

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (CUSTOMERS AND PARTNERSHIPS) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 6th June 2018.

PRESENT: Councillor T D Alban – Chairman.  
Councillors R E Bellamy, S Bywater,  
B S Chapman, J W Davies, K I Prentice,  
Mrs S Smith and Mrs J Tavener.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors B S Banks, S J Criswell, Ms A Diaz and D R Underwood.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors R Fuller and D M Tysoe.

### 5. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Environment) held on 6th March 2018 and the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Customers and Partnerships) were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 6. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

### 7. URGENT ITEM - PARTIAL CLOSURE OF THE ST NEOTS CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE

The Chairman announced that he proposed to admit an urgent item in accordance with Section 100B, parts 3 and 4 of the Local Government Act 1972. The item concerned the decision to close the Customer Service Centre in St Neots for two days a week during June.

The Executive Councillor for Digital and Customer apologised, on behalf of the Council, for not ensuring that the decision to close for two days a week in June was adequately communicated. The Panel was informed that the Council currently does not have an adequate number of staff and therefore the operational decision was taken to redeploy resources to areas which need it most.

The Council are committed to providing a customer service centre in St Neots however, it was added that residents can access Council services over the telephone and online and that a majority of residents access services online.

The Corporate Director – Services informed Members that the issue was an emerging one and the action of informing Ward Members was missed. In future, the Council will inform all Members.

Members were informed that per day 25 residents visit the Customer Service Centre in St Neots whereas the call centre receive 40 calls from the St Neots area. It was therefore decided staff should be redeployed to the call centre.

In response, to the concern that the closure could neglect a small number of people who struggle to access services, Members were informed that the most vulnerable residents receive home visits and that the decision to close the Customer Service Centre for two days a week in June is a temporary measure and on balance of the evidence, available to the Council at the time, the best solution.

It was confirmed that the Council could investigate the viability of staff performing the dual roles of receiving call centre calls and serving residents at St Neots Customer Service Centre however, as the staff shortage is a short term issue, the solution identified was seen as the best one.

The Panel was reassured that, although there will not be additional resources for the Call Centre, they are equipped to handle the additional calls they are likely to receive as a result of the closure.

In summary, the Panel agreed that the incident served as a lesson on the importance of adequately communicating changes to the Council's services.

## **8. 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 June 2018 to 30th September 2018.

Following a concern raised, the Panel was reassured that all items have been allocated to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

## **9. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME - AGREEING THE AGENDA**

With the aid of a presentation by the Corporate Director – Services, Members discussed potential Forward Work Programme. The Panel was informed that the Council's Annual Governance Statement has highlighted the following risks to the Council: Housing Affordability; growing number of years of ill health; wider economic environment; skills levels and educational attainment, and partner agency operational pressure.

During the presentation, Members were given some more details on each topic. The Panel was told that in order to find solutions, Overview and Scrutiny will have to talk to outside agencies and partners and explore the opportunities that exist.

The Chairman informed the Panel that work on the Tree Strategy and Pollution have carried over onto this year's work programme. In addition, the Panel suggested investigating Highways England's plans for the environment and landscape of the A14 project and maintaining a watching brief on Luminus.

It was explained to the Panel that the work programme could comprise of work coming from Cabinet, policy development and investigating the opportunities for collaboration with the Council's partners.

In discussion, a Member raised the issue of housing affordability for the local population and added that affordability is linked to employment. In addition, it was mentioned that housing is linked to educational attainment as houses can't be built without skilled workmen.

Members discussed the issue of the health of the elderly population and the opportunities that exist in greater partnership working. The Panel was reminded that partnership working exists and in some instances it could be a case of advertising the schemes more effectively.

The Panel expressed an interest in looking at homelessness and a Member added that Members should look beyond the statutory definition of homelessness and incorporate sofa surfers.

Planning was discussed and the possibility of investigating how the planning of development in the District fits with the planning for Cambridgeshire by Cambridgeshire County Council.

Members agreed that the following topics should be investigated as potential work programme items: Homelessness and Housing Affordability; Health, in particular investigating opportunities on how active lifestyles could be expanded; and a broad Environment and Pollution item.

The Panel agreed that Councillors T D Alban, B S Chapman, K I Prentice and Mrs S Smith will formulate a work programme and submit it to the Panel for agreement.

#### **10. HUNTINGDONSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REVIEW 2017/18**

With the aid of a report by the Head of Community (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership Annual Review 2017/18 was presented to the Panel. In addition, Members received some background detail of: the Community Safety Partnership (CSP), the broad scope of their work and the current assessments undertaken.

The Panel was informed of the highlights for 2017/18 including: Anti-Social Behaviour has continued to decrease in the District however, there have been small pockets of increases; domestic abuse, sexual violence and hate crimes have increased, although this is seen as a positive as the crimes are ones that victims are reluctant to report; and overall crime rates are lower than Cambridgeshire and the national average.

Members were informed that the CSP tend to have a standard group of organisations that attend meetings however for some agenda items other groups do attend.

Regarding problem solving, the Members were told that the CSP is made up of professionals with some meeting separately as a problem solving group. The group shares information and then jointly problem solve. The Panel was given the example of anti-social behaviour by a problem family and were told that the problem solving group would look at the whole family, not just the individuals.

It was mentioned that the report focuses heavily on Huntingdon and St Neots and does not focus on rural areas. The Panel was informed that the Hot Spots are where they are expected to be. To accurately assess what is happening in rural areas a data analysis, excluding urban areas, would need to be completed. In addition, residents of rural areas would need to be encouraged to report crime as reported crime is what the CSP responds to.

Following a concern raised in regards to drug use, the Panel was informed that the CSP had identified St Neots and Sawtry as having a drug problem and that each area had been given their own action plan to combat the problem.

The point was raised that Members can be a valuable resource for the CSP as they know where the crime is in their area and what type of crime there is.

In response to concern raised about rogue establishments, Members were informed that licenced premises are much better now than what they were in the past.

The Panel recommended that: a similar presentation on the CSP is given at the next parish conference; the CSP balances its work between urban and rural areas and the CSP keeps the Police and Crime Commissioner updated and informed on its work.

*(At 8.48pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor D M Tysoe left the meeting.)*

*(At 8.51pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor D M Tysoe entered the meeting.)*

**11. APPOINTMENT TO HUNTINGDONSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP**

RESOLVED

that Councillor Mrs J Tavener be appointed as the Panel's representative to the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership.

Chairman