

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the LICENSING AND PROTECTION PANEL held in Civic Suite 0.1A , Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 20 October 2015.

PRESENT: Councillor R Fuller – Chairman.

Councillors K M Baker, D Brown,
Mrs S Conboy, J W Davies, R S Farrer,
D J Mead and P D Reeve.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors R Harrison, Ms L Kadic, S M Van De Kerkhove and R J West.

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23rd June 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2. MEMBERS INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

3. LICENSING AND PROTECTION APPLICATIONS SUB GROUP

With the aid of a report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel noted details of the three meetings of the Applications Sub-Group that had taken place between 2nd July to 8th October 2015.

4. SERVICE PLAN FOR FOOD LAW ENFORCEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY MONITORING 2015 -16

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Community (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel received an update on progress being made against the Council's Food Safety and Health and Safety Service Plans for 2015/16 during the period 1st April to 30th September 2015.

By way of introduction, the Panel were reminded that the Service Plan for Health & Safety Regulation had been approved at their last meeting and the Service Plan for Food Law Enforcement by full Council in July 2015. The Head of Community explained that it was his intention to report on performance against these plans on a quarter by quarter basis and this was the first of such reports for Member's consideration. He then provided a detailed explanation of each section of the report.

The Panel were informed that the Service was behind target with the delivery of the Food Safety Service Plan. This was a direct result of a number of factors including staffing resources, two significant accident investigations, the impact of an unforeseen reactive workload, a higher than expected increase in the number of new food

business and a higher than anticipated level of formal enforcement actions being undertaken.

Having expressed concern that the Service was behind target on the delivery of the Plan, Members' attention was drawn to the number of planned Food Hygiene Inspections which were significantly behind schedule. The Head of Community then outlined the reasons for this, the options which were available to address the situation and the actions which might be taken by the Food Standards Agency if the Authority failed to meet its statutory targets. The Panel were informed that the matter would be discussed further by the Corporate Management Team and that the Executive Member for Strategic Economic Development and Legal was aware of the situation. In recognition of Members concerns and in view of the time until the Panel's next meeting, the Head of Community undertook to update the Chairman and Vice-Chairman on the situation on a regular basis. Members agreed that it would also be useful to circulate further information to the Panel as and when it became available. The Chairman also suggested that further discussion with the Executive Member might also be required.

The Head of Community then responded to a number of questions from Panel Members. Having enquired whether there was any capacity to get the Service Plan back on track now that the workload arising from the fatality had reduced, Members were reminded that there had been no margin within the approved Plan for reactivity and the Service was running on minimum resources. In addition, there would still be further budgetary savings to make within the financial year despite a Zero Based Budget exercise already being undertaken. The Head of Community then went on to outline the options which were available to reduce the gap between actual and planned activity and his preferred approach to addressing the problem.

In response to more specific questions, Members were informed that other authorities within the area were also experiencing resourcing difficulties and had approached the District Council for assistance. Whilst Shared Services was not off the agenda, it was difficult to establish what capacity there was for this purpose. A Member commented on the potential for the Authority to invest to save in this area.

In response to a suggestion that the Authority should work with Further Education providers if there was a wider recruitment issue, Members expressed their support for the use of apprenticeship / work placement training schemes to establish a sustainable workforce.

In reviewing the other specific performance indicators within the Plan, the Panel noted that there had also been an increase in food related service requests and notifications for infectious disease control. Members were pleased to note that the number of Food Hygiene revisits and the number of alternative enforcement interventions remained on target and that the number of required inspections of temporary food businesses had not been as high as originally foreseen. It was expected that activity within the Primary Authority Partnership with the Cambridgeshire School Service would increase in the next quarter.

In terms of the Health and Safety Service Plan for 2015/16, Members noted that the number of Health and Safety Premises Inspections were significantly less than planned. However the Head of Community explained that whilst this was behind target, most of the preparatory work in connection with targeted health and safety interventions had been completed and he was confident that the Authority would be back on target by the end of the year. It was also expected that there may be a revision in statutory guidance which might reduce the number of inspections required.

Having invited comments on the format and content of future reports, the Panel agreed that it was useful to receive all the statistics which had been provided. More specifically, it was suggested that it would be useful to identify the type of businesses which were opening or closing within the District and provide further clarification as to those targets which were based upon statutory guidelines and the risk categories.

In concluding the discussion on this item, Members thanked the Head of Community for the preparation of a monitoring report to enable the Panel to monitor the delivery of the Service Plans throughout the year.

(During the discussion on this item, Councillor D Brown took his seat at the meeting at 14.11pm. Councillor D Mead took his seat at 14.21pm and Councillor K Baker at 14.30pm).

Chairman