

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, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 19 June 2012.

PRESENT: Councillor D Harty – Chairman.

Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, I C Bates, I J Curtis, J W Davies, D A Giles, G J Harlock and Mrs D C Reynolds.

Co-opted Member Mr M Phillips.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor C R Hyams and Mr D Hopkins.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor D M Tysoe.

5. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Panel held on 10th April and 16th May 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor I C Bates declared a personal interest in Minute No. 8 by virtue of being Cambridgeshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Growth and Planning and representative on the Environment Agency Regional Flood and Coastal Committee.

7. 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 June to 30th September 2012. Members were advised that a report on abandoned shopping trolleys was no longer to be considered by the Cabinet as steps were being taken to resolve this issue in other ways.

Councillor D M Tysoe, the Executive Councillor for the Environment, advised the Panel that a report on a proposal to charge for a second green bin, not a recycling bin as was stated in the Forward Plan, was due to be considered by Members in July.

In response to a question, the Scrutiny and Review Manager advised Councillor Baker that it was intended the Waste Collection Working Group's work would resume once the Panel had received a report on the waste collection policies and the findings of RECAP studies.

8. ST NEOTS SURFACE WATER MANAGEMENT PLAN

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

Mrs S Pledger, Cambridgeshire County Council's Flood and Water Manager, introduced a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the management of surface water in St Neots and possible ways of reducing the occurrence of surface water flooding. Members noted that the aim of the Surface Water Management Plan study was to produce a long-term surface water management Action Plan for St. Neots. Data for the Plan had been obtained from a variety of sources including historical flooding information from stakeholders and members of the public. As a result four "wetspot" areas in St. Neots had been identified together with measures to help reduce surface water flood risk in these areas. Funding to implement the Action Plan would be sought from the Environment Agency who administered the Medium Term Plan Grant in Aid.

Having discussed instances of sewage flooding in the District, Members were advised that the DG5 Register was the official register of properties at risk of sewage flooding and Anglian Water were only allocated funding to investigate and, where necessary, carry out remediation work for the areas that appeared on the register. All other flooding matters fell under the Maintenance Plan, which had very limited resources for conducting investigations and undertaking works. Having expressed dissatisfaction with the approach that was being taken to dealing with matters of flooding, Mrs Pledger suggested that Members might contact the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about the way The Water Services Regulation Authority (OFWAT) regulated water companies.

Members questioned why steps were only being taken to alleviate the flood risk in St. Neots when other areas of the District had also suffered from significant flooding. In response, it was explained that the Surface Water Management Plan contained a prioritised list of areas that had been identified as being susceptible to surface water flooding through a multi-factor analysis. St. Neots was the highest priority area on the list and, therefore, most in need of flood risk alleviation measures. Councillor Giles drew attention to the fact that Eaton Socon was not represented in the Plan and that this was an area affected by flooding. The District Council's Project and Assets Manager explained that the Plan had not identified all areas within St. Neots which were likely to flood; instead it focused on the four wetspot areas that needed major intervention. The Panel was assured that other areas would be dealt with in due course.

Having raised the recurring problem in St. Ives of a dwelling being flooded by sewage, Mrs Pledger explained that Anglian Water were responsible for flooding of sewers and undertook to carry out the necessary investigations. Having requested clarification of the Environment Agency's powers, Mrs Pledger advised that generally it had a duty to act in accordance with the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy. More specifically, the Environment Agency had an enforcement role when water pollution occurred. However some pumping stations had consented over-flows in emergencies, which affected the Environment Agency's scope to take enforcement

action. Although the County Council now had more powers than previously, it could not remediate risk that was another organisation's responsibility. Mrs Pledger undertook to pursue such matters with the appropriate organisations if they were reported to her. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the approach being taken with the St. Neots Surface Water Management Plan be supported.

9. REMIT AND WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the Panel's programme of studies and providing an opportunity for Members to plan their work programme for the year. The Panel was reminded that they could scrutinise external bodies as they had a wide remit to examine any issues affecting the environmental well-being of the District by conducting in-depth studies.

The Panel reviewed the progress and Membership of its Working Groups relating to the Tree Strategy, Design Principles for Future Developments and Land Use for Agricultural Purposes in the Context of Planning Policies and its Contribution to the Local Economy. Given the slow progress that had been made in the production of the Tree Strategy, Councillor J W Davies undertook to contact the Arboricultural Officer to determine when the Strategy would be available for the Working Group to view.

The Panel endorsed a suggestion that the Chairman should join the Design Principles for Future Developments Working Group. A report of findings to-date for both this and the land use for Agricultural Purposes Working Group would be circulated shortly.

Pursuant to Minute No. 12/7 ante, Councillor M G Baker expressed a wish to resume the Waste Collection study and emphasised the need for the Council to educate residents as to what could be placed in recycling bins. Despite letters having been sent to residents, in his view problems in this area had been exacerbated by a change in the Council's policy on emptying "contaminated" bins. Having acknowledged that any waste contamination incurred costs for the Council, it was suggested that residents should be encouraged to recycle and educated as to what could be recycled. Councillor D M Tysoe, the Executive Councillor for the Environment, advised the Panel that the Council had held back on communicating with residents on recyclable items, as the number of items which could be recycled was due to increase. Further to this, it was noted that communication across the District had been made more difficult by the withdrawal of District Wide. Councillor Tysoe indicated that he welcomed suggestions regarding how best to communicate with residents on this matter. It was then agreed that a meeting would be arranged between the Waste Collection Working Group and the Head of Operations to discuss these matters further.

Pursuant to Minute Nos.11/97 and 12/8 the Panel agreed that as

drainage problems were widespread within the District, a working group should be convened to engage with Anglian Water in order to establish their general powers, responsibilities and limitations on its ability to prevent flooding. The Council's Project and Assets Manager undertook to assist the Working Group.

Having regard to the Panel's Progress Report, Members were advised that a site visit to the Enterprise Zone might be of value. It was agreed that this would be discussed further following a presentation on the planning implications of the Enterprise Zone at the next Panel meeting.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the contents of the Report now submitted, including the existing programme of studies, be noted;
- (b) that a Working Group be established, comprising Councillors Mrs M Banerjee and J W Davies to engage with Anglian Water to establish their powers, responsibilities and limitations on its ability to prevent flooding, and
- (c) that the Membership of the Working Groups listed in paragraph 2.9 of the report now submitted be retained subject to the appointment of the Chairman to the Design Principles for Future Development Working Group.

10. 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), which summarised recent decisions by the Council. In so doing, Councillor G J Harlock clarified the current position with regard to the 2010/2011 Final Accounts.

In response to a question by Councillor G J Harlock, the Scrutiny and Review Manager undertook to circulate details of the contract with LGSS for the provision of Human Resources services.

Chairman