

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SOCIAL WELL-BEING) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Ground Floor, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 2 April 2013.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors R C Carter, K J Churchill,
R Fuller, Mrs P A Jordan, P Kadewere,
M C Oliver, J W G Pethard and R J West.

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

APOLOGY: An Apology for absence from the meeting
was submitted on behalf of Councillor
K M Baker.

107. MINUTES

Subject to the inclusion of the words “Mr J Pye then reported that the impact of financial issues currently facing Peterborough and Stamford NHS Trust on Hinchingsbrooke Hospital was not yet known.”, at the end of the penultimate paragraph of Minute No. 12/100, the Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 5th March 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

108. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Mrs P A Jordan declared a non-disclosable pecuniary interest in Minute No. 12/110 by virtue of being an employee of the NHS.

109. 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 3rd April to 31st July 2013. The Voluntary Sector Working Group would seek permission from the Executive Councillors for Healthy and Active Communities and for Resources to have an input into the determination of the Community Chest Allocations for 2013/14.

110. HEALTHWATCH CAMBRIDGESHIRE

(Mrs R Rogers, Chairman of Healthwatch Cambridgeshire, was in attendance for consideration of this item).

The Panel received a presentation from Mrs R Rogers, Chairman of Healthwatch Cambridgeshire, on the establishment of a local Healthwatch which would replace the former Local Involvement

Network (LINK). Members were advised that the Social Care Act 2012 created a statutory requirement for every area to have a local Healthwatch. Its purpose was to act as an independent consumer champion for users of health and social care services. The Act identified other key activities in the new arrangements, which included the provision of signposting and advocacy services to the residents of Cambridgeshire. It was, however, reported that Healthwatch Cambridgeshire would not be responsible for the latter until next year. The Chairman of Healthwatch Cambridgeshire highlighted the importance of establishing good working relationships with interested stakeholders and acknowledged the challenges currently being faced by Hinchingsbrooke Hospital.

Members were advised that a consultant had been employed by Cambridgeshire County Council to assist with the establishment of Healthwatch Cambridgeshire. The consultant had performed a number of duties, which included the organisation of stakeholder engagement events. These events had successfully brought together key partners from the voluntary and community sectors.

Members noted that Healthwatch Cambridgeshire came into operation on 1st April 2013 and currently was in the final stages of becoming a Company Limited by Guarantee. A Board had been appointed comprising three Non-Executive Directors in addition to the Chairman. It was intended that the first meeting of the Board would consider a vision and priorities for the future. A Chief Executive and four Co-ordinators had also been appointed, two of whom were former LINK employees.

The Panel discussed a number of matters including the role of the Clinical Commissioning Groups in scrutinising Hinchingsbrooke Hospital, the methods of engagement to be employed by Healthwatch Cambridgeshire, the functions of Healthwatch England, proposals to develop role descriptions for volunteers, Healthwatch Cambridgeshire's accountability and reporting mechanisms with Cambridgeshire County Council and the importance of working in partnership and liaising with community and voluntary sector organisations.

In response to a question by a Member on the level of budget available, it was confirmed that Healthwatch Cambridgeshire had a two year contract with the County Council with an indicative budget of £221,000 for the 2013/14 financial year. Mrs Rogers also stated that the organisation would have a seat on the Health and Wellbeing Board and could alert Healthwatch England, the Care Quality Commission and Monitor to any concerns it might have about specific care providers or general health and social care matters. Furthermore, its representatives could enter and view services with a view to determining whether they were operating effectively. The Chairman of Healthwatch Cambridgeshire acknowledged that it would be a challenge to encourage increased levels of reporting on patient experiences to enable the organisation to fulfil its roles.

At the conclusion of the discussions, the Panel thanked the Chairman of Healthwatch Cambridgeshire for her attendance at the meeting.

111. HOUSING BENEFIT CHANGES AND THE POTENTIAL IMPACT UPON HUNTINGDONSHIRE

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) outlining the effects of Government changes to the Housing Benefits system, which were contained in the Welfare Reform Act. In introducing the report, the Head of Customer Services reported that concerns continued to exist over housing benefit claimants renting in the private sector who might not be fully aware of the impact of the changes. To date, only a small proportion of residents had contacted the Council and the fear was that claimants were building up rent arrears.

The Head of Customer Services then reported that Luminus had recruited two part-time employees to assist its tenants with moving into appropriately sized accommodation. This would help to resolve problems associated with households' over and under occupancy of their accommodation. Given that Registered Social Landlords appeared to be working in isolation from one another, the Panel suggested that a more collaborative approach to the impact of the welfare reforms should be adopted across the District.

In response to a question by a Member, the Panel was informed of how benefits were calculated for claimants wishing to sub-let a room or take in a lodger. Clarification was also provided on the level of resources that were available to help residents to deal with the consequences of the welfare reforms. Arising from the discussions, the Panel requested information on the demands on the Call Centre in this respect. This information would be circulated to Panel Members together with details of the Council's Rent Deposit scheme and the homelessness budget.

Other matters that were discussed included the correspondence produced by Registered Social Landlords to advise tenants of the reform changes, the utilisation of discretionary housing payments, the introduction of universal credits, the homelessness prevention projects being undertaken by the Council, the levels of engagement with voluntary sector organisations providing advisory services within the District, likely trends in fraud levels and associated enforcement activity and the exemptions which existed for residents with mental health problems.

Members requested that a monthly update on the welfare reforms was included within the Member's Brief newsletter. Having conveyed their gratitude to the Head of Customer Services and her Team for their efforts during the implementation of the welfare reforms, it was

RESOLVED

that the content of the report now submitted be noted.

112. SOCIAL VALUE WORKING GROUP

With the aid of a report by the Social Value Working Group (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel received an update on progress of its study to date. The Working Group had received

research information on the social, financial and health benefits of One Leisure and an attempt would now be made to attach financial values to these benefits. The next stage would then be to produce a detailed account of the methodology used to complete this work.

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

The Panel received and noted the Minutes of the meeting of the Cambridgeshire Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 5th February 2013 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). Councillor R J West reported that a further meeting of the Committee had been held earlier that day when further consideration had been given to delayed discharges and discharge planning, access to inpatient mental health care, progress against the Adult Social Care Integrated Plan 2012/13 and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group's progress and plans.

114. 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 Environmental Well-Being. Members were reminded of the opportunity they had to participate in the studies if they wished.

115. 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. In so doing, the Chairman delivered an update on the outcome of his discussions with the Deputy Executive Leader in respect of the North-West Huntingdonshire pilot Local Joint Committee. Members placed on record their disappointment that the pilot had not been effectively established in the last year. This view was also held by other Members of the Council. Comment was made that the absence of a mechanism to deal with issues on a scale greater than Ward level remained a concern. As a way forward, the Panel agreed formally to request the Cabinet to reconsider its recommendation that a series of pilot Local Joint Committees was introduced across the District.

116. SCRUTINY

The 133rd Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

Chairman