



HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

ANNUAL REPORT 2011/12

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Overview and Scrutiny in Huntingdonshire

Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being)

Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)

Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being)

Training and Development

Networking

Overview and Scrutiny in Huntingdonshire in 2011/12

Participating in the Overview and Scrutiny Process

INTRODUCTION

Overview and Scrutiny in Huntingdonshire is overseen by a Management Group, which comprises the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Panels who in 2011/12 were:



Councillor Steve Criswell

Chairman of the Social Well-Being Panel



Councillor Philip Godfrey

Chairman of the Environmental Well-Being Panel



Councillor Terry Rogers

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 Steve Greenall

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.

The next few 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 Sid Akthar
- Councillor Keith Baker
- Councillor Ian Bates
- Mr Roger Coxhead
- Councillor Mrs Julie Dew
- Councillor Jeff Dutton
- Councillor Ms Patricia Jordan
- Councillor Mrs Deborah Reynolds
- Mrs Moira Nicholas
- Councillor Steve Van De Kerkhove

Supporting the Voluntary Sector

The Panel has continued its investigations into identifying alternative ways of supporting the voluntary sector in Huntingdonshire which arose from the Council's budgetary proposals not to renew current Service Level Agreements with them. These Agreements are due to expire in 2013/14. The value of services provided by the voluntary sector on behalf of the Council was investigated by a Working Group appointed to undertake this work. It also undertook a prioritisation exercise of what voluntary services are needed to meet current and future demand for services in Huntingdonshire.

The Panel receives a report monitoring the performance of the organisations with Service Level Agreements with the Council on an annual basis. The Panel is satisfied with the performance levels that have been achieved.

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

The Panel has previously expressed the view that the CCTV service should be preserved by the Council, particularly in light of the level of investment already made by the Council in it. Various ways of maintaining the service have been investigated, including receiving contributions from partner organisations. A report on service changes for 2012/13 is due to be reported to the Panel during the course of the ensuing year.

Review of Neighbourhood Forums in Huntingdonshire

A study has been concluded reviewing the effectiveness of the Neighbourhood Forums in Huntingdonshire. The need for the study emerged following expressions of concern by some Members that the Forums had not

been operating as effectively as they might and that they covered too wide a geographic area and generally were not as successful at attracting public attendees. During the review, the Panel was mindful of the duties placed upon the Council to deliver the localism agenda, and the opportunities presented by enhancing the existing Neighbourhood Forums by enabling them to take decisions on matters of local concern and by creating a forum through which all levels of local authorities could work together better.

The Working Group that was established to complete the review undertook two consultation exercises with interested parties and stakeholders. The views elicited assisted with the development of the final proposals, which were designed to build upon and enhance the existing arrangements.

Housing Benefit Changes and the Potential Impact on Huntingdonshire

Arising from the Government's Welfare Reform Bill, the Panel has been in receipt of reports on the implications of the changes for the District. Of particular concern is the impact that the proposals will have upon homelessness and subsequent demand for Council services. The Panel will continue to receive monitoring reports on a quarterly basis.

Redesign of Mental Health Services in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

The Panel has submitted a response to NHS Cambridgeshire on their proposals to redesign mental health services in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The proposals sought the permanent closure of Acer Ward in Hinchingsbrooke Hospital, which have since been agreed by the NHS Board. An informed view of the consultation was taken, with the views of both service users and carers of mental health patients being obtained at the time. The Panel unanimously agreed that the case for the closure of the Ward had not been satisfactorily justified. Other areas of concern included the transportation arrangements for Huntingdonshire patients and visitors to acute wards and the need for the Crisis Resolution Home Treatment Team to remain available within the Huntingdonshire vicinity.

Other Matters

The Panel has contributed to discussions on the performance of the Leisure Centres together with the development proposals of One Leisure, St Ives, the Council's Shared Home Improvement Agency Service, Monitoring of Section 106 Agreements, Disabled Facilities Grants and charges on properties, the health implications of the night-time economy in Huntingdonshire, the Cambridgeshire Local Investment Plan and on the forthcoming introduction of the Police and Crime Commissioner in November 2012. Owing to their previous involvement in the future governance arrangements of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital, the Panel has also received an update from Circle Healthcare on the delivery of the Hospital's Business Plan. Additionally, the Panel has received the annual equality progress report and revisited a former

study on the Council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy, work on which will commence in 2012/13.

Health Scrutiny

The Council is involved in the scrutiny of health matters in a number of ways. Specific responsibility for scrutinising health rests with the Social Well-Being Panel. Councillor Richard West has been a member of Cambridgeshire County Council's Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2011/12, and Councillor Mrs Deborah Reynolds has been his named substitute.

