

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (COMMUNITIES AND CUSTOMERS) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 5th January 2016.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors D Brown, Mrs L A Duffy,
M Francis, R Fuller, T Hayward,
Mrs P A Jordan, P Kadewere and D J Mead.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs R E Mathews and M C Oliver.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors R Harrison and R Howe.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that Councillor S J Criswell be elected Chairman of the Panel for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

Councillor S J Criswell in the Chair.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 1st December 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor S J Criswell declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in relation to Minute Number 7 by virtue of his Membership of Cambridgeshire County Council.

4. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that Councillor Mrs R E Mathews be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Panel for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

5. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel received and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which has been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st January 2016 to 30th April 2016.

Members were informed that the One Leisure Strategic Plan and the

Sports Facilities Strategy for Huntingdonshire 2016-2021 would be presented to the Panel at the meeting in February 2016.

6. HUNTINGDONSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP'S PERFORMANCE 2014/15

With the aid of a report by the Head of Community Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), Chief Inspector Laura Hunt discussed the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership's Performance and the crime statistics for Huntingdonshire with the Panel.

The Panel had been informed that Cambridgeshire Constabulary now have a responsibility to record all reported crime regardless of whether there is any evidence that the crime has taken place, as a result this had the potential to skew statistics upwards.

Members were advised that overall crime in Huntingdonshire had reduced however there was an increase in the reporting of particular crimes. One trend that had been identified was the increase in violent crime including crime not causing injury which has been linked with domestic abuse crime.

The Panel was acquainted with Cambridgeshire Constabulary's five priority areas which are:

- Dwelling Crime;
- Child Sexual Exploitation;
- Domestic Abuse;
- Serious Sexual Offences; and
- Emergency Response.

In response to a concern expressed with regards to grooming and the Police response time Chief Inspector Hunt informed the Panel that the Constabulary had carried out training and refocussed their priorities in order to tackle grooming and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). In addition Chief Inspector Hunt emphasised that it was very important that the message gets out into the community that the Constabulary would take all reports of CSE and grooming seriously.

Following a question regarding drugs the Panel was informed that there is a problem with drug suppliers from the cities, in particular London, coming to the District and using the homes of vulnerable drug users. Chief Inspector Hunt informed Members that this is an issue which the Constabulary are working to resolve.

The Panel noted that despite the complexities of telephone and internet fraud action can be taken at local level to assist in the prevention of fraud. Awareness raising and education is key to ensure that people don't fall victim to fraud.

Concern was raised in regards to the lack of Police response to incidents in St Ives as a result of the night time economy. In particular advice was given to licence holders that the Police do not want incidents to be reported as it is unlikely that there would be a response. Chief Inspector Hunt stated that the advice given was incorrect and it was important that all incidents are reported.

In response to a question regarding dispersal orders and individuals carrying weapons in a public place Members were informed that dispersal orders would not be used for such incidents and that stop and searches should be used instead.

Following the conclusion of the discussion the Panel thanked Chief Inspector Hunt for her time.

7. VOLUNTARY SECTOR GRANT FUNDING 2016/17 TO 2019/20

With the aid of a report by the Head of Community Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Voluntary Sector Grant Funding 2016/17 to 2019/20 report was presented to the Panel. Members were informed that the Council's three year funding arrangement with the voluntary sector was ending on 31st March 2016 and the report sought the views of Members to inform a future funding arrangement.

In addition the Panel was told that funding for the Voluntary Sector Grant is being considered as part of the zero based budgeting of the main Council budgets and formed an integral part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Members were informed that the Council's current financial objective was to reduce all budgets by around 38% by March 2020 which would therefore be likely to result in an overall reduction of the voluntary sector budget.

The Panel was presented with five options for future voluntary sector funding budgets, which are:

- Option 1 – make no change to the level of funding, currently at around £236k, allocated by the Council to the voluntary sector;
- Option 2 – reduce the budget over the term of the MTFS, such that in year 4 the reduction of 38% is achieved;
- Option 3 – reduce the budget in year 1 but then provide an equal annual payment equivalent to the same total amount of spend as Option 2;
- Option 4 – reduce the budget to the value of the MTFS in year 4 with immediate effect; and
- Option 5 – stop funding the Voluntary Sector with immediate effect.

