
Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being)

Report of the meeting held on 4th June 2013

Matters for Information

1. HUNTINGDONSHIRE TOWN AND PARISH CHARTER AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR COMPACT

The Panel has considered the content of a Huntingdonshire Town and Parish Charter and a Voluntary Sector Compact for Huntingdonshire. Both documents are subject to final agreement with Town and Parish Councils and the voluntary and community sector in Huntingdonshire. They aim to achieve the objectives of the Localism Act 2011 by establishing a framework to allow the County, District, Town and Parish Councils and the voluntary and community sector to work together in partnership to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the District for the benefit of the local community.

The County Secretary of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils and the Chief Executive of the Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations have explained the benefits of both documents and the obligations placed upon the three tiers of local government and the voluntary and community sectors to cooperate with one another. It has been acknowledged that both documents will evolve with time given that the essence of localism is to promote cultural change. It has been suggested that the Charter document should refer to Local Joint Committees as an example of an appropriate forum through which to engage with communities.

Huntingdonshire is the most advanced of the district level authorities in Cambridgeshire in developing a Charter and Compact. The others are looking to Huntingdonshire to guide the introduction of their own documents. The Panel has discussed the levels of engagement with both the Town and Parish Councils and the voluntary and community sectors, which are held to be encouraging.

The Panel has been acquainted with the County Council's commitment to and support for both documents, the benefits that a local Compact might bring to the voluntary and community sectors such as the encouragement of more open and transparent procedures and the challenges that will arise to embed new working practices within organisations. Members have stressed the need to be mindful of the existing pressures placed upon Town and Parish Councils, the importance of identifying Compact Champions to

encourage acceptance of the agreement within organisations, the advantages of employing closer working practices between organisations and the outcomes that the Compact document will achieve for the end user.

In noting that the documents have yet to be formally endorsed by the District, Town and Parish Councils and the voluntary and community sectors, the Panel has requested sight of both documents again in September 2013 prior to their submission to the Cabinet. In addition, it was agreed that the Panel will have a role to play in monitoring the implementation of the Charter and Compact. How this work is undertaken will be determined by the Panel at a later date.

2. HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY SHARED SERVICE REVIEW AND DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT BUDGET

The outcome of a review of the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) shared service following one year of operation and the on-going demand for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) has been reported to the Panel. The service has experienced some problems in the first six months but these issues have now been resolved. The Deputy Executive Leader has reiterated the commitment made by the Council to support the delivery of DFGs and the difficulties faced by the authority in forecasting future levels of demand with the financial impact this has on the Council.

The Panel has been acquainted with background to the establishment of the shared service. DFGs are only awarded for adaptation works in excess of £1,000. Following longstanding problems in the area, successes have been achieved in reducing the waiting times for Occupational Therapists (OT) from eight months in March 2012 to four months in March 2013. In that context Members' attention has been drawn to the HIA's progress against its agreed key objectives and the work plan that will guide its activities over the course of the ensuing year. The latter will include improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the service through measures such as introducing competitive tendering for equipment and for the procurement of adaptation works from local businesses.

Despite the improvements made to reduce OT waiting times, the Panel is keen to see further reductions in the future. Four months is likely to appear to applicants to be a significant time to wait. The HIA Manager intends to prioritise further improving these times. In addition, there is some concern over the impending dissolution of Cambridgeshire Community Services and the future OT service provision. Meetings are being held with relevant parties to address this matter.

The Panel has discussed a number of matters including the feedback received from clients who have had works carried out on their homes, which reveals very high levels of satisfaction with the service they have received. Members have also considered a suggestion that homeowners might be encouraged to utilise the value of their properties as a means of funding adaptations in the future, the

reasons why only 70% of DFG applications are fully completed, the point at which OT assessments are undertaken, the charges placed on properties where owner occupiers receive a DFG in excess of £10,000 for adaptations relating to garage or outbuilding conversions and/or extensions and the point in the process at which applicants are means tested. On the latter, the Panel has expressed the view that means testing should take place at the start of the process so that works are not undertaken on cases that do not proceed because the applicant is not eligible for assistance.

With regard to the DFG budget, clarification has been received that "HIA earned fee income" refers to the 10% of the capital grant that the Council pays to the HIA for running the service. The Chairman of the Economic Well-Being Panel attended the meeting for this item and he commented on the need for the Council to review its commitment to financing DFG adaptations in the future. He also suggested that the budget forecast should be reviewed to reflect a more realistic view of demand. Past trends show a continuous increase in demand and, given projected demographic changes, this increase is likely to continue in the future. Finally, he requested that when the review of contractor lists is undertaken, the option of establishing an in-house service to carry out adaptation works should be explored.

3. CAMBRIDGESHIRE ADULTS, WELL-BEING AND HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor R J West has reported that an induction meeting for the Cambridgeshire Adults, Well-Being and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be held on 11th June with the first meeting of the Committee to be held on 18th July 2013.

4. WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel has been provided with an opportunity to establish its work priorities for 2013/14 and to review its current work programme. In doing so, attention has been drawn to the functions and responsibilities of the Corporate Governance and Employment Panels.

Members have noted progress of the recent review of the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny and endorsed the content of an Overview and Scrutiny Protocol. The Protocol provides a framework for the conduct of overview and scrutiny within the Council and will promote closer working with the Executive and senior management.

The Panel has reviewed the membership of each of its Working Groups and made changes as necessary. The study on Social Value is nearing completion and the findings will be reported to the Panel in due course.

Having considered the addition of new subject areas to the Panel's work programme, it has been agreed to establish a Working Group to undertake a review of elderly patient care at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital

and Members have been appointed to a Working Group for this purpose. This work will be undertaken in conjunction with the Hospital and public views will be elicited as part of the study. Other areas for inclusion within the Panel's work programme include an update on the redesign of mental health services and Ambulance Service provision. Representatives of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group will be in attendance at the Panel's September 2013 meeting to deliver an update on the former.

Given that the Panel has developed its health scrutiny role and that there are a range of data sources available, Members have requested a report be submitted to a future meeting on health trends across the District.

Other Matters of Interest

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

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies. It has been agreed at a recent meeting of the Executive Leader's Strategy Group that the Panel's previous proposals to establish Local Joint Committees (LJCs) will be revisited. Whilst there is support for the model proposed, the Executive Leader has stressed that it will be permissive thereby allowing local communities to establish LJCs for themselves. It will be for groups of Parishes to organise, pay for and service the LJCs. The Council will recognise them as legitimate forums with which to engage. A report to this effect will be submitted to the Cabinet in due course.

The Panel has agreed to widen the scope of its work relating to the Local Plan 2036 in respect of social and affordable housing to include supported housing. It will, for example, look at the opportunities that exist for housing developments to include bungalows for elderly residents. Members have also requested Officers to liaise with the relevant Lead Officer of the Children and Young Peoples Thematic Group with a view to enquiring when she will be in a position to deliver a presentation on the Group's work at a future meeting.

6. WORK PLAN STUDIES

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

7. NOTICE OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel has been acquainted with the current Notice of Executive Decisions. Members of the Voluntary Sector Working Group will be

provided with an opportunity to comment on the Community Chest Allocations 2013/14 when details are circulated around to all Members prior to a decision being made by the Executive Councillors for Resources and Healthy and Active Communities on 27th June 2013.

8. SCRUTINY

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

S J Criswell
Chairman