



HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

ANNUAL REPORT 2010/11

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INTRODUCTION

The Centre for Public Scrutiny, in its publication *The lion that roared – Giving scrutiny a voice through annual reports* (2011), suggest that Overview and Scrutiny annual reports should answer the question: How does the scrutiny function in my local council contribute to the improvement of public services? This report attempts to answer this question.

Overview and Scrutiny in Huntingdonshire is overseen by a Management Group, which comprises the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Panels who are:



Councillor Steve Criswell

Chairman of the Social Well-Being Panel



Councillor Philip Godfrey

Chairman of the Environmental Well-Being Panel



Councillor Jason Ablewhite

Chairman of the Economic Well-Being Panel



Councillor Richard West

Vice - Chairman of the Social Well-Being Panel



Councillor David Harty

Vice - Chairman of the Environmental Well-Being Panel



Councillor Gordon Thorpe

Vice - Chairman of the Economic Well-Being Panel

This Report summarises the Panels' activities over the past year and contains illustrations of their impact through the outcomes and results they have achieved.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

Overview and Scrutiny is the mechanism by which Councils can achieve community leadership, good governance and by which Councillors can become powerful and influential politicians."

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister - 2002

The Centre for Public Scrutiny has defined four principles for effective scrutiny:-

- ❖ Providing 'critical friend' challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers;
- ❖ Enabling the voice and concerns of the public and its communities;
- ❖ Being carried out by 'independent minded governors' who lead and own the scrutiny process, and
- ❖ Driving improvement in public services

The Overview and Scrutiny Panels have endeavoured to apply these principles since they were first defined in 2007. They do this through:

- ❖ holding the Cabinet to account;
- ❖ scrutinising decisions, both prior to and after they are made;
- ❖ developing and reviewing policies;
- ❖ monitoring performance; and
- ❖ investigating matters affecting the District.

Overview and Scrutiny provides a forum for Members to exercise active community leadership and governance. As will be seen it also enables them to address the needs of local residents.

Members set their own agenda and are able to work in innovative ways. In this way they can address issues of public concern. Examples of this appear later on.

The Council continues to operate three Overview and Scrutiny Panels, with remits that reflect the Council's duty to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of the District. This means the Panels are able to scrutinise the Council's collaborative working and any other matters affecting the area as well as the Council's internal operation.

The Panels each have two co-opted Members, who play a full part in their work.

More than one Panel has been involved in reviewing the Council's performance against its priorities, customer services and the New council plan. The next seven pages highlight the achievements of the individual Panels.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SOCIAL WELL-BEING)

- Councillor Steve Criswell - Chairman
- Councillor Richard West – Vice-Chairman
- Councillor Peter Bucknell
- Councillor Stephen Cawley
- Councillor Barry Chapman
- Councillor Mrs Kendal Cooper
- Mr Roger Coxhead
- Councillor Jeff Dutton
- Councillor Ms Patricia Jordan
- Councillor Peter Mitchell
- Mrs Moira Nicholas
- Councillor Peter Reeve

Monitoring of S106 Agreements

The Panel has had a long-standing interest in securing the timely implementation of leisure projects that have been negotiated through S106 agreements. Significant advances have been made in the year in encouraging others to complete the work required of them to enable progress to be made on some projects that have stalled for a considerable period of time.

In addition, the Panel has made recommendations to the S106 Advisory Group on the way monitoring of the implementation of S106 Agreements is carried out. It has since been agreed that a database will be set up to assist with the monitoring process. The database will be available to all Members and will keep them informed of what is going on in their Wards.

Hill rise park, St Ives

Last year the Panel received a petition from local residents requesting the Council take action to deter anti-social drivers from causing noise nuisance late at night in Hill Rise Park, St Ives. A series of actions has been taken. In receiving an update on the effectiveness of them the Panel has been pleased to learn that since their introduction a very low number of nuisances have occurred.

The Social Implications of the Council's Budget Proposals for CCTV

Arising from the Council's plans for its CCTV service, the Panel has received a submission from the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership on the value locally of the service. On the basis of this submission, Members have concluded that the service should be preserved, particularly in light of the

level of investment already made by the Council in it. Members have requested that efforts are made to collaborate with other local authorities and external parties with a view to determining whether they might be interested in buying into the CCTV system. The views also have been expressed that the availability of external funding should not be the deciding factor when a decision on the future of CCTV is taken and that savings should instead be found in other areas. The outcome of negotiations with other parties will be reported to the Environmental Well-Being Panel.

