

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 5th December 2017.

PRESENT: Councillor T D Alban – Chairman.

Councillors B S Chapman, J W Davies,
D A Giles, Mrs P A Jordan, P Kadewere,
L R Swain, Mrs J Tavener and D Watt.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors P L E Bucknell, S J Criswell and Mrs A Donaldson.

52. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 31st October 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

53. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were received.

54. 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 December 2017 to 31st March 2018.

55. CAMBRIDGESHIRE HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

With the aid of a report by the Housing Strategy Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency (CHIA) Improvement Plan was presented to the Panel.

The CHIA manager, Frances Swann, was in attendance and updated the Panel on the current performance of the agency and the improvement plan. The CHIA manager stated that she had been in post since the end of June and during her time in the role has developed an understanding of the problems and their complexity.

Members were informed that currently the CHIA has 409 open cases. Since July, the agency has been working at reducing the number of cases and that, as of September, there are 345 cases open. The number of cases over 24 months old has reduced from 17 to 13. Cases over 12 months old has reduced from 80 to 40 and those cases over 6 months old has reduced from 164 to 90.

There are currently four CHIA case workers managing 90 cases each and the target is to reduce this to 60 cases. The agency want to reduce the delays built into the system such as using builders already approved instead of tendering every piece of work. In addition, staff have also undergone a substantial amount of training. When questioned regarding the caseloads of case workers in better performing Home Improvement Agencies (HIA), the Panel was informed that caseloads are smaller however the better performing HIAs have a greater level of resources. By comparison, East Cambridgeshire has 100 cases per case worker.

CHIA is jointly funded and that currently Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) also provide funding. As of April 2018, the CCC are reducing their funding and the CCG are to remove their funding completely. The reason for this is unclear however the CCG have stated that not all of their criteria had been met. The CHIA manager is hopeful to engage into dialogue with the CCG to demonstrate that the funding and joint working is crucial. Following a question it was confirmed that this will affect the £159k of external revenue contributions.

The Panel was informed that the CHIA received 9000 calls in the 11 months preceding 1st April 2017. In addition, concern was expressed by the CHIA manager that an estimated third of those who have made preliminary enquiries and are eligible do not then progress to a referral. However, the number of referrals are increasing and have risen by 15% in the last three years.

A Member expressed surprise at the number of calls and questioned if it relates to the number of cases. In response, the CHIA manager stated that the calls are a combination of enquiries, Occupational Therapists and staff and that it is hoped that a transition to an online self-service would reduce the number of calls received.

In response to a question regarding the economic viability of the work, the Panel was informed that the CHIA does carry out some work when a move might be more appropriate.

A question was asked about any money received by the CHIA, in response Members were informed that cases are few and far between and that they are received by the Council and goes back into the Council's reserves. It was confirmed that the money is not ring-fenced and can be spent by the Council as it chooses.

The Panel asked about warranties and was informed that all works carry a five year warranty which is passed onto the individual receiving the adaptation. It then becomes the owner's responsibility. However, following complaints regarding the standard of work, the CHIA manager stated that she has been working with contractors to improve the standard.

Following a question regarding who receives the capital benefit of an extension the Panel was informed that, in regards to equipment, it is the individual who receives the adaption and, in regards to social housing, then it is the occupier. Members were reminded that Disabled Facilities Grants are means tested and that the CHIA do have private customers who make a full contribution. In addition the

duty to provide the adaptation is the District Council's.

In regards to a question on the shortage of Occupational Therapists (OT), the Panel was informed that there are now more OTs however the workload coming from them is high.

Concern was raised that there are 13 cases that are over 24 months old, in response, the Panel was informed that not all cases are managed by the CHIA and that reasons for the length are being investigated.

Following a statement by a Member, the Housing Strategy Manager stated that she does provide an end of year CHIA performance report and will do so again next year.

