

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 Thursday, 13th June 2019.

PRESENT: Councillor T D Alban – Chairman.
Councillors B S Banks, R E Bellamy,
S Bywater, Ms A Diaz, D A Giles,
Mrs S Smith and Mrs J Tavener.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S J Criswell, Mrs A Dickinson, K I Prentice and D R Underwood.

5. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 4th April 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. Subject to the inclusion in Minute No. 4 of “and that Councillor K I Prentice be appointed as the substitute Member” after the word “Committee”, the Minutes of the meeting held on 15th May 2019 also were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were received.

7. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel received and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) which had been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st June to 30th September 2019. Clarification would be sought of the date that the item on the Community Resilience Strategy would be submitted to the Cabinet.

8. PETITION

The Panel gave consideration to the terms of a petition relating to the proposed closure of the squash courts at the One Leisure St Ives Outdoor Centre. The Council had referred the petition to the Panel at its meeting on 15th May 2019. The organiser of the petition, Mr J Dewis, addressed Members on it. He referred to the importance of the courts to the local community and the wider area, the level of participation rates in squash nationally compared with other sports and the likelihood that ongoing new residential development would increase demand for squash. In his view the decline in usage of the St Ives courts is partly the result of past faults with the heating and drains. He also commented that other gym facilities were available and that the Club had not been consulted before the decision had

been taken to close the courts. He concluded by putting forward suggestions to promote squash and expressing a wish to work with One Leisure St Ives to attract new users to the facility.

During questions put by Members to Mr Dewis, it was established that the club held weekly club nights and organised a number of large events each year. The club had 30 members and other casual users also used the courts. The difference between squash courts usage in St Neots and St Ives was then discussed. Finally, Mr Dewis confirmed the dates on which he received communications on the Council's intention to repurpose the courts and that he did not consider he had been given an opportunity to influence the decision.

Councillor J D Ablewhite addressed the Panel on the petition. He informed the Committee that the Council previously had invested in leisure and that while it should be run as a business, it was in fact a service. One of the reasons for investing in the indoor centre in St Ives was to enable the Council then to invest in the outdoor centre. The outdoor centre could benefit from improvements, had limited opening hours and did not receive adequate marketing. There were opportunities to install other fitness facilities at the indoor centre and to provide the existing facilities at the outdoor centre such as the bar and catering through other models, for example, as a franchise. Councillor Ablewhite concluded by expressing the view that more time should be taken to consider the Council's options to promote the well-being of the community.

The Chairman thanked Mr Dewis and Councillor Ablewhite for their contributions and assured them that their views would be taken into consideration during their deliberations at Minute No 12 post.

9. ANNUAL UPDATE ON VOLUNTARY SECTOR GRANT FUNDING

Ms J Farrow, Chief Executive Officer of the Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations, was in attendance to present the Annual Update on voluntary sector grant funding (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). Mr C Stopford, Head of Community, also was present. Mr Stopford alerted the Panel to the fact that he was a trustee of the Forum and its Treasurer.

By way of background Mr Stopford reminded Members that the Forum received two strategic grants and that in the autumn the Council would commence its commissioning process for 2020 and beyond. Ms Farrow informed the Panel that from 2017 the terms of the Forum's grant required it to be innovative. She went on to provide more details on each section of the report. In particular she referred to the numbers of organisations the Forum assisted and its role in alerting those organisations to funding opportunities and in challenging and championing the voluntary sector.

In response to a question by a Member, Ms Farrow informed the Panel that the Forum had approximately 120 member organisations; some were longstanding members while others only became members for as long as they needed the assistance of the Forum. It was not necessary to be a member to receive support from the Forum. Following further questions, it was confirmed that the Forum provided training for individuals and the Forum's officer structure was

outlined. The latter was augmented by a number of volunteers who were recruited by word of mouth. The value of the work carried out by volunteers had been estimated at £13-£16 per hour.

The Panel discussed the ways the Forum advertised the benefits and services if provided to new organisations. While personal reference by existing member organisations had an important role in this respect, the Forum recently had adopted a marketing strategy. In addition, a marketing expert had been appointed to the Forum's Board.

The Chairman indicated that the Panel's task and finish groups would investigate many of the areas covered in the Annual Report. He then thanked Ms Farrow for attending the meeting.

10. CITIZENS ADVICE RURAL CAMBS ANNUAL UPDATE

Mr M Mealing, Mr R Marshall and Ms H Spriggs provided the Panel with the Citizens Advice Rural Annual Update. In the course of a presentation Mr Mealing outlined the structure of the organisation, the levels of client interaction and of benefits achieved, before Mr Marshall provided a detailed explanation of the means of access to the services provided, links to the national organisation, the numbers of users and examples of the ways clients were assisted, some of whom had highly complex needs. A large part of the organisation's resources was devoted to improving younger clients' financial skills. Considerable benefit was attributed to the fact that the service was co-located with the Council. The value of the work provided by volunteers had been estimated to be the equivalent of £157k in salaries for the year. Ms Spriggs then outlined her role managing projects, the importance and expansion of the Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme and the development of the telephone system.

In the course of the ensuing discussion Members examined the challenges associated with engaging with the elderly and the assistance that was provided to obtain services via the internet and by providing appointments. They also looked at the relationship between Citizens Advice and Disability Huntingdonshire (DISH). DISH provided a service on behalf of Citizens Advice, which was labour intensive and, therefore, had a limited extent.

Following a question by a Member, the Panel was informed that providing services through Skype was being investigated. It would require a significant amount of investment but was potentially an effective way of operating as more clients could be contacted.

Having noted the position locally relating to Universal Credit, the Chairman thanked Mr Mealing, Mr Marshall and Ms Spriggs for attending the meeting.

At 8.55pm the meeting was adjourned.

At 9.00pm the meeting resumed.

11. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

12. ONE LEISURE ST IVES OUTDOOR - REPURPOSING OF SQUASH COURTS INTO A FITNESS FACILITY

(Councillor J Palmer, Executive Councillor for Partnership and Well-Being was in attendance for this item).

Pursuant to Minute No. 8 ante, the Panel gave consideration to a report by the Head of Leisure and Health and the One Leisure Business and Operations Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on repurposing the One Leisure St Ives outdoor centre's squash courts as a fitness facility. Particular attention was paid to the business case, financial data and demand. Having examined the options presented in detail, Members were fully supportive of the proposed project but also discussed opportunities to meet and develop demand for squash within St Ives. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to approve the implementation of Option 2 as set out in the report now submitted and also to commit to the provision of two replacement squash court facilities to be provided as soon as possible.

13. RE-ADMITTANCE OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be re-admitted to the meeting.

14. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was presented to the Panel. Councillor Mrs J Tavener informed Members that the Tree Strategy Working Group would report to the next meeting.

Chairman