

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SOCIAL WELL-BEING) held in Meeting Rooms 0.1 A and B, Ground Floor, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 6 November 2012.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors S Akthar, K M Baker,
P Kadewere, Ms L Kadic, M C Oliver,
J W G Pethard and R J West.

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

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors R C Carter and Mrs P A Jordan.

52. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 2nd October 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

53. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors S J Criswell, Mrs L Kadic and R J West declared non-disclosable pecuniary interests in Minute No. 12/58 by virtue of their Membership of Cambridgeshire County Council's Safer and Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

54. NOTICE OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel considered and noted the current Notice of Executive 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 November 2012 to 28th February 2013.

55. POTENTIAL MERGER BETWEEN CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND SUFFOLK FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

(Councillor F Brown, Chairman of Cambridgeshire Fire Authority, and Mr M Warren, Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Cambridgeshire Fire Authority, were in attendance for consideration of this item).

(Councillor P J Downes was in attendance for this item)

Councillor F Brown and Mr M Warren delivered a presentation to Members on the background to the consultation currently being undertaken by Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service on proposals for further collaboration up to a full merger between Cambridgeshire and Suffolk Fire and Rescue Services. By way of background,

Members were advised that the proposals had been developed because of anticipated reductions in the level of Government grant expected to be awarded to both Fire and Rescue Services in future years. It was explained that there was an expectation that the spending formula for allocating Fire Service funding would change and be less favourable for Cambridgeshire in 2013/14 and 2014/15. These financial pressures had led the Fire Authority to consider its options for further collaboration, up to a full merger, with Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service.

Members expressed the view that the consultation had been undertaken too early in light of the fact that no specific information was available at the present time. Furthermore, Members queried whether there would be a further opportunity to comment on the proposals if a business plan was produced. In response, it was reported that the exercise had been undertaken to meet central Government deadlines. It was also confirmed that a further consultation exercise would be undertaken if it was decided to proceed.

Members were informed that concerns existed over the property and fleet of the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service. They were advised of potential liabilities for these assets which were reported as being in a poor condition. Historically, Cambridgeshire had invested heavily in its assets and, therefore, a merger could be detrimental to Cambridgeshire.

Members also expressed reservations over the ability of collaboration to respond to calls in a timely manner and the associated negative impacts on the current performance levels achieved by the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service. Councillor F Brown reported that these concerns also existed within the Cambridgeshire Fire Authority. He then went on to indicate that Suffolk had advised that they were able to run their services at one third of the cost of the Cambridgeshire service. Clarification in this respect was currently being sought from Suffolk.

It was suggested that extensive investigations should continue to be undertaken by the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, with a view to ensuring that any decisions made in the future were for the benefit of Cambridgeshire residents. Members expressed strong views that a sound business plan, which demonstrated financial and operational resilience, was required before any final decisions were made. Whilst it was reported that preliminary enquiries with other neighbouring Fire Authority areas had not elicited any interest in collaboration, Members were of the view that this option should further be explored by the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Given that the consultation period would close on 14th January 2013, it was agreed that a draft response to the consultation would be submitted back to the Panel's meeting in December 2012.

Having thanked Councillor F Brown and Mr M Warren for their attendance at the meeting, it was

RESOLVED

that a draft response to the consultation undertaken by Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service on the proposals for further collaboration up to a full merger between Cambridgeshire and Suffolk Fire and Rescue Services be submitted to the Panel's next meeting.

56. HUNTINGDONSHIRE CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

(Councillor T D Sanderson, Executive Member for Healthy and Active Communities, and Mr M Mealing, Chairman of the Huntingdonshire Citizens Advice Bureau, were in attendance for consideration of this item).

(Councillor P J Downes was in attendance for this item).

Pursuant to Minute No.12/46, the Panel received a further update on recent developments in connection with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) in Huntingdonshire. In so doing, Mr M Mealing, Chairman of the CAB reported that the CAB Board would be meeting with the organisation's potential liquidators the following week with a view to determining the final steps to be taken to wind down the organisation. Whilst it had originally been anticipated that a service would be provided until December 2012, it was now likely that it would cease to operate at the end of November 2012. Assurances were delivered that the existing client base was continuing to be serviced; however, new clients were referred to other service providers, including neighbouring CABs.

The Community Health Manager then provided an outline of the Council's new voluntary sector funding arrangements, which would take effect from 1st April 2013 onwards. Five submissions had been received from various organisations to deliver advice and information services across the District. All funding applications received would be determined by the relevant Executive Members at the end of the month. A challenge remained to secure the service until 31st March 2013. Whilst some expressions of interest had been received in taking on this temporary role, it was reported that this matter would be reviewed pending the outcome of Executive Members' deliberations on the voluntary sector funding applications. Particular consideration would need to be given to the interim arrangements for December 2012.

The Panel discussed a number of matters including the storage arrangements for confidential files held by the CAB, the requirement for successful funding applications to offer District-wide services, the value placed upon the CAB's volunteers, the organisation's pension liabilities, the utilisation of surplus funding to assist with the interim arrangements and the importance of maintaining positive communications with the public.

