criteria.

#### **102. SCRUTINY**

The Panel received and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest. In so doing, comments were made on the recent approval by the Cabinet of the new Council Plan despite the concerns which the Panel had previously expressed and whether this reflected the Council's commitment to overview and scrutiny. In response, Councillor J D Ablewhite, in his new role as Executive Leader designate, expressed the view that the three Overview and Scrutiny Panels had an important role in the democratic process and outlined the measures, which had been implemented to ensure the Executive was acquainted with the Panel's comments when taking decisions.

In response to a question on the changes that had been made to the Risk Register between the period 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010 to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2011, the Scrutiny and Review Manager undertook to provide Mrs H Roberts with a copy of the report, which had been submitted to the Corporate Governance Panel on this subject.

