

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, 4 October 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor R J West – Vice-Chairman in the Chair.

Councillors S Akthar, K M Baker, I C Bates, Mrs P A Jordan, S M Van De Kerkhove, Mrs D C Reynolds 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 S J Criswell, Mrs J A Dew and J J Dutton.

41. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 6th September 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chairman.

42. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor K M Baker declared a personal interest in Minute No. 45 by virtue of being a Trustee of Huntingdon Shopmobility.

43. 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 October 2011 to 31st January 2012. It was reported that the item entitled "CCTV Future Funding" would be submitted to the Panel at its meeting in November 2011.

44. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS AND CHARGES ON PROPERTIES

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

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Housing Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel considered a proposal to impose charges on properties in certain circumstances, which had been adapted wholly or with the assistance of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs).

The Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing and the Head of Housing Services outlined the background to the proposals. Members noted that changes to legislation gave local authorities the

discretion to impose limited charges on adapted properties that were occupied by their owners if the properties were sold within ten years of the grant being made and if the grant was in excess of £5,000.

The Panel discussed a number of matters, including the resources that the proposal would require for it to be implemented, the anticipated level of charges that would be placed on properties together with the criteria that would be applied to determine whether repayments would be enforced.

Following a question by a Member on when applicants would be notified of charges, the Head of Housing Services assured the Panel that this would be done by Officers during the application process. The Panel then discussed the market value of adapted properties and noted that in Huntingdonshire the charges would only be made in respect of grants in excess of £10,000 for garage/outbuilding conversions and/or an extension to a property. Having expressed their satisfaction with the proposals, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to

- (a) agree that charges be placed on properties where owner occupiers receive a Disabled Facilities Grant in excess of £10,000 (excluding Home Improvement Agency fees) where the grant is for a garage or outbuilding conversion, or extension or any combination of these;
- (b) agree that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, together with the Head of Housing Services, following consultation with the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, should determine the most effective and efficient procedure for placing charges on properties; and
- (c) delegate authority to decide whether to seek repayment, as set out in paragraph 2.5 of the report now submitted, to the Head of Housing Services.

45. VOLUNTARY SECTOR REVIEW

(Councillor J D Ablewhite, Executive Leader, Councillor T D Sanderson, Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities, and Councillors P J Downes and T W Clough were in attendance for this item).

The Panel received a report by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) detailing the outcome of a review of the Voluntary Sector Organisations that held commissioning agreements with the Council.

In introducing the report, the Healthy Communities Manager reminded

the Panel of the background to the review, which had been prompted by Members at the November 2010 meeting of full Council. It was reported that a series of review meetings had been held with the organisations concerned to assess the potential impact of a reduction in grant funding upon service users, their ability to attract external funding and their willingness to utilise their financial reserves to offset any grant reductions proposed by the Council.

The Panel questioned whether the social impact of grant reductions to voluntary organisations could be assessed given that they had a number of functions beyond those specified within their service level agreements that affected the wider social environment. The review findings indicated that some of the voluntary organisations could be placed in a vulnerable situation if the Council decided to reduce its grants to them by 50%. Members commented that there would be greater pressures placed on the Council and other public service providers and voluntary organisations in the District if grants were reduced. Owing to the fact that the organisations made use of volunteer workers, the cost to the Council of meeting this demand would exceed any grant reductions.

The Panel noted that the level of funding provided to the organisations had changed over time. It was suggested that future funding should be based on the level of need for the services offered by them. It was further suggested that the Council should take into account whether services were offered on a District-wide basis. Members were informed that Huntingdon Shopmobility and St Barnabas Community Learning Centre were the only organisations that provided services to a specific sector of the District's community. Having been acquainted with the outcome of the Equality Impact Assessment undertaken as part of the review, the Panel also expressed concern at the likely effect of any grant changes on those in isolated rural areas.

Members discussed the fact that financial support was provided to the voluntary organisations by other funders such as Cambridgeshire County Council, the Primary Care Trust, the Police and Town and Parish Councils. Although they acknowledged the difficulties faced by some organisations when other funders withdrew their contributions, it was noted that the District Council had, in the past, made up the resulting shortfall in funding.

