

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SOCIAL WELL-BEING) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 4 June 2013.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors R C Carter, I J Curtis, R Fuller,
C R Hyams, Mrs P A Jordan, P Kadewere,
S M Van De Kerkhove, 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 Councillors
K M Baker.

6. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Panel held on 2nd April and 15th May 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

7. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor C R Hyams declared a non-disclosable pecuniary interest in Minute No. 13/09 by virtue of his membership of Huntingdon Town Council.

Councillor Mrs P A Jordan declared a non-disclosable pecuniary interest in Minute No. 13/10 by virtue of being an employee of the NHS.

8. 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 1st June to 31st December 2013. Members of the Voluntary Sector Working Group would be provided with an opportunity to comment on the Community Chest Allocations 2013/14 when details were 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.

9. HUNTINGDONSHIRE TOWN AND PARISH CHARTER AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR COMPACT

(Mrs J Farrow, Chief Executive of Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations, and Mr I Dewar, County Secretary for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils, were in attendance

for consideration of this item).

With the aid of a report prepared by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was acquainted with the terms of the Huntingdonshire Town and Parish Charter and Voluntary Sector Compact for Huntingdonshire. Both documents were still subject to final agreement with town and parish councils and the voluntary and community sectors in Huntingdonshire.

In introducing the report, the Healthy Communities Manager reported that both documents set out to achieve the objectives of the Localism Act 2011 by establishing a framework to allow the County and District Councils, town and parish councils and the voluntary and community sectors to work together in partnership to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of Huntingdonshire for the benefit of the local community. The County Secretary for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils and the Chief Executive of the Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations then delivered an explanation of 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 was acknowledged that both documents would evolve with time given that the essence of localism was to promote cultural change. As the Cabinet would be reviewing its previous decision in respect of Local Joint Committees (LJCs), it was suggested that reference should be made within the Charter document to LJCs as an example of an appropriate forum in which to engage with communities.

In response to a question raised by a Member, it was confirmed that to date, Huntingdonshire was the only Cambridgeshire authority to have developed Charter and Compact documents. Neighbouring local authorities were now looking to Huntingdonshire to guide the introduction of their own documents. Following a brief discussion on engagement with both the town and parish councils and the voluntary and community sectors, Panel Members were encouraged to note the participation levels which had been achieved during the process to develop the documents.

In response to questions, the Panel received details of the County Council's commitment to and support for both documents, the benefits that a local Compact would bring to the voluntary and community sectors such as the encouragement of more open and transparent procedures and the challenges that would arise to embed new working practices within organisations. Members stressed the need to be mindful of the existing pressures on 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 would result in for the end user.

In noting that the documents were yet to be formally endorsed by the local authorities and the voluntary and community sectors, it was agreed that Members would have sight of them again in September 2013 prior to their submission to the Cabinet. In addition, it was

agreed that the Panel would monitor the implementation of both documents; however, the form that this work would take would be determined at a future meeting.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the content of the report now submitted be noted; and
- (b) that the Panel have further sight of the Charter and Compact in September 2013 prior to their submission to the Cabinet.

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

(Councillor N J Guyatt, Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, and Councillor T V Rogers, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being), were in attendance for consideration of this item).

(At 7.10pm, during discussion on this item, Councillor S M Van De Kerkhove took his seat at the meeting).

Consideration was given to a report by the Housing Strategy Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the outcome of a review of the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) shared service following one year of operation and on the on-going demand for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs).

In introducing the report, the Deputy Executive Leader explained that the HIA was the first shared service to be introduced by the Council. Whilst some problems had been experienced in the first six months, the service currently was operating as intended and in some respects his expectations had been exceeded. He went on to reiterate the commitment made by the Council to meet the demand for DFGs. Finally, he referred to the difficulties faced by the authority in forecasting future levels of demand and the implications of this for the Council's financial planning.

The Housing Strategy Manager reminded the Panel of the background to the establishment of the shared HIA service. She reported that DFGs were only awarded for adaptation works in excess of £1,000. Members were encouraged to note the successes which had been achieved in reducing the waiting times for Occupational Therapists (OT) from eight months in March 2012 to four months in March 2013. The length of time applicants had to wait for assessments had been a longstanding problem. Members' attention was then drawn to the HIA's progress against its agreed key objectives and the work plan which would guide its work over the course of the ensuing year. It was reported that the latter included improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the service through measures such as the introduction of competitive tendering for equipment and the procurement of adaptation works from local businesses.

Despite the improvements which had been made to reduce OT waiting times, Members were of the opinion that further reductions should be sought. The view was held that four months was likely to appear to applicants to be a significant time to wait. In response, the Housing Strategy Manager reported that this was a priority for the HIA Manager. In addition, Members had some concern over effect of the impending dissolution of Cambridgeshire Community Services on the future of OT service provision. It was reported that meetings were being held with relevant parties to address the matter. Furthermore it was confirmed that to assist with the current backlog of casework in Huntingdonshire an additional Surveyor had been appointed on a temporary contract within the HIA.

