

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, 5 November 2013.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors K M Baker, R C Carter, I J Curtis, Mrs P A Jordan, P Kadewere, M C Oliver and J W G Pethard.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors R Fuller, C R Hyams and S M Van De Kerkhove.

53. COUNCILLOR C R HYAMS

In noting that Councillor C R Hyams' wife had sadly passed away earlier that day, Members extended their thoughts to Councillor Hyams during this difficult time.

54. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 5th November 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

55. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Mrs P A Jordan declared a non-disclosable pecuniary interest in Minute No. 13/59 (c) by virtue of being an employee of the NHS.

56. NOTICE OF EXECUTIVE KEY DECISIONS

The Panel considered and noted the current Notice of Executive Key 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 25th October 2013 to 31st March 2014. The Panel will have sight of the Reconnections Policy at a future meeting.

57. UPDATE ON REDESIGN OF LOCAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

With the aid of a report prepared by the Clinical Commissioning Group (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel received a position statement on the ongoing implementation of the redesign of local mental health services. A question on the number of acute referrals made from the Hinchingsbrooke catchment area to Fulbourn and to Peterborough will be put to representatives of the Clinical Commissioning Group when they attend the Panel's January 2013 meeting. Assurances will also be sought on the support provided to mental health patients whom have been discharged into

the community. In noting that redesigned community services were in the process of being implemented, the Panel has agreed to postpone its planned public consultation on mental health services until this process has been completed.

58. 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

- (a) the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information); and
- (b) consultation or negotiations in connection with labour relation matters between the Council and its employees.

59. FACING THE FUTURE 2013

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

(Councillors J D Ablewhite, Mrs B Boddington, P L E Bucknell, D B Dew, R S Farrer, Mrs L Kadic, P D Reeve, T V Rogers and R J West were also in attendance for this item).

With the assistance of a note which had been prepared by the Scrutiny and Review Manager (a copy of which is appended in the annex to the Minute Book) the Panel were reminded of the process for undertaking the "Facing the Future" service reviews. In doing so, it was reiterated that Members should be reminded of their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct in respect of the treatment of confidential matters.

In his introductory remarks, the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing delivered an overview of the Planning Service drawing attention to the statutory and prescriptive nature of its role, the existing pressures placed upon Officers and current areas of work. The service had also proved to be a success at generating income for the Council and it was the Executive Councillor's vision to increase the level of consultancy offered to neighbouring authorities in the future.

(a) Development Management

The Panel considered the strategic review template for the Development Management service (a copy of which is appended in the annex to the Minute Book). In doing so, the Planning Service Manager (Development Management) delivered an outline of the service and provided comparable data on the performance of the authority in comparison to

national statistics.

A number of areas were challenged which included the likely costs of selling the service's expertise, the reasons against the devolution of some planning responsibilities to Town and Parish Councils, the possible decline in income generation trends and whether consideration had been given to a future management restructure of the service.

Following discussion, the Panel agreed upon proposed priority areas for the service and took note of other suggestions offered by the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing. A report is expected to come before the Panel outlining a range of service delivery options at a future meeting.

RESOLVED

that the strategic service review template for the Development Management service, together with the Panel's recommendations on the proposed priority areas, be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration as part of the "Facing the Future" process.

(b) Planning Policy

A copy of the strategic review template for Planning Services (Policy) was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the annex to the Minute Book). In introducing the template, the Planning Service Manager (Policy) delivered a brief outline of the work of his teams together with the benefits of being a part of the Joint Strategic Planning Unit which had enabled income generating opportunities to be achieved.

The Panel has questioned whether there would be a reduction in the level of resources within the Planning Policy Team following completion of the Local Plan and queried whether the likely level of income to be generated through the establishment of a consultancy role was ambitious enough for the service. The Panel has challenged the availability of effective IT systems to enable services across the Council to perform effectively and efficiently. The Assistant Director, Environment, Growth and Planning confirmed that this was a theme which had been raised by a number of other service areas.

The Panel has agreed upon proposed priority areas for the service and made a suggestion to the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing to investigate the possibility of outsourcing parts of the service to the private sector.

RESOLVED

that the strategic service review template for Planning Services (Policy), together with the Panel's

recommendations on the proposed priority areas, be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration as part of the “Facing the Future” process.

(c) Strategic Housing

Consideration was given to the strategic review template for the Strategic Housing service (a copy of which is appended in the annex to the Minute Book). The Housing Strategy Manager delivered an outline of the service’s role drawing particular attention to the range of work being undertaken with other authorities and partners, which included a number of health and social care organisations.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that little priority was accorded to dealing with empty properties within the District given that a lot of resource would be required which would provide a very small return for the Council. Given underlying links to the Planning Services (Policy) area of the Council, a suggestion has been made to the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing to investigate the possible merging of the two services.

In agreeing to the proposed priority areas for the service, it was

RESOLVED

that the strategic service review template for Strategic Housing, together with the Panel’s recommendations on the proposed priority areas, be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration as part of the “Facing the Future” process.

Chairman