The Panel has commented that, given the varying levels of funding currently received by the organisations and the contributions that the grants make overall towards their operating costs, a uniform rate of reduction across all the organisations would not be appropriate. Any grant adjustments should be assessed on an individual basis.

The Panel acknowledged the valuable contribution made by the organisations to the Council's aims and the fact that they each had its own links to other voluntary organisations in the District. Members expressed support for the joint working that they undertook and encouraged them to explore further opportunities for closer working in order to generate further efficiency savings.

The Panel suggested that the Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities should investigate alternative accommodation

options for the voluntary organisations with a view to reducing their operating costs. The options identified included approaching Churchmanor Estates and Huntingdon Town Council and utilising accommodation space available at Pathfinder House and at the Bargrove Centre in Eynesbury, St Neots.

A further suggestion was made that the Council should offer support to the organisations that it currently commissions to search for external and/or match funding opportunities. Additionally, it was suggested that a more holistic approach to the review, incorporating other voluntary sector organisations, should be undertaken. Finally, the Panel placed on record the point that future large scale developments, such as the St Neots Eastern expansion, could result in there being greater demand for voluntary services.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be invited to consider the Panel's comments as part of its deliberations on the report by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services.

46. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL REMITS

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing a proposal to change the way the Overview and Scrutiny Panels' remits were defined. The remits previously had been linked to Executive Councillors' responsibilities. However, following changes in the Cabinet, it was suggested that specific Council service functions should be allocated to each Panel.

In response to a question by a Member on monitoring of Section 106 Agreements, Members were informed that this remained the responsibility of the Environmental Well-Being Panel but that an exception had previously been made to enable the Social Well-Being Panel to scrutinise schemes for the provision of leisure/play equipment. The Panel decided to reinstate the previous monitoring arrangements.

Whilst acknowledging that all Overview and Scrutiny Panel Members had the opportunity to attend Economic Well-Being Panel meetings when the draft Budget was considered, the Panel accepted a suggestion by Councillor I C Bates that the Social Well-Being Panel should receive a separate report on an annual basis on the budgets associated with those services that fell within its remit. In that light, the Panel

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel remits contained in the report now submitted be endorsed;
- (b) that the Panel reinstate the monitoring of Section 106 Agreements that provide leisure/play equipment; and
- (c) that a report be submitted annually on the budgets associated with the Council functions in the Panel's remit.

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

Councillor R J West delivered an update on matters currently being considered by the Cambridgeshire Adults Well-Being and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, including the NHS consultation on the Redesign of Mental Health Services in Cambridgeshire, acute stroke services for Huntingdonshire residents, a review of home care services, the Adult Social Care Review of Progress Against the Integrated Plan, the review of dementia services and the Health and Wellbeing Board. A discussion then ensued on the management of Home Care Services. Members welcomed the work that was being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in this respect.

(At this point during the meeting (8.30pm) Councillor I C Bates left the meeting).

48. 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 for Economic Well-Being and Environmental Well-Being.

Members placed on record their disappointment that the Cabinet had not accepted their recommendation that the provision of a rifle range should be explored as part of the development proposals for One Leisure, St Ives. The Scrutiny and Review Manager outlined the various ways in which Members were informed of Cabinet decisions and reminded the Panel of the opportunity that existed to call-in any Executive decision.

49. 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 referred to a question which had been raised at full Council in respect of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital. Officers were requested to seek a response from Circle Healthcare on the financial provision the company had made in respect of the Public Finance Initiative (PFI) for the construction of the treatment centre at the Hospital.

The Panel requested clarification from the Managing Director (Resources) as to when he would be in a position to report back on the action he proposed to take in response to its recommendations arising from the study into the Council's consultation processes. An update was then delivered on the work of the Cambridgeshire Safer and Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee study into domestic abuse.

50. SCRUTINY

The 117th Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

Chairman