The Panel discussed a number of matters including the feedback received from clients who had works carried out on their homes which revealed very high levels of satisfaction with the service received, 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 were completed, the point at which OT assessments should be undertaken, the charges placed on properties where owner occupiers received 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 were means tested. In terms of the latter, the Panel expressed the view that means testing should take place at the start of the process so that works were not undertaken on cases which did not proceed because the applicant was not eligible for assistance.

Having regard to the DFG budget, clarification was received of the source of "HIA earned fee income" which referred to the 10% capital grant that the Council paid to the HIA for running the service. Councillor T V Rogers commented on the need for the Council to review its commitment to financing DFG adaptations in the future. It was also suggested that the budget forecast should be reviewed to reflect a more realistic view of demand given that past trends revealed a continuous increase in need and, given projected demographic changes, this was likely to continue in the future. Finally, it was suggested that when the review of contractor lists was undertaken, the option of establishing an in-house service to carry out adaptation works should be explored. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the content of the report now submitted be noted;
- (b) that it be noted that additional modelling of current and future demand will be undertaken over the summer to feed into the Council's Medium Term Plan process in September 2013; and
- (c) that a further report be submitted to the Panel after two years of Cambs Home Improvement Agency (HIA) operation.

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

The Panel received and noted the Minutes of the Cambridgeshire Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19th March 2013 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). Councillor R J West reported that an induction meeting for the Cambridgeshire Adults, Well-Being and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be held on 11th June 2013, with the first meeting of the Committee scheduled to be held on 18th July 2013.

12. WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which provided Members with an opportunity to establish their work priorities for 2013/14. In doing so, Members' attention was drawn to the functions and responsibilities of the Corporate Governance and Employment Panels.

In noting the outcome of the recent review of the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny, the Panel endorsed the content of an Overview and Scrutiny Protocol which provided a framework for the conduct of overview and scrutiny within the Council and the promotion of closer working with the Executive and senior management.

Having received a brief update on the work of each of the Panel's Working Groups, Members undertook a review of their memberships and made changes as necessary. It was reported that the study on Social Value was nearing completion and that the findings would be reported to the Panel in due course.

Having considered the addition of new subject areas to the Panel's work programme, Members agreed to include a review of elderly patient care at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital as a future study area. The suggestion for the study had emerged following concerns raised by Members on the basis of their own experiences and feedback received from residents over the level of care provided to elderly patients at the Hospital. It was agreed that a Working Group would be established for this purpose. The Chairman indicated that he currently was liaising with the Franchise Manager at the Hospital with a view to determining the way forward for the study. It was also intended to elicit public views on patient experiences at the Hospital as part of the investigations. Other areas for inclusion within the Panel's work programme were the receipt of an update on the redesign of mental health services and ambulance services. Having regard to the former, it was confirmed that representatives of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group would be in attendance at the Panel's September 2013 meeting to deliver the update that had been requested.

Given that the Panel had developed its health scrutiny role over the previous few years and in noting that health data was available from a large range of sources, the Panel requested that a report was submitted to a future meeting on health trends across the District.

Having noted Councillor R J West's wish to step down from the Voluntary Sector Working Group, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the content of the report now submitted be noted;
- (b) that a review of elderly patient care at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital and ambulance services be included as new subject areas in the Panel's programme of studies;
- (c) that Councillor P W G Pethard be appointed to the Equality Working Group;
- (d) that Councillor C R Hyams be appointed to the Joint Hinchingsbrooke Hospital Working Group;
- (e) that Councillor R C Carter be appointed to the Voluntary Sector Working Group;
- (f) that Councillors S J Criswell, I C Curtis, C R Hyams, Mrs P A Jordan, P Kadewere, J W G Pethard and R J West together with Mr R Coxhead be appointed to a Working Group tasked with undertaking a review of elderly patient care at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital; and
- (g) that the Overview and Scrutiny Protocol as appended to the report now submitted be endorsed.

13. 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.

14. 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 doing so, the Chairman delivered an update on the outcome of a recent meeting of the Executive Leader's Strategy Group when discussion had taken place on Local Joint Committees (LJCs). Whilst there was support for the proposed model, the Executive Leader had stressed that it would be a permissive arrangement and that it would be for groups of parishes to organise, pay for and service the LJCs themselves. In that light it had been agreed that the Panel's former proposals would be reviewed. The Council would recognise LJCs as legitimate forums with which to engage. A report would be submitted to the Cabinet in due course.

The Panel 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 would, for example, look at the opportunities that existed for housing developments to include bungalows for elderly residents. Additionally, the Panel requested Officers to liaise with the relevant Lead Officer of the Children and Young Peoples Thematic Group with a view to receiving a presentation on the work of the Group at a future meeting.

15. SCRUTINY

The 134th Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

Chairman