Members noted that for the three years up 2015/16 the Council have provided grants to the following voluntary sector organisations:

- Rural Cambridgeshire Citizens Advice Bureau;
- Disability Information Services Huntingdonshire;
- Hunts Forum for Voluntary Organisations;
- Care Network;
- Huntingdon Volunteer Centres; and
- Huntingdon Shopmobility.

The Panel had been advised of three options with regards to the allocation of funding for the voluntary sector.

- Option A was the continued funding to all the organisations

that the Council funds;

- Option B sought to reduce the number of organisations funding directly by the Council and engage with umbrella organisations that through their funding supports others; and
- Option C was developing a joint commissioning approach for voluntary sector services at a District level with Cambridgeshire County Council.

The Panel expressed their concern that the options report had not been submitted earlier, following the initial review of this issue at the October meeting of the Panel, as it does not give Members the requisite time to fully consider the options available. In addition the Panel thought it was unfair that the Voluntary Sector would only be given a month's notice before a potential reduction in funding following consideration of the budget in February.

Members had further concerns that the options report did not contain the effect a reduction of funding would have upon the organisations in receipt of voluntary sector funding. Furthermore the Panel would like to have seen the advantages the work of the organisations has upon the District in terms of outcomes for local residents.

The Panel discussed the merits of forming a working group to investigate the funding options with the condition that the funding for the voluntary sector organisations continues at the current level for 2016/17. Members expressed a preference for the Council to set the priorities it wants the voluntary sector organisations to achieve, allocate funding and then invite voluntary sector organisations to bid for funding. The Panel,

RESOLVED

- i) not to recommend any of the options presented in the report.
- ii) to recommend to Cabinet that funding for voluntary sector organisations remains as it is for the next 12 months in order for work to be carried out and completed on finding an alternative funding arrangement which can be in place for 2017/18.
- iii) to form a working group to investigate alternative funding options with the group reporting back to the Panel by June 2016.

8. ANNUAL EQUALITY PROGRESS REPORT 2015

With the aid of a report by the Policy, Performance and Transformation Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Annual Equality Progress Report 2015 was presented to the Panel. Members had been informed that the Council are looking to introduce a more proportionate and effective response to the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty.

The Panel had been advised that it would be up to individual managers to ensure equality compliance. This was seen as a more efficient use of time and resource compared to the model of

monitoring equality compliance from a central location.

In response to a question regarding equality, the Panel was informed that the Equality Duty consists of a general duty and several specific duties, which are intended to help public bodies meet the general duty. The general duty requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it, and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Following the question as to why the report was presented to the Panel and not the Employment Panel, Members were informed that the report affects customers as well as employees in addition it was noted that the role of the Panel is to scrutinise meaning that it can scrutinise any piece of Council business within the Panel's remit.

(At 8.28pm, during the discussion on this item, Councillor D J Mead left the meeting).

9. RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING WORKING GROUP

With the aid of a report by the Executive Leader and Chairman of the Cabinet (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the response by the Cabinet to findings and recommendations of the Affordable Housing Working Group was presented to the Panel.

Members were informed that the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Working Group were fully considered and endorsed by the Cabinet. In addition the Cabinet resolved that the Council should take legal advice to explore the options to protect local houses for local people on rural development schemes.

The Panel noted that the Cabinet expressed congratulations to the Working Group for the comprehensive report.

10. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel received and noted a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of studies being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Economy and Growth and Finance and Performance.

(At 8.30pm, during the discussion on this item, Councillor D J Mead returned to the meeting).

11. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROGRESS

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel reviewed the progress of its activities since the last meeting. In addition Members had the opportunity to discuss issues arising from the

Decision Digest (circulated separately).

The Panel was informed of an article in the Hunts Post regarding the potential loss of services at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital. As a result of this Members indicated that they would like to invite Lance McCarthy, Chief Executive Officer of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital to the Panel meeting in February 2016.

Chairman