
Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)

Report of the meeting held on 12th February 2013

Matters for Information

47. PROCURING A GREEN DEAL PARTNER RELATIONSHIP FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE

The Panel has been acquainted with the background to the establishment of a countywide Green Deal partnership. The Home Energy Act requires all local authorities actively to promote and report on local Green Deal activity within their area whilst also playing a lead role in its delivery. Under the scheme, households can spend up to £10,000 on energy saving measures within their homes with repayments made through their energy bills. The “Golden Rule” is that repayments should not exceed the projected cost savings on an average bill for the duration of the green finance arrangement, which can be as long as 25 years for houses.

The Panel has been acquainted with the events that have led to the development of a Cambridgeshire Green Deal brand. To date, three of the participating authorities have endorsed the proposals. A joint procurement exercise will now be required in order to establish a partner relationship with a fully accredited Green Deal Provider. This will be subject to EU procurement rules but there is a desire to attract local assessors and installers to participate in the scheme. It has been confirmed that the costs of any energy improvement works will be levied upon the property and not homeowners. In the case of private rented properties, permission to carry out works will need to be sought from the landlord.

Members’ attention has been drawn to the Green Deal investment potential in Huntingdonshire together with the likely leads to be generated which is expected to produce an income of around £30,000-£60,000 per annum for the District. These projections are based on the findings of a report commissioned by the County Council. Emphasis has been put on the need for safeguards to be in place to ensure the scheme does not operate in a way that might damage the Council’s reputation.

The Panel has discussed the Energy Company Obligation (ECO), which focuses on hard to treat properties and vulnerable and fuel poor households. Funding to undertake any works to qualifying properties under the ECO will be obtained via the award of grant from the Government’s “Green Deal Pioneer Places” fund, regardless of a

household's income. The assessment will be based purely on the property itself.

The Panel has reached the conclusion that a robust methodology and associated assessment software will be required to support the accreditation and certification of energy improvement assessors and installers. This will guarantee the standard of works undertaken and the probity of the practices employed to sell them and also protect the Council's reputation. They will need to be aligned to established points of contact within the Council and communities to act as "trusted" informants about the scheme.

The Panel is also of the view that the Green Deal offer for Cambridgeshire needs to commence operation as soon as possible. While there is a need to ensure the partnership arrangements with a Green Deal provider and the offers are sound, Members are aware that other providers have started marketing their products and they do not want to miss this opportunity. Adherence to the timescales for the launch of the scheme specified in the report should ensure this does not happen.

Members have further commented that the level of referral fees should not be part of the criteria employed to select the Provider. The Provider should be selected on the basis of their ability to provide high quality energy saving measures in a responsible way to meet the needs of customers. Having discussed the role of the Environment Team in generating leads and undertaking marketing activity, the Panel has recommended the Cabinet to

- ◆ approve the establishment of a partnership of the Cambridgeshire Districts to deliver the Green Deal work proposal, subject to detailed approval of a Memorandum of Understanding between the local authorities involved at Public Service Board;
- ◆ approve a procurement exercise and subsequent award of contract(s) to one or more Green Deal Providers to be let on a Countywide basis and in collaboration with Cambridgeshire Local Authorities; and
- ◆ Authorise the Head of Paid Service and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding governing joint working and to enter into a contract with a chosen Green Deal Provider, subject to consultation with the Executive Councillor for the Environment.

The Panel has requested an update on progress of the scheme after 12 months of operation.

48. REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The outcome of a review of the effectiveness of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels undertaken by a joint Working Group comprising Members from each of the Panels has been reported to the Panel. The findings reveal that the Panels are generally acting effectively in

discharging their responsibilities and fulfilling their terms of reference. A number of opportunities for improvement have been identified and will be incorporated within an action plan that will be subject to review by the Working Group.

Matters discussed by the Panel include the "Member Champion" appointed by the Economic Well-Being Panel. It is considered that this is good practice and should be developed. Members have also commented on the role of the Panels in influencing the Cabinet's decision making, the need to generate more publicity on their work and ways of encouraging public attendance at their meetings.

Members have endorsed a recommendation that the Working Group should meet with the Executive Leader to discuss opportunities for earlier scrutiny and involvement in the formulation of policy.

49. AGRICULTURE WORKING GROUP

An in-depth study into the Council's planning policy framework as it relates to agriculture has been completed by the Agriculture Working Group. As part of their investigations, the Working Group has held discussions with local representatives of Linking Environment and Farming and of the National Farmers Union and developed a list of matters that might be addressed in Council policy. The Working Group has examined the relevant part of the draft Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 and is satisfied that the most significant issues are now covered. A number of comments have been made on the draft Policy and these will be reviewed by the Planning Service.

The Panel has been pleased to note that its recommendation relating to the Council's use of consultants when dealing with planning applications where agriculture is a factor has been accepted by the Development Management Panel.

Other Matters of Interest

50. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) - PROGRESS

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies. It has been confirmed that the Waste Collection Working Group will resume once the RECAP studies have been completed. On a related matter, Members have queried why they have not been provided with information on the new waste collection rounds, which will go live on 25th February 2013. In addition, the Panel is concerned that the Land beach Waste Management Plant is currently not operational and that this will significantly increase the level of waste directed to landfill. The Chairman has undertaken to make enquiries on behalf of the Panel in both respects and to report back thereon. Members have requested a breakdown of the current recycling figures to ascertain what the impact of the situation at Land beach has been.

51. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel has received details of the studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels. In response to a question on the investigations being undertaken by the Economic Well-Being Panel in respect of the One Leisure Business Plan, Members have been advised that the public were excluded when this matter has been considered.

52. NOTICE OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel has been acquainted with the current Notice of Executive Decisions. Items entitled Local Plan and Revision to Wind Power Supplementary Planning Document will be submitted to future meetings of the Panel.

53. SCRUTINY

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

D Harty
Chairman