Supporting the Voluntary Sector

Arising from budget proposals not to renew current Service Level Agreements with the voluntary sector as they expire in 2013/14, the Panel has decided to determine the social value of the sector locally. To do this the Panel has interviewed the Chief Executive of the Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations. Members have also considered alternative ways in which support might be provided to the voluntary sector. Given the complexity of the sector and the rapid changes to the environment prompted by developments in Localism and the Big Society, the Panel has chosen to investigate the social value of the functions performed by the voluntary groups through a Working Group. The Working Group is expected to report in 2011/12.

Consultation Processes

A study has been concluded on the Council's consultation and engagement policies, procedures and practices. The need for the study emerged following expressions of concern by members of the public at perceived weaknesses in the procedures employed by the Council during recent consultations

The Working Group that was established to undertake this work has recognised that there is a need for the Council's current consultation processes to be improved. They have made a number of suggestions to improve the current practices employed by the Council. The recommendations made have been considered in terms of their ability to support the objectives of the new Council Plan and to meet the challenges presented by recent developments concerning Localism and the Big Society. It is planned that these suggestions will be carried through into a wider review of the Consultation and Engagement Strategy and associated Guidance which is scheduled to commence in 2011/12.

Other Matters

The Panel has also contributed to discussions on the performance of the leisure centres, the Homelessness strategy, the Open Space Strategy for Huntingdonshire, the Cambridgeshire Local Investment Plan, the New Council Plan and the Council's Customer service centres.

Health Scrutiny

The Council is involved in the scrutiny of health matters in a number of ways. Specific responsibility for scrutinizing health rests with the Social Well-Being Panel. Councillor Richard West has been a member of Cambridgeshire County Council's Adults Wellbeing and Health Scrutiny Committee in 2010/11, and Cllr Barry Chapman has been his named substitute.

Over the year, the Adults Wellbeing and Health Scrutiny Committee:

- responded to the Government's proposals for the health service
- scrutinised the County Council's adult social care budget and plans for 2011/12
- scrutinized performance against the 2010/11 adult social care plan
- considered NHS Cambridgeshire's forward plan
- examined Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Foundation Trust plans for mental health services, both in general and in relation to changes to older people's mental health services in Huntingdonshire and Fenland.
- maintained a watching brief on service changes and the implications of the forthcoming franchise arrangements at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital
- examined the development of continuing care and rehabilitation services, changes to dermatology services, and plans to reduce nursing staff at Addenbrooke's Hospital, all of which were of particular relevance to residents of Cambridge City and S Cambs.

The Social Well-Being Panel has been active in health scrutiny in its own right. The Panel's Chairman, Councillor Steve Criswell, has represented the Council and other local stakeholders on the Hinchingsbrooke Stakeholder Panel.

The Social Well-Being Panel also has followed-up its study into car parking charges at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital. The Panel has had an input into the Hospital's plans to simplify further its schedule of charges.

The Panel has responded to NHS consultations on Pharmaceutical services in Cambridgeshire and on the East of England Ambulance Service's Plans to become an NHS Foundation Trust

Partnership / Joint Scrutiny

Finally, the Panel has scrutinised the Community Safety Partnership. The Panel also has undertaken some preliminary work on scrutinising the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership's Health and Well-Being Thematic Group and the Children and Young Peoples Thematic Group. However, like the other two Panels, this work has been limited owing to the Strategic Partnership reviewing the way it operates and its structure. The Panel's Co-opted Members have registered an interest in participating in the joint scrutiny with the Cambridgeshire Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee on rural crime.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING)

- Councillor Philip Godfrey - Chairman
- Councillor David Harty – Vice-Chairman
- Councillor Keith Baker
- Councillor Michael Baker
- Councillor Mrs Madhabi Banerjee
- Councillor John Davies
- Councillor Peter Downes OBE
- Councillor Peter Godley
- Mr David Hopkins
- Councillor Michael Newman
- Mr Mike Phillips
- Councillor John Watt

Planning Conservation

The Panel formed a Working Group to consider and evaluate the role of the Council's Planning Conservation Team in the preservation of Huntingdonshire's built heritage with particular reference to conservation areas and listed buildings. Planning conservation is an emotive and contentious subject which, by its nature, generates strong feelings. The Working Group found that overall the planning conservation process works well in Huntingdonshire and it compares favourably with other authorities. Conservation Officers have been commended for their hard work and enthusiasm. Nevertheless, the Working Group felt that the treatment of applications and communication between conservation officers and residents could benefit from further improvement. A number of recommendations have been made to this effect, some of which have already been implemented.

