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## **Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being)**

**Report of the meetings held on 8th January and  
5th February 2013**

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### **Matters for Information**

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**42. HOUSING BENEFIT CHANGES AND THE POTENTIAL IMPACT  
ON HUNTINGDONSHIRE**

The Panel has continued to monitor the effect of Government changes to the Housing Benefits system arising from the Welfare Reform Act. Transitional protection arrangements for Housing Benefit claimants ceased in December 2012 and the impact of this is not yet known as only a small number of claimants have made contact with the Council to date.

It is not yet known whether there will be an increase in demand for services. The Panel has been assured that efforts will continue to be made to contact those who will experience a significant reduction in their benefit entitlement. Changes to the way Housing Benefit is calculated for adults of working age and the introduction of a new local Council Tax Support scheme for the District will start to affect social housing tenants from April 2013.

Members have discussed the extent to which the Council is able to subsidise private sector rents for those households faced with the threat of eviction, the use of MTP funding to prevent homelessness, the process undertaken by the Council to identify claimants at risk and the awareness raising activities being pursued in conjunction with Partners on the impact of the reforms. Other matters discussed include the Council's current performance in preventing households from becoming homeless and the difficulties faced by the Council because some private sector landlords are reluctant to accept tenants in receipt of housing benefit in their properties.

**43. LOCAL PLAN 2036 – PROVISION OF SOCIAL AND  
AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND IMPACT UPON HOMELESSNESS**

The Panel has received an outline of how the new Local Plan will help to address housing and homelessness needs within the District. The Council has had previous successes in reducing the levels of homelessness and increasing the number of affordable homes within the District. It will be challenging to continue this in the future. It is hoped that some progress will be made over the next 2-3 years by

encouraging new developments and the opportunities arising from the Local Enterprise Zone.

The Council has a statutory duty to prevent households from becoming homeless. Homelessness currently is increasing in the District. At present 95 households are accommodated within Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The options available to the Council to prevent homelessness include re-letting existing housing stock and housing individuals through the new affordable homes programme and the private rented sector. The new Local Plan is expected to bring forward housing in the future. Rural housing opportunities have also arisen through the National Planning Policy Framework and the community planning process.

The Panel has been acquainted with current developments in planning policy and the restrictions placed by the Government on the Council. Attempts will be made by the Planning Service to ensure the delivery of affordable housing over the next few years however this will continue to be difficult in the current financial climate. A number of large scale strategic sites are planned for the District in the future, but these often take between 5-7 years from original concept to occupation.

Other matters discussed by the Panel include the influence that developers and landowners have over the market, whether or not there is demand for retirement villages, the exception that could be made to planning policy through community plans and the incentives offered to social tenants to encourage them to downsize.

Biannual updates on the provision of social and affordable housing will continue to be provided to the Panel.

#### **44. HUNTINGDON GYM**

*(The following item was considered as a confidential item under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.)*

The Panel has expressed its support in principle for a financial proposal relating to Huntingdon Olympic Gymnastics Club. Members have also been provided with an outline of the existing building's leasehold arrangements with the Town Council.

The Panel has discussed the funding options available to the Club, the risks associated with the proposal and the British Gymnastics Association's future strategic plans. Owing to the Panel's concerns about certain aspects of the proposal, a number of suggestions have been reported to the Cabinet, which are intended to alleviate some of these concerns.

**45. NOTIFICATION OF GRANT AID AWARDS FOR 2013-14 AND DETAILS OF INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS FOR ADVICE SERVICES (JANUARY – MARCH 2013)**

The decisions relating to the award of grant aid for 2013/14 and an update on the interim arrangements for advisory services during January to March 2013 have been reported to the Panel. The interim arrangements for advisory services to the end of March 2013 are in the process of being phased in, before delivery of a full service commences on 1st April 2013.

It has been confirmed that during the transition period, those seeking advice are being signposted to other service providers within the District. Members have asked for further information on the number of former Huntingdonshire CAB volunteers who have migrated over to Rural Cambs CAB, whether or not training opportunities will remain available to volunteers of the Rural Cambs CAB organisation and the level of funding awarded to the organisation for the delivery of interim advisory services.

The Panel has been reminded that all grant aid awards will be tapered and that a Community Chest of up to £30,000 has also been made available to all voluntary organisations to bid for funding for community based projects up to the value of £500. It has been confirmed that the delivery of outreach services provided by Rural Cambs CAB in St Ives, Ramsey and Yaxley has been based on previous service level data. The Voluntary Sector Working Group will monitor the performance of organisations awarded grant funding.

**46. DRAFT ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR BILL**

Owing to its duty to scrutinise the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership, the Panel's attention has been drawn to the impact of the draft Anti-Social Behaviour Bill upon the District. The Government is keen that Councils and other interested parties engage in the process of pre-legislative scrutiny and has provided local authorities with an opportunity to comment on the draft Bill. The Bill has been considered by the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership and clarification has been received on what roles various scrutiny bodies within Cambridgeshire hold in respect of the scrutiny of crime and disorder matters.

