

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, 6 September 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.
Councillors S Akthar, I C Bates, Mrs J A Dew, J J Dutton and R J West.

Co-opted Members – Mr R Coxhead and Mrs M Nicholas.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors K M Baker, Mrs P A Jordan, S M Van De Kerkhove and Mrs D C Reynolds.

32. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 5th July 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

33. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors I C Bates, S J Criswell, J J Dutton and R J West declared personal interests in Minute No. 36 by virtue of their membership of Cambridgeshire County Council.

Councillor S Akthar declared a personal interest in Minute No. 36 as Vice-Chairman of Huntingdon Neighbourhood Panel.

Mr R Coxhead declared a personal interest in Minute No. 36 by virtue of being a member of the Huntingdon Neighbourhood Panel.

34. 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 Executive Leader of the Council for the period 1st September to 31st December 2011.

Under Section 15 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules contained in the Constitution, the Chairman drew attention to the fact that an item entitled Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Budget would be considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 22nd September 2011 without having first appeared on the Forward Plan. This was necessary to avoid a delay in the consideration of an additional budget requirement to fund adaptations to the homes of applicants with disabilities under the DFG scheme. The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) would also consider the report at its meeting on 8th September 2011 and it would be circulated electronically to Members of the Social Well-Being Panel for information purposes.

35. SHARED HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY

(Councillor T V Rogers, Executive Councillor for Resources and Customer Services, was in attendance for consideration of this item).

Pursuant to Minute No. 11/23, the Panel gave consideration to a report by the Head of Housing Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) responding to a number of questions raised by Members in respect of the proposed shared Home Improvement Agency service.

In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Resources and Customer Services and Managing Director (Resources) delivered assurances that the proposals were designed to have a minimal effect on staff with changes being introduced on an incremental basis. In presenting the report, the Head of Housing Services reported that he had categorised the Panel's questions and comments into three themes; service quality, financial matters and human resources. Having regard to the concerns which had been raised in respect of service quality, it was reported that South Cambridgeshire District and Cambridge City Councils both had achieved 90% satisfaction ratings for their services and that efforts were being made to further enhance these performance levels. Additionally, it was noted that the Cambridge City Manager, who would be responsible overall for the shared service, had an extensive knowledge of how the Agency operated and had formerly been employed by the Papworth Trust. Furthermore, it was noted that a joint authority Management Board would be established to oversee and monitor the delivery of the shared service. Having expressed their wish to receive performance reports on the work of the Agency, the Head of Housing Services undertook to make these available to the Panel in the future.

Councillor I C Bates queried the absence of East Cambridgeshire and Fenland District Councils from the proposal. In response, the Head of Housing Services informed Members that owing to the legal status of their respective Agencies, procurement rules had prevented them from being part of the proposal at the present time but that there was a desire on the part of both authorities to join the shared service in the future.

In noting that touchdown bases would be provided for Huntingdonshire staff at Pathfinder House, some concern was raised at the possible dilution of contact between employees and their Service Manager, who would be based at South Cambridgeshire District Council. In response, it was confirmed that such communication matters were currently being considered by the authorities concerned. In referring to the financial aspects of the proposals, it was confirmed that the anticipated cost savings to the Council were likely to be in the region of £25,000 - £30,000. Members were mindful of the potential for associated costs to be increased, such as investments in technology and the infrastructure required to establish the service.

Having regard to their questions which had been raised in respect of the human resource implications of the proposal, Members received assurances that the necessary procedures would be followed and that

all those affected would be fully consulted. Having expressed their satisfaction with the proposals, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the content of the report now submitted be noted.

36. NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS: SCOPING REPORT

(Councillor N J Guyatt, Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing was in attendance for consideration of this item).

With the aid of a report prepared by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel discussed the terms of its review of the Neighbourhood Forums in Huntingdonshire.