Flooding in St. Ives

In 2008 the Panel responded to a petition about flooding in the St Audrey Lane area of St Ives and some progress was made. Members have continued to monitor the situation. They have recently been advised by Anglian Water that once their capital expenditure plans have been finalized, improvements will be made to the Broadleas Pumping Station. A representative of Anglian Water will discuss the plans with interested parties.

Trees

In 2010/11 the Panel received the Council's first ever Councillor Call for Action. It requested action to be taken against the scale and timing of the felling of a large number of trees on the former St. Ives golf course and along

Houghton road, St. Ives in advance of the residential development. With specific regard to the site in question, it had been made clear before permission was granted for development at this site that a significant number of trees would be lost. No trees have been removed from the site without prior permission and re-planting is required under the planning permission and other trees are protected by conditions attached to the permission.

The loss of mature trees is of concern to many people and the Panel has accepted that unauthorised works to trees is an issue within Huntingdonshire. Members have responded to the Call for Action by suggesting that improvements are required to the way the Council deals with the problem, either by more rigorous enforcement or by means of improved communication with landowners, developers and the public generally. A strategy for the retention and planting of trees will now be drafted for adoption to help to raise the profile of this issue and encourage good practice and public awareness.

Public Conveniences

Following the submission of a petition to the full Council, the Panel has reviewed the Council's position in respect of public conveniences. The petition was prompted by the Council's decision to reduce its expenditure on their ownership and maintenance. Having discussed the matter with Executive Councillors, the Panel has asked the Cabinet develop a package of help and guidance for town and parish councils to enable them to provide conveniences available for use by the public.

Other Matters

The Panel has contributed to ongoing discussions on the Ramsey Market Town Transport Strategy, car parking, civil parking enforcement, the revocation of the regional spatial strategy, progress against the targets set in the carbon management plan, the "green house" project, abandoned shopping trolleys, St Neots east urban design framework, the Great Fen Project, schools development, the draft local transport plan 2011, mini bring recycling sites, the adoption procedures for the Huntingdon West Area Action Plan, the preparation of special planning documents and wind farm applications.

Joint Accountability Committee

The Local Area Agreement Board (LAA), Cambridgeshire Together, has been scrutinised by the Joint Accountability Committee (JAC). The JAC comprises Members of the County and Cambridgeshire's District Councils. In 2010 Cambridgeshire Together was disbanded in favour of a more streamlined and flexible 'task and finish group' arrangement. Consequently, the JAC also has been disbanded. Once a new partnership arrangement has been established, a corresponding scrutiny system will be established, again involving representation from Huntingdonshire District Council.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING)

- Councillor Jason Ablewhite - Chairman
- Councillor Gordon Thorpe - Vice-Chairman
- Councillor Terry Bell
- Councillor Eric Butler
- Councillor Mrs Julie Dew
- Councillor Stephen Greenhall
- Councillor Nick Guyatt
- Mr Roger Hall
- Mrs Helen Roberts
- Councillor Michael Shellens
- Councillor Ms Mandy Thomas
- Councillor Darren Tysoe

The Council's Budget and Future Financial Planning

The Economic Well-Being Panel has primarily been occupied with scrutinising the Council's budget and future financial planning. This has been vital work given local and national economic circumstances. The Panel has received several reports and hosted Council-wide debates on the Budget 2011/12 and the MTP 2012/16. As a result a number of challenges have been made to the Council's financial plans. This has necessitated the instigation of a number of pieces of work on the social value of Council functions including CCTV and the voluntary sector.

The Leisure Centres' Financial Performance

This work began with an investigation into the Council's Leisure Centres' future plans and the performance of the hospitality function. It quickly became apparent that extensive and detailed work would be required on this subject. A Working Group was, therefore, established in conjunction with the Social Well-Being panel to carry out this work. The Working Group has the task of reviewing One Leisure's financial performance and making recommendations on the service's future strategic direction including devising a vision and a strategic direction.

Huntingdon Town Centre Re-Development

The Panel has reviewed proposals to redevelop Huntingdon Town Centre. They have endorsed them but have recommended that formal analysis of the risks involved is undertaken and contingency plans devised.