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

- scrutinised the County Council's adult social care budget and plans for 2011/12;
- scrutinised the performance against the 2011/12 Adult Social Care Plan;
- considered aspects of the County Council's Integrated Plan relating to adult social care, including integrated health and social care;
- responded to a number of national developments which included consultancy support for members to establish their relationship with the emerging Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board, examining the Annual Public Health Report and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, contributing views to the Department of Health on the content of forthcoming scrutiny regulations and guidance, considering the emerging clinical commissioning arrangements and examining the County Council's plans to set up a local Healthwatch initiative; and
- considered NHS Cambridgeshire's forward plan and contributed towards proposals for major changes in adult mental health services through a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee with Peterborough City Council.

Partnership / Joint Scrutiny

Finally, the Panel has scrutinised the work of the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership and the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership's Health and Well-Being Thematic Group. This work is undertaken on an annual basis. Whilst some preliminary work on scrutinising the role and performance of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership's Children and Young Peoples Thematic Group was undertaken the previous year, further work in this respect is programmed in for the ensuing year. Councillor Mrs Deborah Reynolds has also participated in a joint scrutiny study with the Cambridgeshire Safer and Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee on domestic abuse.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING)

- Councillor Philip Godfrey - Chairman
- Councillor David Harty – Vice-Chairman
- Councillor Michael Baker
- Councillor Mrs Madhabi Banerjee
- Councillor Ian Curtis
- Councillor John Davies
- Councillor Peter Godley
- Councillor Greg Harlock
- Mr David Hopkins
- Councillor Colin Hyams
- Mr Mike Phillips
- Councillor John Watt

Design Principles for Future Developments

Councillors Mrs B E Boddington and R J West have attended a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel to address Members on their concerns over the appearance of the Loves Farm development at St.Neots. The Panel's attention was drawn to the high density of housing within the development and problems associated with this. Residents had complained about the poor appearance of the extremities of the development as well as the narrowness of the roads, the lack of footpaths and the absence of street names.

The Panel has acknowledged that there could often be tensions and differences in priorities between developers and the planning authority. In response to the concerns raised, the Panel decided to establish a Working Group to examine the issues brought to their attention and to make recommendations to inform future developments.

The Working Group is satisfied that the Council is taking significant steps to deal effectively with concerns raised over the Loves Farm development and that lessons learnt from this site will influence the design of future developments.

Land Use for Agricultural Purposes in the Context of Planning Policies and its Contribution to the Local Economy

Following consideration of the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy, Members have raised concern at the lack of mention of agriculture within the Strategy. A Working Group was established to undertake a study on this subject. Given that, according to the National Farmers' Union estimation, up

to 80% of land in Huntingdonshire is used in farming, the Working Group judged that the importance of rural areas and agriculture should be reflected to a greater extent in the Council's planning policy framework. A number of recommendations have been made to this effect, and the Working Group intends to conduct further investigations into the Council's procedure for dealing with applications where agriculture is a factor.

Waste Collection

A Working Group has been appointed to look into the Council's waste collection procedures. The Working Group visited the Ameycespa site at Waterbeach to instigate their investigations. However, following the Panel's consideration of the Advanced Waste Partnership report in January 2012 it was agreed that the work of the Partnership could overtake the findings of the Working Group and the study was postponed. It will resume in 2012/13.

Drainage

A petition was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) Panel in December 2011 by Parish Councillor Mrs A Rees, in respect of sewage overflow at Windsor Road and Main Street, Yaxley. The petition had been referred to the Panel from the Council meeting on 2nd November 2011. The Executive Leader of the Council had written to Anglian Water expressing his concerns over the flooding problems in Yaxley and a response had been received. Although Anglian Water's response addressed the particular instance of flooding referred to in the petition, Members were not satisfied with Anglian Water's programme generally to prevent problems with the drainage system in the District from occurring and with their response to sewerage system failures. Residents in Hemingford Abbots had experienced similar problems. Other problems when the drainage system had proved inadequate were also reported. It was suggested that the Environment Agency had enforcement powers that it might use in such situations. As a result of their discussions, the Panel agreed that, as drainage problems within the District appeared to be widespread, 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.

Other Matters

The Panel has contributed to ongoing discussions on Transport for Cambridgeshire, CCTV Provision, St Ives West Urban Design Framework, the Great Fen Project, the Carbon Management Plan and the new Local Plan.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING)

- Councillor Terry Rogers - Chairman
- Councillor Steve Greenall - Vice-Chairman
- Councillor Graham Bull
- Councillor Eric Butler
- Mr Roger Hall
- Councillor Roger Harrison
- Councillor Robin Howe
- Councillor Alan MacKender-Lawrence
- Councillor Peter Mitchell
- Mrs Helen Roberts
- Councillor Michael Shellens
- Councillor Alan Williams

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 2012/13 and the MTP. As a result a number of challenges have been made to the Council's financial plans. In addition, Members of the Panel have been working with Officers on the best way to present financial information.