Councillor N J Guyatt, Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, addressed the Panel and reported on the background to the Cabinet's request for the review to be undertaken. Comments had been made by some Members that the Forums had not been operating as originally anticipated, with Partners such as the Police also concurring with this view. He expressed the views that the North-West Huntingdonshire Forum in particular covered too wide a geographic area and that the Forums generally were not successful in attracting public attendees. Councillor Guyatt indicated that he had held preliminary discussions with the County Council's Cabinet Member for Community Engagement on the possible introduction of an "experimental hub" in Yaxley to trial alternative community engagement models suggested by the Panel. In his concluding remarks, Councillor Guyatt requested Members to be mindful of the duties placed on the Council to deliver the Localism agenda, together with the management of funds received through the Community Infrastructure Levy when undertaking the review.

The Panel concurred with the views of Councillor Guyatt and made a number of comments relating to the level of public attendance at Forum meetings, the issues raised, the choice of venues, policing boundaries and the lack of active engagement on the part of Town and Parish Councils.

In his capacity as County Council Cabinet Member for Community Infrastructure, the Chairman reported that the County Council were in the process of reviewing the Area Joint Committees in light of the fact that they were no longer regarded as being fit for purpose. He suggested that the possibility of devolving decision making responsibilities in this respect should be considered during the course of the review process.

Members were of the view that a new model of community engagement should be adopted by the Council, but with greater emphasis placed on local democracy and the three tiers of local government. The Panel accepted that despite the Council's duty to consult and engage with the public, public attendance at such meetings would only be great if there was a desire to attend, and this would largely depend on the subject matter under discussion. Additionally, a suggestion was made that the introduction of smaller

more localised area based Forums, with decision making powers, might be investigated. The Panel expressed preliminary views that these Forums might be more successful in encouraging the effective involvement of the Town and Parish Councils.

The Panel agreed that the views of the relevant County and District Council Members and the Town and Parish Councils should be sought on the Neighbourhood Forums and reported back to the Panel in November. In order to commence the Panel's investigations in this respect, it was agreed that a Working Group should be established for this purpose. Additionally, Members requested an update on the discussions on the future of the Huntingdonshire Neighbourhood Forums being held between the District and the County Councils and on Cambridgeshire Constabulary's Operation Redesign Community Engagement project. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that Councillors S J Criswell, J J Dutton and R J West be appointed to a Working Group to initiate the Panel's investigations into the Neighbourhood Forums in Huntingdonshire.

37. CAMBRIDGESHIRE ADULTS WELL-BEING AND HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Panel received and noted the Minutes of the meeting of the Cambridgeshire Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7th July 2011 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). Brief updates were delivered on the establishment of the Countywide Health and Wellbeing Board and on the work of the Adult Social Care Working Group. Members' attention was also drawn to the forthcoming NHS consultation on the Redesign of Mental Health Services in Cambridgeshire, which would be launched at the end of September 2011. A further meeting of the Committee would be held on 15th September 2011.

38. WORK PLAN STUDIES

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) containing details of studies being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels. It was agreed that background information on the health implications of the night time economy and on the emerging issue of homelessness arising as a result of changes to the Housing Benefit system should be submitted to future Panel meetings.

Brief updates were delivered on recent meetings of the Voluntary Sector and One Leisure Working Groups. In considering a request by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) to review the availability of larger houses for letting through the Council's Housing Register, the Panel decided that this could be dealt without the need for a formal study. Officers were requested to investigate the matter and to report back thereon directly to Panel Members and to Councillor M F Shellens directly.

39. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SOCIAL 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) which contained details of actions taken in response to recent discussions and decisions. The Chairman reported that the Government's approval of the terms of the management contract for Hinchingbrooke Hospital was still awaited and that, on its receipt, Circle would attend a meeting of the Panel to discuss how the Hospital would operate.

Councillor R J West delivered a brief update on the study being undertaken by the Cambridgeshire Safer and Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of domestic abuse, in which he reported that two meetings of the Working Group had been held.

Additionally, it was reported that the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership (HSP) Board had met on 27th July 2011 to discuss the future of the HSP. At that meeting, Partners had agreed to the dissolution of the Inclusive, Safe and Cohesive Communities thematic group and that whilst the Economic Prosperity and Skills and Environment thematic groups would no longer be a part of the formal structure of the HSP, they would continue to meet on an informal basis.

40. SCRUTINY

The 116th Edition of the Digest of Decisions was received and noted.

Chairman