A Member raised the concern that it takes the CHIA 63 days to install a stair lift however, it was confirmed that the 63 days refers from the date of referral to the date of completion. In addition, all the lead in time adds to the total amount of time, although Members noted that the time no longer includes procurement. The Panel was told that previously the CHIA had to go out to tender.

It was confirmed following a question that the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service are used to assist with minor housing adaptations.

A discussion ensued regarding the CCC budget for CHIA and the Housing Strategy Manager confirmed that CCC have saved money from their revenue budget which was used for additional funding for DFGs. They are now focusing on using resources for upstream services.

The CHIA manager informed Members that despite the issues, in a recent survey of customers, 95% stated that the adaptation has enabled them to maintain independent living.

Following a question regarding how realistic the targets are, the Panel was informed that the targets are aspirational and some do not have a date. The targets are long term ambitions which the CHIA would like to achieve in the future. The Panel

RESOLVED

- 1) to recognise the good work of the CHIA,
- 2) to invite the CCG to a meeting of the Panel to question them on their decision to remove funding from the CHIA, and
- 3) to invite the CCC to a meeting of the Panel to clarify their position regarding the funding they give to the CHIA.

(At 7.11pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor P Kadewere entered the meeting.)

(At 7.15pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor Mrs J Tavener left the meeting.)

(At 7.15pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor Mrs J Tavener entered the meeting.)

56. REPRESENTATIVES ON EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS - ANNUAL UPDATES

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Representatives on External Organisations – Annual Updates was presented to the Panel.

In scrutinising the attendance of representatives, the Panel asked has the attendance of representatives on external organisations declined since Cabinet decided that only current Members could be appointed. A Member suggested that former Members could be appointed however, despite some support on the grounds of knowledge and experience, the majority of the Panel disagreed with the suggestion. Those in disagreement stated that by appointing former Members there would be a lack of democratic accountability and there is also a concern that the former Member may misrepresent the Council's position.

It was suggested that representatives could easily miss meetings of external organisations who meet infrequently.

There was also a question of what does the Council expect the representatives to do and who should they report back to. In response, a Member stated that representatives are appointed to observe the activity of the external organisation and to report back any relevant information to the relevant Officers, Overview and Scrutiny Panel or Committee and the annual Representatives on External Organisations report. In addition, representatives can account for Council investment and they can help and advise organisations.

An audit, conducted by Cabinet, of external organisations and the worthwhileness of appointing representation was suggested. The Panel agreed that an audit would be worthwhile particularly as some representatives no longer receive an invite and that some organisations no longer meet or meet so infrequently that appointing representation could be deemed as not worthwhile. In addition, it was questioned should the Cabinet appoint a representative where the effectiveness of doing so could be questioned.

The Panel wanted to emphasis to Cabinet that it would be helpful for the Council to appoint representatives, where possible, who are engaged and interested in the work of the external organisation. The Panel,

RESOLVED

To recommend to Cabinet that:

- 1) where possible, Cabinet should recommend to external organisations that when representatives, who have an interest, are stepping down as Members they should be co-opted onto the organisation as a non-Huntingdonshire District Council member.
- 2) when appointing representatives to external organisations,

that Cabinet maintains the democratic principle of accountability and appoint only serving Members.

- 3) Cabinet conducts an audit of the representation on external organisations and do not appoint to organisations that either: do not invite the appointed representative, have not met in excess of a year or by appointing a representative is deemed as not worthwhile.
- 4) the Cabinet should make best use of all Members and appoint representatives regardless of party politics
- 5) the external organisations should be asked to provide a job specification to outline their expectations of their Members, and
- 6) where there is an organisation which the Cabinet has appointed representative, then other similar organisations should also have an appointed HDC representative (e.g. BID Huntingdon and St Neots Town Initiative).

57. 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 all the Panels' work programmes since the last meeting.

In response to the question of feeding a viewpoint into the Strategic Review of Car Parking, the Panel was informed that if any Member wishes to submit their views to the Task and Finish Group than they should approach the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chairman, which in this case is Councillor D B Dew, or the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group (Councillor J White).

Chairman