Subsequently, two Members of the Panel took it on themselves to look at the business case for that part of the proposals relating to a multi-storey car park

in Huntingdon. Having reiterated the need for the risks associated with the project to be identified, they have suggested that major projects of this nature should be subject to more rigorous analysis, including documentation of the assumptions that have been made for inflation and the period over which project are costed. On the basis of this work, the Panel has asked that a detailed methodology is introduced for the assessment of projects. A report will be submitted to a future meeting on proposed project assessment criteria.

The Council's Use of Consultants

Following a recommendation to the Cabinet, the Panel has been asked by the Cabinet to review and make recommendations on the Council's use of consultants including the criteria used in the appointment of consultants. The Panel appointed a Working Group to undertake this work, which was completed towards the end of the year. The Working Group began by compiling data on the Council's expenditure on non-permanent employees. This will constitute baseline data against which the Council will be able to assess future trends. The Panel will be involved in this work as it has requested an annual report on planning related spending on consultants. Having examined a number of other matters including budgetary control, a series of recommendations has been developed designed to improve current management practices.

Other Matters

The Panel has had an input into the Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership, Management of the Council's assets, treasury management, the Council's New headquarters, the risk register, the performance of organisations supported by grants via service level agreements, the Former fire station site and waste recycling centre in St Neots, the economic impact of a14 upgrade and visitor development and town centre vibrancy.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

During 2010/11 Panel Members received both in-house and externally provided training to improve their scrutiny skills. The Head of Financial Services provided a particularly useful course on local government finance and a trainer from the Centre for Public Scrutiny provided training on developing scrutiny.

A cross-county event titled Questioning Skills for Better Scrutiny was held in March. This was delivered by officers from the Cambridgeshire Scrutiny Network and twenty members signed up from five councils. The feedback from the event was very positive.

NETWORKING

Overview and Scrutiny continues to benefit from an officer-led scrutiny network in Cambridgeshire. During 2010/11 this enabled officers to share the learning from various training sessions, as well as good practice and experience. It also prompted joint scrutiny between the Cambridgeshire local authorities.

Officers also belong to a scrutiny network for the whole of the Eastern Region. This is supported by an extranet, for exchanging work programmes, examples of best practice, training resources and offers of help or advice. Links have been established at the national level with the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE IN 2011/12

The profile of Scrutiny is changing nationally and much is expected from the Panels in response to the localism agenda: community involvement; scrutiny of and with partners; scrutiny of crime and disorder issues and supporting the scrutiny of health services will all be important areas of work.

The Panels want their 2011/12 work programme to continue to be driven by the quest for value for money. They would like to support the Cabinet in ensuring there is robust performance management.

Between them, the three Panels have begun to develop a programme of work for 2011/12. Topics already identified for possible inclusion are:

- the management and maintenance of water courses;
- changes in the national planning framework;
- the Council's waste management and recycling policies;
- the Employees Performance Development Review process;
- the Council's communication with residents;
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership's performance;
- the Council's housing function including the impact of changes to the Benefits system and the availability of larger houses through the Housing Register.

Studies will be completed on:

- One Leisure Finance;
- the future of CCTV;
- the voluntary sector;
- The Tree Strategy.

The Panels will also following up on the studies they concluded in 2010/11 and oversee the Council's performance against the New Council Plan. A number of avenues are being explored for joint scrutiny with other Cambridgeshire local authorities.

PARTICIPATING IN THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROCESS

Further information on the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels can be found on the Council's Website – www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Overview and Scrutiny needs your help to make sure the Council delivers effective, value for money services. There are a number of ways you can be involved:

1. Come along to a Panel meeting. Dates, venues and agendas of all forthcoming Overview and Scrutiny Panels are posted on the District Council website (use the [Modern.Gov link](#) in Councils and Democracy). These meetings are open to the public.

2. Suggest a topic for inquiry. The Panels welcome ideas for study, provided they:
 - affect a group of people living within the Huntingdonshire District;
 - relate to a service, event or issue in which the Council has a significant stake, or which the Council has an influence;
 - do not duplicate an issue which overview and scrutiny has considered during the last 12 months;
 - do not relate to an individual service complaint - these must be dealt with via the Council's complaints procedure;
 - do not relate to an individual planning or licensing decision or any other matter dealt with by one of the Council's regulatory committees.

3. Write, phone or email the Scrutiny and Review Manager at the District Council with your views on any of the topics that the Panels are currently looking at or issues you think should be drawn to the Overview and Scrutiny Panels' attention.

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