

## 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, 1 October 2013.

PRESENT: Councillor R C Carter – Vice-Chairman in the Chair.

Councillors K M Baker, R C Carter, I J Curtis, R Fuller, C R Hyams, S M Van De Kerkhove, M C Oliver and J W G Pethard.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S J Criswell and Mrs P A Jordan and Mrs M Nicholas.

### **39. MR R COXHEAD**

The Chairman drew Members' attention to the resignation of Mr R Coxhead as a Co-opted Member of the Panel. The Panel placed on record its gratitude for the work Mr Coxhead had undertaken and the contribution he had made to its work over the previous three and a half years.

### **40. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 3rd September 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **41. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

No declarations were received.

### **42. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS**

The Panel considered and noted the current Notice of Key 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 October 2013 to 31st March 2014.

### **43. PROPOSED ESTABLISHMENT OF LOCAL JOINT COMMITTEES IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE**

With the aid of a report from the Cabinet (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was acquainted with Executive Members' deliberations on the establishment of Local Joint Committees (LJCs) in Huntingdonshire. Having noted that the Town and Parish Councils had already been notified of the opportunity they had to establish their own LJCs across the District, it was

RESOLVED

that the report be received and noted.

**44. HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX 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 and Council Tax Benefit/Support schemes contained within the Welfare Reform Act. It was reported that there had been a delay with the introduction of the Universal Credit system, which was expected to have a major impact upon Huntingdonshire's residents. An explanation was then delivered of homelessness trends within the District together with the reasons why households were becoming homeless. The main causes of homelessness were the eviction of households from private sector tenancies, landlords' reluctance to work with benefits claimants and the sale of private rented properties because they had ceased to be sufficiently profitable.

In response to a question by a Member, it was confirmed that pensioners were not affected by the welfare reforms. The reforms primarily affected households of working age with the under occupancy element affecting 816 households within the District. Whilst being mindful that Huntingdonshire had a larger population, overall the impact of the reforms upon the District was comparable with the other Cambridgeshire authorities. Following a question about the omission of some of Huntingdonshire's data from Appendix C of the report, the Housing Needs and Resources Manager reported that this was attributable to the closure of the former Huntingdonshire Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) which ceased to operate in December 2012. Rural Cambs CAB had commenced the delivery of advisory services with effect from 1st April 2013 and would be providing the data in the future.

The Panel discussed the availability of smaller social rented properties within the District to households wishing to downsize, the number of households who had moved because of the reforms and Luminus' mutual exchange programme. Members were then acquainted with the Council's discretionary housing payments policy, the factors considered by the Council when determining households' needs including the receipt of any other benefits such as disability payments and the levels set by the Government for the benefit cap. Having referred to the use of emergency accommodation for households evicted from their properties, an outline was provided of the steps required to evict tenants from their homes and the measures available to prevent this from happening.

A Member asked whether the Council's budget position was likely to be affected by the introduction of the Council Tax Support scheme. Given that the scheme had only been implemented in the last six months, it was reported that this information would be collected from the Council Tax Team and circulated to the Panel.

Having indicated a wish to continue receiving reports on a six monthly basis and that Appendix B should include details of comparative data

for Cambridgeshire, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report now submitted be noted.

#### **45. AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS**

*(Councillor N J Guyatt, Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, was in attendance for this item).*

With the aid of a report by the Lead Housing Strategy Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel received an update on how the Council's emerging Affordable Housing Policy would help to meet the identified need for accommodation for homeless households and those that required supported housing. In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing reminded the Panel that a number of factors influenced the availability of affordable housing and that encouraging residents to move out of social housing into the private housing sector remained a challenge both locally and nationally.

The Lead Housing Strategy Manager delivered a presentation on the Council's duty to prevent homelessness and the scale of the housing need within the District. She reported that there had been a decline in the number of affordable housing units being built. This was unlikely to change until the construction of large scale strategic housing sites commenced. The Panel was then apprised of the impact of the reduced new build programme on homelessness and of the options available to the Council to meet demand.

There was a need for 21,000 new homes to be built in Huntingdonshire by 2036, of which 8,188 would need to be affordable units. The forthcoming Local Plan aimed to meet housing need via a number of means including the reinvigorated supply of housing land. Although the affordable housing delivery target was likely to be reduced, the potential reduction in site thresholds from 15 to 10 homes and the delivery of a number of large strategic housing sites over the Plan period meant that the number of affordable units being constructed should at least be maintained. The draft enabled exceptions policy and policies designed to reflect and meet the needs of the ageing population also would assist in this respect. In concluding her presentation, the Lead Housing Strategy Manager delivered an outline of how the Council would seek to meet the need for supported housing, particularly in cases where commissioners had identified a particular need.

