
Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being)

**Report of the meeting held on 6th November and
4th December 2012**

Matters for Information

**31. POTENTIAL MERGER BETWEEN CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND
SUFFOLK FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES**

At the meeting in November 2012, Councillor F Brown, Chairman of the Fire Authority, and Mr M Warren, Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Cambridgeshire Fire Authority, delivered a presentation to Members on proposals for further collaboration up to a full merger between Cambridgeshire and Suffolk Fire and Rescue Services. The proposal has emerged in response to anticipated reductions in the level of Government grant expected to be awarded to both Fire and Rescue Services in future years. It is expected that the spending formula for allocating Fire Service funding will change and be less favourable for Cambridgeshire in 2013/14 and 2014/15. This has led the Fire Authority to consider the options for further collaboration, up to a full merger, with Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service.

The consultation is undertaken to meet Central Government deadlines. However, the Panel is of the view that the consultation is being undertaken too early as no specific information is available at the present time. Members have queried whether there will be a further opportunity to comment on the proposals if it is decided to proceed. An undertaking has been received that in this case a further consultation exercise will take place once a business plan has been developed.

The property and fleet arrangements of the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service are of particular concern to the Panel given that there is a potential liability associated with assets held by Suffolk, which are reported as being in a poor condition. Historically, Cambridgeshire invests heavily in all of its assets and Members are concerned that the proposals for a merger might be to the detriment of Cambridgeshire.

Concerns also exist over future service provision and the ability of a merged organisation to respond to calls for service in a timely manner, without impacting negatively upon the current performance levels achieved by the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service. These concerns also exist within the Cambridgeshire Fire Authority.

Suffolk has indicated that they run their services at one third of the cost of the Cambridgeshire service. Clarification in this respect is currently being sought.

At the December meeting, the Panel has endorsed a draft response to the consultation. It has been suggested that the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service should continue to undertake extensive investigations, with a view to ensuring that any decisions made in the future are for the benefit of Cambridgeshire residents. The Panel supports the principle of working with other Fire and Rescue Services but feels that there should be a long term vision. Members have expressed strong views that a sound business plan, which demonstrates financial and operational resilience, will be required before any final decision is made. The Panel is of the view that further enquiries should also be made with other neighbouring Fire Authorities on whether collaborative working might be feasible. The response has been submitted to the Fire Authority.

32. HUNTINGDONSHIRE CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

Pursuant to Item No. 24 of their Report to Council, the Panel has received further updates on recent developments relating to the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and the provision of advice services in Huntingdonshire at each of its meetings. Mr M Mealing, Chairman of the CAB has been in attendance at these meetings.

The CAB Board has met with the organisation's liquidators to consider the final steps to wind down the organisation. The organisation ceased to operate at the end of November 2012. As the Money Advice Service is separate from the Huntingdonshire CAB, the service they provide is not affected by the CAB's decisions. A service will continue to be provided until 21st December 2012.

An outline of the Council's new voluntary sector funding arrangements has been delivered. The new arrangements will take effect from 1st April 2013. Five submissions from various organisations to deliver advice and information services across the District have been received and the relevant Executive Members took decisions on them on 21st November 2012. The terms of the current service level agreements with the Huntingdonshire CAB prevent the decision from being formally announced before 8th December 2012. Rural Cambs CAB has been identified as the preferred bidder. Its bid will provide for a four day service in Huntingdon and a three day service in St Neots. Debt advice services will be provided at both locations on one day each week. In addition, a three hour outreach session will be provided in Yaxley, St Neots and St Ives on a rotation basis with email, telephone and web advisory services provided alongside front line services. Once the formal announcement is made, steps will then be taken to provide interim services for the period January to March 2013 inclusive. An approach is expected to be made to the successful bidder.

The Panel has expressed concerns over the process adopted to determine the applications received under the new voluntary sector

funding arrangements. Assurances have been delivered by the Executive Leader and Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities that due process has been followed and that the preferred bidder will be able to meet the needs of the District.

It has been agreed that the Voluntary Sector Working Group, previously established by the Panel, will take part in regular review meetings with the successful bidder and the Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities to monitor the performance of the service. Whilst six monthly meetings are suggested, it has been agreed that more frequent meetings could be held if necessary.

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

On behalf of the Council, the Executive Leader has placed on record his thanks to Mr Mealing and the Huntingdonshire CAB for their efforts over the years.

33. HUNTINGDONSHIRE TOWN AND PARISH CHARTER

The Panel has considered the draft Huntingdonshire Town and Parish Charter which will enable local government in Huntingdonshire to respond to the Localism Act 2012. The Charter outlines how the three tiers of local government will work together for the benefit of the local community whilst recognising and respecting their individual rights as separate democratic bodies.

A Parish Charter Working Group, comprising representatives of the three tiers of local government has been established to develop the Charter document. Owing to delays with the publication of guidance by the Department for Communities and Local Government on neighbourhood planning and the Community Infrastructure Levy, the Charter cannot yet be finalised. The document is expected to obtain the Cabinet's endorsement in April 2013. Positive support for the Charter has been received from the Town and Parish Councils.

At the Panel's request, reference to the pilot Local Joint Committee in North Huntingdonshire will be included within the document. The Panel has also suggested that Town and Parish Councils should appoint a "champion" to assist with the successful embedding of the Charter within their respective organisations. This will help Parishes to embrace and gain an understanding of the localism concept. It is the Panel's view that Parishes need to have 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 this within their community plans.

The Panel has discussed a number of matters including the level of engagement with all Town and Parish Councils on the proposed Charter together with 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.

