

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in Civic Suite 1a, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs PE28 3TN on Tuesday, 10 January 2012.

- PRESENT: Councillor P M D Godfrey – Chairman.
- Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, I J Curtis, J W Davies, P Godley, G J Harlock, D Harty and J S Watt.
- Co-opted Member Mr D Hopkins.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors M G Baker and C R Hyams and Mr M Phillips.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor N J Guyatt and Councillor D M Tysoe.

64. MINUTES

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

65. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor D Harty declared personal interests in Minute Nos. 67 and 68 arising from his Membership of Cambridgeshire County Council.

66. 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 January 2012 to 30th April 2012. Members were advised that an item on Thermal Imaging of Private Homes in Huntingdonshire through the Heatseekers scheme had been removed from the Plan.

67. CAMBRIDGESHIRE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

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

Councillor N J Guyatt introduced a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) informing Members of the terms of a revised Cambridgeshire Green

Infrastructure Strategy which it was intended would be used as supporting evidence for planning purposes. The document was an update of the first Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Cambridge sub-region which was developed in 2006. The "Strategic Network" of green infrastructure had been divided into different geographical areas. The areas identified in Huntingdonshire were Huntingdonshire Fens and Woods (including the Great Fen) and Great Ouse. The Strategy would be part of the evidence base informing the Council's future work on updating its development strategy for the period up to 2036.

The Strategy was supported by the Green Infrastructure Forum and, in light of the demise of Cambridgeshire Horizons, the Panel suggested that the accountability and reporting lines of the Green Infrastructure Forum should be clarified.

An important purpose of the Strategy would be to form a piece of evidence which could be used to help local communities identify local green spaces and to set realistic and meaningful objectives in neighbourhood plans. The Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing advised the Panel that this would be explained further at the April Council meeting.

The Chairman raised concerns over the Strategy's lack of reference to the local agricultural industry. He suggested that food security was of local, national and international concern and as such ought to be given higher priority and be reflected to a greater extent in the Council's policy framework. Having concurred with these views, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended, bearing in mind the primacy of the agricultural sector and its importance to the local and national economy, to endorse the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy as supporting evidence for planning purposes.

68. ADVANCED WASTE PARTNERSHIP

(Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Councillor for the Environment, was in attendance for this item)

Councillor D M Tysoe introduced a report by the Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on moving the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Waste Partnership (RECAP) to the next level of partnership working in order to gain the maximum advantage collectively for the partner authorities.

Having acknowledged that the work of RECAP represented an excellent example of Countywide partnership working which delivered significant benefits to Cambridgeshire, Members supported the proposals to formalise relationships with neighbouring authorities in order to deliver further benefits to residents. Members were advised that before any costs were incurred by the Council individual business cases would be brought to the Panel for comment.

Members highlighted the facts that the Council's waste collection service had high satisfaction levels and was delivered at a relatively low cost per household. In that light, the Panel questioned whether the Council's performance levels would be compromised by the proposal for greater joint working. In response, Members were advised that joint working would lead to greater savings and improve the trade waste function which would be of benefit to the business community.

The Panel referred to the possibility of using waste to generate electricity. It was noted that this might be considered in the future. Members also questioned whether waste separation would be viable at the Waterbeach waste facility. However, at present the plant would be unable to cope with the changes in the calorific value of the waste that was being processed and, as such, this would be a costly process.

Members discussed whether the negotiations on the advanced waste partnership would be successful. They questioned whether the political will existed for all partners to commit to enhanced partnership working and pointed out that some partner authorities had low levels of resources available to develop their services.

The Head of Operations acquainted the Panel with details of a route optimisation project which was being undertaken. The aim of the project was to achieve the most effective waste collection service possible across the County. It was hoped this project would result in a collection round being saved from June 2012. In response to a question by a Member it was reported that cross county route optimisation would be difficult to co-ordinate but might be considered in the future.

Owing to their involvement in reviewing the business cases for advanced waste projects, a planned visit by the Waste Collection Working Group to the Waterbeach waste facility was extended to all Members of the Panel in order that they might familiarise themselves with its operation and potential for service development.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to adopt the RECAP Advanced Partnership Working Charter and that outline business cases for any advanced waste projects be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well Being) Panel before a decision is made to proceed.

69. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel considered and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) informing them of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

70. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS

With the aid of a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was advised of progress on issues that had been previously discussed.

Further to Minute No. 68 ante, it was agreed that developments relating to RECAP were likely to overtake the work of the Waste Collection Working Group and consequently the study should be postponed until further notice.

Councillor Mrs M Banerjee advised the Panel that the Design Principles for Future Developments Working Group was due to receive an overview from Jenny Parsons, Development Management Team Leader on the history of the Loves Farm site. This would be followed by a site visit to Loves Farm.

Pursuant to Minute No. 67 ante, Members discussed the need to consider environmental and agricultural issues in tandem. It was felt a working group ought to be established to ensure that the local agricultural industry was properly reflected in the new Local Plan. It was, therefore

RESOLVED

that Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, P M D Godfrey, G J Harlock, D Harty and Mr D Hopkins be appointed to a working group to investigate land use for agricultural purposes in the context of planning policy and its contribution to the local economy.

71. SCRUTINY

The Panel received and noted the latest edition of the Council's Decision Digest (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) summarising the Council's decisions since the previous meeting. In response to a question by Councillor D Harty the Scrutiny and Review Manager informed the Panel that the Cabinet had supported a recommendation that the Council should not accept the Council Tax Freeze Grant.

Chairman