Having thanked the Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities, the Community Health Manager and Mr M Mealing for their attendance at the meeting, it was agreed that a further update would be provided at the Panel's meeting in December 2012.

57. HUNTINGDONSHIRE TOWN AND PARISH CHARTER

(Councillor T D Sanderson, Executive Member for Healthy and Active Communities, was in attendance for consideration of this item).

With the aid of a report by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was apprised of details of the draft Huntingdonshire Town and Parish Charter, which was currently in its early stages of development.

In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities reported upon the background to the Charter, which had emerged as a result of the Localism Act 2012. A Parish Charter Working Group had been established, comprising representatives of the three tiers of local government to develop the Charter document. The Community Health Manager reported that owing to delays by the Department for Communities and Local Government in the publication of guidance on neighbourhood planning and the Community Infrastructure Levy, the Charter could not yet be finalised. It was expected that the document would obtain the Cabinet's endorsement in April 2013.

Members were encouraged to note that positive support had been received from the Town and Parish Councils on the Charter, which outlined how the three tiers of local government would work together for the benefit of the local community whilst recognising and respecting their individual rights as separate democratic bodies. Following a suggestion made by the Chairman, it was agreed that reference to the pilot Local Joint Committee in North Huntingdonshire should be included within the document.

A Member then suggested that each Town and Parish Council should appoint a "champion" to embed the Charter within their respective organisations. It was held that this would help them to embrace and gain an understanding of Localism. Furthermore, through the Charter, Parishes could be encouraged to adopt a more holistic vision of their communities, such as taking a more active interest in the health and wellbeing needs of their residents and including measures for their promotion within their community plans.

Other matters that were discussed included the level of engagement with all Town and Parish Councils on the proposed Charter, including the feedback received, the proposed extension to the number of days given to Town and Parish Councils to comment upon planning applications and the importance of communication between the three tiers of local government.

RESOLVED

that the content of the report now submitted be noted.

58. CONSIDERATION OF DOMESTIC ABUSE JOINT MEMBER LED REVIEW: FINAL REPORT

(See Members' Interests)

Pursuant to Minute No. 12/33, the Panel received a report by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) outlining the feedback received from the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership on the findings of the joint Member-led review on domestic abuse by Cambridgeshire County Council and Huntingdonshire and Fenland District Councils.

Whilst the Partnership has expressed their support for a number of the recommendations arising from the review, the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services who was also the Chairman of the Partnership, reported upon her concerns relating to the action plan which had been reproduced for the Domestic Abuse Steering Group. It was felt that too much emphasis had been placed upon promoting the Domestic Abuse Partnership and that instead there should have been more focus on clients and achieving outcomes. In noting that the Chairman of the Partnership had been invited to join the Steering Group, the Panel supported a suggestion that she should seek to refocus the Action Plan in the way which was suggested. An area of particular concern to Huntingdonshire was the level of repeat cases of domestic abuse. As this currently represented 40% of cases, it was suggested that it should be adopted as a priority.

Members' attention was drawn to the fact that the District Council's only funding for domestic abuse was through the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership. In light of the fact that this funding would not be available next year, there was little chance of establishing a pooled budget with contributions from the District Council. Furthermore, it was noted that there currently was no invest-to-save justification for the District Council to fund measures to reduce domestic abuse as costs were only incurred when victims presented themselves to the Council as homeless and this equated to around 6% of homelessness applications received. The Panel, therefore, endorsed a suggestion that the Executive Leader of the Council, as the District Council's representative on the Police and Crime Panel, should exert influence on the Police and Crime Commissioner to fund measures to tackle domestic abuse.

The Panel agreed that in order that all relevant organisations' practices relating to domestic abuse were as efficient and effective as possible, there should be improved links between those working in the field of domestic abuse and social services. It was therefore concluded that there should be appropriate representation at Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership meetings, with the Area Manager for Localities and Partnerships and a representative of Social Services attending meetings.

In their concluding remarks, Members indicated their wish to have sight of the County Council's Scrutiny review next year of progress against the study's recommendations. Members also concurred with a suggestion that they should revisit this matter as part of their annual scrutiny of the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership.

RESOLVED

that the report now submitted be noted.

59. CAMBRIDGESHIRE ADULTS, WELLBEING AND HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A brief update was delivered by Councillor R J West on the meeting of the Cambridgeshire Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25th October 2012. He drew attention to the fact that the Committee had discussed changes to emergency services proposed by East of England Ambulance Services NHS Trust, received a presentation from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Groups on governance, accountability and patient and public involvement and considered an update on the Cambridgeshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

60. 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) which contained details of studies being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Economic Well-Being and for Environmental Well-Being.

61. 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 upon the outcome of a joint scrutiny meeting held the previous day with Members from the County Council's Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss the financial performance and operational activities of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital. A copy of the notes from this meeting were tabled and are also appended in the Minute Book.

Members were informed that a meeting of the Corporate Plan Working Group would be held on 12th November 2012 to refine further the Council Delivery Plan and to consider future monitoring arrangements.

The Panel agreed to remove the potential future study on Gypsy and Traveller Welfare from the Panel's work programme as this was expected to be addressed within the new Local Plan.

62. SCRUTINY

The 128th Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

Chairman