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

The Panel has received feedback 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. The Partnership has concerns about the action plan, which has been produced for the Domestic Abuse Steering Group. It is felt that too much emphasis is placed upon promoting the Domestic Abuse Partnership and that the focus should be on domestic abuse victims and achieving outcomes. As a member of the Steering Group, the Chairman of the Partnership will seek to change the Action Plan in the way which has been suggested. Of particular concern to Huntingdonshire is the level of repeat, as this currently represents 40% of cases. Members are of the view that this should feature in the Action Plan.

The District Council's only funding for domestic abuse is that granted to the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership. This funding will be withdrawn next year and there is little chance that the recommendation which was approved by the County Council's Cabinet that a pooled budget is established with contributions from the District Council will be delivered. Moreover, there currently is no invest-to-save case for the District Council to find funding for domestic abuse, as the only cost incurred is when such victims present themselves as homeless to the Council. This equates to around 6% of homelessness applications received. It is suggested 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 provide funding for domestic abuse.

The Panel is of the view that in order that all relevant organisations' practices relating to domestic abuse are as efficient and effective as possible, there should be improved links between domestic abuse and social services. It is felt that there should be appropriate representation on the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership with the Area Manager for Localities and Partnerships and a representative of Social Services attending these meetings.

The Panel will have sight of the County Council's Scrutiny review next year and will revisit this matter as part of its annual scrutiny of the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership.

35. NHS CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH: FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT

Owing to concerns relating to the financial and operational performance of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital, the Panel has received a presentation from Ms S Shuttlewood, representative of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group, explaining the Commissioning Group's role in monitoring the performance of the Hospital.

She has explained that a rigorous contractual performance regime has been adopted to ensure the standards required of the Hospital are delivered. Of the 46 acute providers in the County, Hinchingsbrooke's performance is rated at 8th place. The Hospital could be penalised financially if it is felt that they are not adhering to the terms of the contract or implementing appropriate remedial action. Areas of current concern include the recent norovirus outbreak and its impact upon the availability of bed space without resulting in delays in waiting times within the Accident and Emergency Department, performance against targets for treating cancer patients and the anticipated financial deficit expected at the end of the current financial year.

The Panel has discussed a number of matters including the powers held by the Commissioning Group, the requirement to report upon national health standards, the recent award received by the Maternity Unit, the cleanliness standards of the Hospital, the risks associated with the imposition of financial penalties on the Hospital, current issues with the Ambulance Service, delayed discharges, the availability of care in the community services and the Commissioning Group's relationship with Circle Healthcare. The Panel has further sought clarification on the reasons for the reported financial deficit and discussed the Hospital's progress against the Quality, Innovation, Prevention and Productivity programme.

Regular reports will continue to be provided on the Hospital. Councillors S J Criswell, P Kadewere, M Oliver and R J West, together with Mr R Coxhead, have been appointed on to a Joint Working Group with representatives of the County Council's Cambridgeshire Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to pursue further these investigations.

36. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT

In conjunction with the Cabinet, the Panel considered a proposal to adopt a new local Council Tax Support scheme for the District. This scheme will supersede the current national Council Tax Benefit scheme on 1st April 2013.

The Executive Councillor for Customer Services has acquainted Members with the proposals and drawn their attention to the impact of the scheme upon the District whilst providing a comparison of it with the Government's proposed transitional scheme. The draft scheme has been subject to consultation in late summer, which has resulted

in changes being made relating to the backdating of payments for up to six months and to the capital limit, which will remain at the existing Council Tax Benefit level of £16,000. These changes have been incorporated within the new scheme.

The Panel has discussed at some length the impact of the proposals upon Town and Parish precepts. Members appreciate the difficulties faced by the Head of Customer Services in providing accurate estimates on Council Tax calculations, as they depend on a Government announcement expected on 13th December 2012. Town and Parish Councils have been advised by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils to defer setting their precepts until this announcement has been made. It has been agreed that a report outlining the impact of this process on Town and Parish Councils will be made available to Members in February 2013.

The Panel has discussed the group's who will no longer be affected by the new scheme; namely those in receipt of Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment Support Allowance. Members have also considered the recommendation contained within the Equality Impact Assessment relating to the definition of vulnerable groups. As a result, legal opinion is to be obtained on this matter.

At the conclusion of their deliberations, the Panel has endorsed the content of the proposed Council Tax Support Scheme for Huntingdonshire.

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

Councillor R J West has updated the Panel on matters currently being considered by the Cambridgeshire Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, including emergency services proposals for the East of England Ambulance Services NHS Trust, Clinical Commissioning and the Cambridgeshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy. He has also drawn attention to a subsequent meeting of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Working Group on Mental Health Services Across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough where consideration was given to the Joint Commissioning Draft Strategy for the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Adults of Working Age.

Other Matters of Interest

38. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SOCIAL WELL-BEING) – PROGRESS

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies at each of its meetings. Members have agreed to remove the potential future study on Gypsy and Traveller Welfare from its work programme as it is expected that the matter will be addressed within the new Local Plan. Updates have been received on recent meetings of the

Corporate Plan and Social Value Working Groups and the Neighbourhood Forums Working Group has reiterated their wish to be involved in the North Huntingdonshire pilot Local Joint Committee.

39. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel has received details of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

40. NOTICE OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel has been acquainted with the current Notice of Executive Decisions at each of its meetings.

41. SCRUTINY

The Panel has considered the latest editions of the Decision Digest and discussed matters contained therein.

S J Criswell
Chairman