The Panel highlighted the need to future proof new homes and the challenges that existed to deliver rural exception sites. In response to a question by a Member, the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing reported that the Council was actively looking at options to deliver more supported housing and ways of promoting the local housing market. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report now submitted be noted.

**46. CAMBRIDGESHIRE ADULTS, WELLBEING AND HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Councillor J W G Pethard reported on matters currently being considered by the Cambridgeshire Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He had been appointed to a Working Group to consider the future commissioning of older peoples services. In addition, investigations were being made into the retirement/sheltered housing at Langley Court, St Ives.

Councillors C R Hyams and I J Curtis reported upon their experiences of patient care at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital. They highlighted traffic problems for Ambulances travelling on the A14, lengthy waiting times in the Accident and Emergency Department and the need for elderly patients requiring palliative care to have a single point of contact, for more joined up business practices and for improved communication methods to be employed at the Hospital. Other issues raised included the need for publicity to be given to the benefits of living wills and the financial support available to assist with meeting the costs of aids and adaptations for elderly patients within their homes. Councillor J W G Pethard undertook to raise these issues at the next meeting of the Cambridgeshire Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**47. 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.

**48. 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. Members noted that a meeting of the Corporate Plan Working Group had been held on 23rd September 2013 and that a further meeting would be arranged for December 2013. It was intended that the new Delivery Plan would be launched in April 2014.

Owing to the extent of the work required by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels' involvement in identifying priority areas for savings (Minute No. 13/50 ante refers) the Panel agreed to defer those items scheduled for November and December 2013 to the January and February 2014 meetings.

**49. SCRUTINY**

The 137th Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

**50. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY INVOLVEMENT IN IDENTIFYING PRIORITY AREAS FOR SAVINGS**

*(The following item was admitted by the Chairman as a late urgent item under Section 100B (3) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 because there was a need for the Panel to prepare proposals for a delivery review programme for presentation to the October Cabinet meeting for approval).*

*(Councillor N J Guyatt, Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, was in attendance for consideration of this item).*

The Panel considered a report by the Assistant Director, Finance and Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) seeking the Overview and Scrutiny Panels' involvement in identifying priority areas for savings for the Council. In explaining the background to the report, the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing drew the Panel's attention to the fact that additional savings of £3,694,000 had to be identified by 2018/19 and that significant changes would need to be made to the way the Council currently operated.

The Assistant Director, Environment, Growth and Planning explained that the Overview and Scrutiny Panels were being asked to assist with undertaking reviews of all the Council's services and prioritising areas where savings could be achieved. Owing to the extent of the work required, it was suggested that non urgent items should be cleared from the Panels' Agendas for November and December 2013 with a further two meetings of each Panel being held over this time. The Panels were being asked to prepare proposals for a delivery review programme for presentation to the October Cabinet meeting for approval. There was a need for all reviews to be completed by December 2013 to enable the outcome of the Panels' deliberations to be reported to the Cabinet's January 2014 meeting.

The Panel discussed a template, which had been developed to provide a range of information for each service area, including statutory duties, service standards and current performance, manpower including any vacancies and financial data including historic spending.

**51. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to consultation or negotiations in connection with labour relations between the authority and employees of the authority.

**52. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY INVOLVEMENT IN IDENTIFYING PRIORITY AREAS FOR SAVINGS**

Pursuant to Minute No. 13/50, the Panel gave consideration to a draft template for the Development Management service. Members

received an explanation of each element of the template enabling them to gain a feel for the information that would be presented to them at their forthcoming meetings.

The Panel asked a number of questions and received a response to each one. It was confirmed that whilst the Panels would be undertaking reviews of Council service areas, the Cabinet would explore a number of overarching strategic issues, such as pay and the LGSS human resources function.

In acknowledging the need for additional Panel meetings, Members' attention was drawn to a suggested programme of meetings including the service areas to be considered by the Panel in November and December 2013. Whereupon, it was

#### RESOLVED

- (a) that the Panel's involvement in identifying priority areas for savings as outlined within the report by the Assistant Director, Finance and Resources be endorsed;
- (b) that additional Panel meetings be held on 19th November and 11th December 2013; and
- (c) that the Cabinet be informed of the Panel's proposals for a delivery review programme at its October 2013 meeting.

Chairman