

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 11 June 2013.

PRESENT: Councillor G J Bull – Chairman.

Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, K J Churchill, J W Davies, D A Giles, G J Harlock, D Harty, Ms L Kadic and Mrs D C Reynolds.

Mr D Hopkins – Co-opted Member.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors I C Bates and C R Hyams.

5. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Panel held on 9th April and 15th May 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

7. 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 Leader of the Council for the period 3rd June to 31st December 2013. It was confirmed that the Whole Waste System Approach would be submitted to the Panel for consideration prior to its submission to the Cabinet.

8. REVIEW OF GROUNDS MAINTENANCE - SERVICE STANDARDS

(Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Member for Environment, was in attendance for consideration of this item).

With the aid of a report prepared by the Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Panel gave consideration to the first stage of a review of grounds maintenance service standards. By way of background, the Executive Member for Environment reported that the Cabinet had been tasked with identifying £2 million of savings and that this was one area in which it was felt that savings could be achieved.

The Head of Operations reported on the range of work being undertaken by the Grounds Maintenance Team and the current service standards provided. It was noted that service changes and a

reduction in service standards had previously been introduced in 2011 following an earlier review. Members of the Panel were therefore provided with an opportunity to comment on the service standards prior to any consideration being given to service delivery options.

It was reported that owing to the complexity of the way in which the service operated, a reduction in cost would not necessarily be achieved by reducing service standards. Service reductions relating to grass cutting could potentially result in an increased level of spend elsewhere within the service and an increase in the risk of claims being made against the Council. Members concurred with the view that the standards for grass cutting should be retained at the current levels.

An explanation was then delivered of the duties placed on the Council to maintain open spaces and, in particular, closed churchyards. Having regard to the latter, it was reported that town and parish councils could serve statutory notices upon the District Council to undertake this work. However, attempts were being made to work in conjunction with the town and parish councils to rationalise all grounds maintenance. The Panel also received an update on the latest position with regard to the existing County Council and Luminus contracts.

The Panel suggested that there was a need to educate residents on the effects of littering and that the Council should work with local "Friends of the Park" groups to discourage littering in their areas. Following discussion on the Council's strategic approach to the service, Panel Members put forward a further suggestion that the opportunities presented by outsourcing the service, or alternatively undertaking more work on behalf of town and parish councils or other local authority areas, should be explored.

It was reported that the District was likely to continue to obtain open space in developments through S106 Agreements. However, Members were informed that the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy raised doubts about whether funding would be available for their maintenance. Even if funding was forthcoming, such agreements were usually time limited and the Council would eventually become responsible for their maintenance. This would put further pressure on the service.

A report on the opportunities to achieve savings in respect of litter picking would be submitted to the Panel in the autumn. Other suggestions for savings made by the Panel included the use of growth inhibitors and the introduction of a single grounds maintenance service for town parks, small areas of amenity land, the leisure centres and the country parks. The latter might result in efficiencies through joint working such as the effective utilisation of equipment. The Executive Councillor for Environment undertook to investigate these matters once senior management's plans for savings had been published.

In his concluding remarks, the Executive Councillor for Environment thanked the Panel for their views and contributions.

RESOLVED

- (a) that further work be undertaken to investigate the potential for making savings from reducing the level of litter picking and from the Panel's other suggestions relating to the operational practices and organisation of grounds maintenance; and
- (b) that the remaining service standards, including grass cutting, be retained as set out in the report now submitted.

9. MEETING OUR OBJECTIVELY ASSESSED NEED FOR HOUSING: MEMORANDUM OF COOPERATION - SUPPORTING THE SPATIAL APPROACH 2011 - 2031

(At 8.15pm, during discussion on this item, Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds left the meeting).

Consideration was given to a report prepared by the Assistant Director for Environment, Growth and Planning (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which outlined the joint work undertaken by the Council with other partner authorities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to assess the District's future housing needs. Under the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework, the Council could now set its own future housing targets. The Panel noted that the work had been undertaken in compliance with the Duty to Co-operate as outlined within the Localism Act 2011.

It was reported that there would be a need for 93,000 homes across the Cambridge Sub-Region Housing Market Area between 2011 and 2031. Peterborough's housing market area overlapped into Cambridgeshire, and as Peterborough had already accommodated a proportion of its housing need, its contribution was assumed to amount to approximately 2,500 homes. This would mean that 90,500 dwellings were required in the Cambridge Sub-Region Housing Market Area, with Huntingdonshire contributing 17,000 homes by 2031 and 21,000 homes by 2036. The Assistant Director for Environment, Growth and Planning reported that in Huntingdonshire, 10,000 of these homes would roll forward from the former Core Strategy and that there currently were planning applications for around 11,000 dwellings within the planning system. It was therefore, expected that the 21,000 homes allocation for Huntingdonshire would be achieved by 2036. In addition, the Planning Service Manager (Policy) confirmed that the housing need assumptions which underpinned the future growth proposals contained within the emerging Local Plan were in accordance with the Memorandum of Co-operation.

In response to a question by Councillor G J Harlock, it was reported that Huntingdonshire had been the only authority to identify housing allocations up to 2036 because it already had a Local Plan in place to 2026 and there was a requirement for the new Plan to last for at least a further 15 years. It was for this reason that the District's housing needs had been forecast for the period to 2036.

Having been advised of the methodology employed to determine allocations across each local authority area and of the factors that were likely to produce an increase in demand for housing including fluctuations in birth rates, the ageing population and local economic pressures, the Panel noted that the Council regularly collaborated with partner authorities on infrastructure matters such as local bus services and the rail network. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to

- (a) note the effective joint working that has taken place; and
- (b) endorse the content of the Memorandum of Co-operation as appended to the report now submitted.

10. 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.

Members undertook a review of the memberships of their Working Groups and appointed Councillor Mrs L Kadić as the Panel's representative on the Cambridgeshire Future Transport Initiative. Given that the studies relating to the Tree Strategy and Design Principles were nearing completion, the Panel decided that no further changes would be required to the memberships of these Working Groups.

Having considered the addition of new subject areas to the Panel's work programme, various suggestions were made including car parking management, the impact of large scale housing developments upon the A428, local bus services within Towns and recycling in flats. Members would discuss how this work would proceed at their next meeting.

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 Council's overview and scrutiny function.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the content of the report now submitted be noted;
- (b) that car parking management, the impact of large scale housing developments upon the A428, local bus services within Towns and recycling in flats be included in the Panel's work programme as potential new study areas;

- (c) that Councillor Mrs L Kadić be appointed as the Panel's representative on the Cambridgeshire Future Transport Initiative; and
- (d) that the Overview and Scrutiny Protocol as appended to the report now submitted be endorsed.

11. 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 Social Well-Being and Economic Well-Being.

12. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL 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, it was reported that a site visit to the Great Fen would take place on 17th September 2013. Additionally, it was noted that owing to resource constraints within the Planning Service, work to finalise the Tree Strategy and Design Guide was currently being undertaken; however, this was taking longer than anticipated.

13. SCRUTINY

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

Chairman