As part of their deliberations, the Panel has contributed to discussions on voluntary sector support for 2012/13 and have asked the Social Well-Being Panel to examine in detail the proposed policies and mechanisms for the distribution of voluntary sector funding. The Panel has recognised the importance of supporting the voluntary sector service but have been mindful of the continuing need to address the Council's budgetary deficit.

The Panel has given particular attention to the financial position of the CCTV Service. In the preceding year, there had been a suggestion that the Service would be mothballed and the Panel has been pleased to support an allocation of funding to maintain the service in 2012/13. They have asked the Social Well-Being Panel to give further consideration to the implications of potential changes arising from future budget arrangements and service plans.

Members have also considered the impact of changes to the Housing Benefit System which are being introduced as part of the Government's welfare reform programme on residents in Huntingdonshire and the District Council's Budget. The Panel will continue to monitor the situation and have asked for further information on private sector rent levels on a regular basis.

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 to review the services' financial performance and make recommendations on the future strategic direction of the Service. This Group completed its investigations in the New Year and a number of recommendations were accepted by the Cabinet, who have now asked the General Manager to draft a Business Plan for the Service.

Work is currently ongoing to investigate the most appropriate business model for the service and to develop a methodology to value the social benefit the service provides. It is hoped that this work will conclude in during 2012/13.

The Council's Support Services

Following their previous interest in the practice of re-charging between Council Services, the Panel has commenced a review of the Council's support services to form a view on their efficiency and cost effectiveness. To start the review the Panel has selected the District Council's Document Centre and appointed a working group to undertake this work on their behalf. This review is expected to conclude shortly.

Redevelopment of St Ivo Leisure Centre

The Panel has reviewed proposals to redevelop the St Ivo Leisure Centre during the course of the year. This significant development was intended to reduce the Centre's net operating costs and to increase admissions and participation levels to meet both Government and Council health agenda targets.

Prior to indicating their support for the proposals the Panel made a number of recommendations about the need for additional information and suggested that the Cabinet should undertake a review of the tenders received to assess the building costs involved and economic conditions at the time. These were accepted by the Cabinet and the Panel was given the opportunity to review the outcome of the tender exercise at the end of the year.

Other Matters

The Panel has had an input into the development of the Alconbury Enterprise Zone, the future location of the District Council's Call Centre, the review of the District Council's Human Resources, the sale of Castle Hill House and Disabled Facilities Grants. The Panel has also continued to monitor the performance of the District Council's Customer Services Centre, the development of a Countywide Asset Management Strategy and the performance achieved in investing the Council's Capital receipts.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

During 2011/12 Panel Members received both in-house and externally provided training to improve their scrutiny skills.

Cross-County events entitled 'Basic Scrutiny Skills' and 'Questioning Skills for Better Scrutiny' were held. They were delivered by officers from the Cambridgeshire Scrutiny Network and members from five councils attended. The feedback from the event was very positive.

NETWORKING

Overview and Scrutiny continues to benefit from an officer-led scrutiny network in Cambridgeshire which has been extended to Members. During 2011/12 this enabled officers and Members to share the learning from various training sessions, as well as good practice and experience.

Officers also belong to a scrutiny network for the whole of the Eastern Region. Links have been established at the national level with the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE IN 2012/13

Between them, the three Panels have begun to develop a programme of work for 2012/13. Topics already identified for possible inclusion are:

- the Council's consultation processes;
- the Council's relationship with the voluntary sector;
- the Council's waste collection and recycling arrangements;
- the Community Infrastructure Levy;
- the Council's levels of Reserves;
- Fraud Prevention;
- Drainage Problems within the District and
- Economic Development.

Studies will be completed on:

- One Leisure;
- The Tree Strategy;
- Land Use for Agricultural Purposes;
- Neighbourhood Forums;
- Design Principles for Future Developments;
- The Council's Document Centre;
- The Maintenance of Water Courses; and
- Rural Transportation.

The Panels will also following up on the studies they concluded in 2011/12 and oversee the development of the Council's Delivery Plan which will establish the key activities and performance measures that will contribute to the Council's overall aims and objectives. Performance against the Plan will be monitored by the Panels on a regular basis.

At the suggestion of the Corporate Governance Panel, the Panels will undertake a review of their effectiveness.

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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