The Panel has agreed to submit a response to the Government on the proposals relating to the Community Remedy, which will enable victims to have a say in the treatment of offenders. A list of community sanctions for low level crime and anti-social behaviour will be compiled by the Police and Crime Commissioner. The Remedy will provide victims and the public with an opportunity to agree what sanctions would be meaningful. Members have expressed their support for the introduction of the Remedy but their response to the Government will stress that, where necessary, victims anonymity should be protected.

The Panel has been acquainted with other provisions contained in the draft Bill including the Community Trigger, which will enable victims of persistent anti-social behaviour to request relevant bodies to undertake case reviews and discussed the role of Registered Social Landlords in dealing with anti-social behaviour tenants. It is likely that significant changes will be made to the Bill before it is enacted.

#### **47. ANNUAL EQUALITY PROGRESS REPORT**

##### **(a) Annual Progress Report**

The Panel has noted progress towards the achievement of the Council's Single Equality Scheme and associated Action Plan both of which have been subject to prior review by the Equality Working Group. Members' attention has been drawn to the legislative background to the report and the current position with regard to the completion of Equality Impact Assessments.

The Action Plan indicates that the Diversity and Projects Officer will be made redundant at the end of March 2013. The Panel has received clarification on this Officer's role. Hate Crime reporting will transfer to the Community Safety Team. The Panel has also queried various aspects of the Equality Impact Assessments undertaken in 2012, specifically in relation to refuse and recycling round rescheduling and charging for a second green bin. It has been suggested that they should only contain matters relating to equalities as defined in the Equality Strategy.

##### **(b) Equality Working Group**

The outcome of a recent meeting of the Equality Working Group has been reported to the Panel. Since its meeting, the Working Group has reviewed information relating to Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender inequalities in Huntingdonshire and the outcome of the 2012 Employee Opinion Survey. The Working Group will continue to meet to monitor progress against the Action Plan.

#### **48. CONSULTATION PROCESSES WORKING GROUP**

The Panel has received an update from the Consultation Processes Working Group on progress of its investigations to date. Further revisions to the Strategy and Guidance have been agreed and the Working Group will meet once they have been introduced to review their effectiveness. Members' attention has been drawn to two key issues arising from the Working Group's investigations. The Panel has endorsed the view that Officers should be encouraged to populate the Consultation Calendar and Database with details of consultations they are undertaking and to evaluate them once they have been completed. Additionally, it has been agreed that an annual evaluation report summarising the consultations undertaken by the Council each year should be presented to the Panel. This will be incorporated within the Strategy and Guidance, the final drafts of

which are expected to be submitted to the Panel and Cabinet in June/July 2013.

**49. 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 the Adult Social Care Business Plan 2013/14 and the Committee's Forward Work Programme.

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**Other Matters of Interest**

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

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies at each of its meetings. Members of the Hinchingsbrooke Hospital Working Group have attended at a meeting of the Cambridgeshire Adults Well-Being and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5th February 2013 when an update on Hinchingsbrooke Hospital's progress and plans has been delivered by representatives of Hinchingsbrooke Healthcare NHS Trust, Circle and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Shadow Clinical Commissioning Group. In order for Circle to deliver a balanced budget, they had committed £3.7m of their own funding to the management of the Hospital but they expect to make a return on their investment in later years as the Hospital's financial and operational performance improves. Members' attention also has been drawn to the fact that the Hospital management agreement includes a clause enabling either party to terminate the contract.

The local press has tended to focus on some negative performance at the Hospital. Members will endeavour to obtain their own evidence from patients and staff on the impact of the changes and the level of service provided to inform the debate when representatives of the Hospital attend the Panel's meeting in March 2013. The Panel has requested an Executive Summary of the terms of the management contract to be circulated in advance of the meeting.

The Panel has been provided with an outline of the Member Seminar held prior to the Panel's February meeting on Local Clinical Commissioning Group Strategic Plans. Preliminary consideration has been given to how recent health service changes and health matters generally will be scrutinised. The options include joint working with the County Council.

It has been confirmed that Rural Cambs CAB are now delivering interim advisory services from the Town Hall, Huntingdon. Given their wish to receive an update on progress of the pilot North Huntingdonshire Local Joint Committee, the Chairman has agreed to

liaise with the Deputy Executive Leader in this respect on behalf of the Neighbourhood Forums Working Group.

**51. WORK PLAN STUDIES**

The Panel has received details of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels and has been reminded of the opportunity they have to participate in the studies should they wish.

**52. NOTICE OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS**

The Panel has been acquainted with the current Notice of Executive Decisions at each of its meetings. The Panel has requested sight of the items entitled Home Improvement Agency Shared Service – Annual Operating Service and Town and Parish Council Charter prior to their submission to the Cabinet.

**53. SCRUTINY**

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

S J Criswell  
Chairman