

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 on Thursday, 5 November 2015.

PRESENT: Councillor G J Bull – Chairman.

Councillors T D Alban, P L E Bucknell, Mrs A D Curtis, R S Farrer, L George, D Harty, B Hyland, J M Palmer, M F Shellens and J E White.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor E R Butler.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors J D Ablewhite, D B Dew, J A Gray and R B Howe.

47. MINUTES

Subject to the deletion of the words “an employee of NHS Cambridgeshire and Peterborough” to be replaced by “the Cambridge University Hospitals Trust and the Peterborough and Stamford Hospitals NHS Trust were customers of his employer” in Minute No. 15/37, the Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 8th October 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

48. MEMBER'S INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were received.

49. 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 had been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st November 2015 to 29th February 2016. Members noted that, following the decision on their remits, the Customer Services Strategy would be submitted to the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny forum in December. They also were acquainted with the particular circumstances of the approval of the Council Tax Base 2016/17.

50. TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2015/16 BIENNIAL REVIEW

(Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Resources, was in attendance for this item).

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing details of the Council's borrowing and investments for the period 1st April to 30th September 2015. Having commented on a loan by the Council

and on the spread of the Council's investments, Members received additional detailed information on the terms of those investments.

RESOLVED

- a) that the contents of the report be noted; and
- b) that the Cabinet be recommended to endorse the report for submission to the Council.

51. CORPORATE PLAN AND FINANCE - INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT (QUARTER 2)

(Councillors J D Ablewhite, D B Dew, J A Gray and R B Howe were in attendance for the discussion on this item).

Consideration was given to a joint report by the Corporate Team Manager and the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on progress against the Council's Key Indicators for 2015/16 in the period 1st July to 30th September 2015, the status of current projects and financial performance on revenue and capital spend as at 30th September 2015. Members were informed that 83% of the key actions were on target and of the reasons why some measures had not been achieved.

This was the first time the complete set of integrated performance information had been submitted to the Panel. At the suggestion of the Chairman, it was decided that key areas would be allocated to Members of the Panel who would then focus on them. This task would be completed at the next meeting. The Panel proceeded to examine in detail the information presented.

With regard to the Strategic Theme – A Strong Local Economy, a comment was made that the Council appeared not to be achieving some Development Management targets but, at the same time, it had made savings by holding open a number of posts in that section. In response, Councillor D Dew, Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, accepted that the service had experienced problems but he stated that the vacant posts had not necessarily caused them. The Development Management section was subject to review and practices had been changed, which had resulted in more effective recruitment. The appointment of a Planning Services Manager (Development Management) was the first step and he had been given a number of key additional roles. Improvements in performance had already been achieved.

With particular reference to fast track pre-application advice, Councillor Dew stated that although the target had been missed, he was most disappointed that only one such enquiry had been received. An Officer recently had been appointed who would be solely responsible for this service.

Members commented generally on the need to improve communications between Development Management and other sections within the Council and with developers. Having been advised that measures had been taken in these areas and that ambitious targets had been adopted, which were achievable, assurances were

received that it was highly unlikely the Council would be put into special measures as it did not have a history of failing to meet its targets. It was suggested that future performance monitoring might include the length of time it took to issue decisions once planning permission had been approved.

In response to a question by Councillor J M Palmer, Members were informed that the Building Control shared service would achieve the expected savings because the budget allocated was net of the savings. Following a further question by Councillor T D Alban, it was reported that there was not a correlation between the collection of business rates and the collection of rent.

The view was expressed that the Budget consultation should be more effective. The aim was to obtain feedback that would enable the Council to take decisions informed by public opinion. It was suggested that preparation for consulting businesses in the New Year should begin urgently.

Councillor M F Shellens suggested that the Panel should receive a report on the Council's overall financial position. However, it was expected that the Budget report to the next meeting would provide this information. Councillor Shellens then asked what One Leisure's financial targets were. Councillor R B Howe indicated that the service aimed to achieve commercial rates of return on the capital employed within five years.

Further on the performance against Development Management targets, Councillor Dew responded to a question on affordable housing by stating that the viability test and Government changes to the thresholds meant it was unlikely the targets linked to need identified through the Strategic Housing Market Assessment would be achieved. On a related matter, the Council currently was examining the implications of the application of Right to Buy to Registered Providers.

Councillor P L E Bucknell asked about the uptake of activities for young people. The Head of Leisure and Health reported that the Youth Service had taken over the referral process but, following cuts to the service, this had ceased. The Council would be looking into taking this over. It was suggested that the Police and Crime Commissioner might provide funding for youth services.

During discussion on the projects being undertaken, a Member drew attention to the fact that some projects did not have any documents on the SharePoint site. It was agreed to pursue this through the Project Management Select Committee.

Through the Financial Performance Monitoring Suite for September 2015, Members gave consideration to a proposal to use an underspend in the current year to bring forward the procurement of an upgrade to the Capita payments system. On the grounds that it would improve resilience and the disaster recovery arrangements, the proposal was supported.

In response to a question by Councillor M F Shellens, it was agreed to circulate information to Members on the three strategic expansion

locations in the draft Local Plan that were expected to produce an increase in housing completions from 2018 onwards.

RESOLVED

- a) that the Cabinet be recommended to note the Panel's comments on progress against the Key Activities and Corporate Indicators, on current projects and on the Financial Performance Monitoring Suite, and
- b) that the Cabinet be recommended to include a supplementary capital bid in the 2015/16 Capital Programme for an upgrade to the Capita payments system.

52. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL STRUCTURE

Consideration was given to a report by the Policy, Performance and Transformation Manager (Scrutiny), which recommended the adoption of a new structure for the Overview and Scrutiny function. Members were informed the intention was that the new arrangements would better reflect that Council's strategic priorities, that more cross-remit working would be undertaken and that the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen jointly would determine how work was allocated. Having received further information on the options considered, it was

RESOLVED

- a) that Option 2 referred to in paragraph 3.1 of the report now submitted be endorsed as the new structure for the Overview and Scrutiny function, and
- b) that the amendments to the Constitution also contained in the report be referred to the Corporate Governance Panel and Council in December.

53. EXCLUSION OF THE 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).

54. ONE LEISURE NEGOTIATIONS

(Councillor Robin B Howe, Deputy Executive Leader and Executive Member for Commercial Activities, was in attendance for this item).

Consideration was given to a report by the One Leisure Business Development Manager – Development (a copy of which is appended in the Annex to the Minute Book) seeking authority to undertake negotiations on behalf of One Leisure. On the understanding that reports on the progress of negotiations and on the terms of any agreement reached were submitted to Overview and Scrutiny, it was

RESOLVED

- a) that the Cabinet be recommended to approve the recommendations contained in the report now submitted, and
- b) that reports on the progress of negotiations and on the terms of any agreement reached are submitted to Overview and Scrutiny.

55. RE-ADMITTANCE OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

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

56. 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 Social Well-Being and Environmental Well-Being.

57. WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel reviewed a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on progress of its activities since the last meeting. Following a suggestion accepted by the Social Well-Being Panel the previous week, it was agreed to appoint Members to a Joint Working Group to collate the views of interested parties and partner organisations on the County Council's budget proposals and to make a co-ordinated response to the consultation from a Huntingdonshire perspective. It would also enable Members to look at the actions the Council and other organisations might need to take if the proposals were implemented.

58. DECISION DIGEST

The Panel received and noted 159th Edition of the Decision Digest.

Chairman