

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH) held in Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 7 June 2023.

- PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chair.
- Councillors A M Blackwell, I D Gardener, J E Harvey, S A Howell, A R Jennings, R Martin, Dr M Pickering, N Wells and Graham John Welton.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S J Corney and R A Slade.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors S W Ferguson, B A Mickelburgh and S Wakeford.

4. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 5th April 2023 and 18th May 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Jennings and Councillor Welton to the Panel and thanked Councillor Cawley and Councillor Gray for their valuable contribution over the past year.

5. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

6. 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 has been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st June 2023 to 30th September 2023.

The Panel were advised that a joint meeting of both Overview and Scrutiny Panels would be convened on 6th July 2023 to discuss the Garden Waste Subscription Service report.

7. MARKET TOWNS PROGRAMME - SUMMER UPDATE

By means of a report by the Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Market Towns Programme – Spring Update 2022/2023 was presented to the Panel.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the opportunity given to Panel Members to view detail plans for the St Neots Town Centre proposal,

which had been extremely informative and helpful.

In response to concerns from Councillor Gardener, the Panel heard that a communications plan would be developed to ensure St Neots residents were proactively communicated with regarding the planned works to trees in the Market Square. Councillor Harvey's suggestion of using the old wood as part of the planning art projects for the areas was noted. Following a further question from Councillor Jennings, the Panel were advised that the County Council would be making a contribution towards the cost of the removal of the trees and that there was a working assumption that the replacement trees would remain the liability of the County Council.

Following a question from Councillor Pickering, the Panel were advised that plans were progressing in respect of the Old Falcon property and that more detail would be brought to a future report.

In response to questions from Councillor Martin around capital funding in section 2.39 of the report, the Panel heard that the two projects had been chosen due to the timescales and availability of funding available.

Following an observation from Councillor Wells, who praised the amended terminology from Masterplan, the Panel heard that the aim was to clear up confusion surrounding the terminology and to allow for clarity moving forward.

The Panel heard, in response to a question from Councillor Martin, that all funding opportunities would be maximised and that delays in procurement were due to managing both material cost and availability, resulting in a deliverable scheme. The Panel were further assured that the Council would benefit from the Eastern Highways Alliance Framework ensuring deliverability.

Councillor Blackwell expressed concerns over the continuation of the Digital Wayfinding project, following which, the Panel were assured that the project and the installed machines would continue to be monitored with an exit strategy contingency should this prove necessary. The Panel were further assured that whilst decisions could be made on this project outside of the democratic meeting cycle, the Cabinet would, where feasible, seek to loop the Panel in to the decision.

It was thereupon

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be passed to Cabinet for their consideration when making a decision upon the recommendations contained within the report.

8. MID TERM REVIEW OF THE HOUSING STRATEGY 2020-2025

By means of a report by the Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Mid Term Review of the Housing Strategy 2020-2025 was presented to the Panel.

In response to a question from Councillor Gardener on whether agricultural workers would be included within the definition of key workers, the Panel heard that there was a suggestion that this term maybe replaced with Essential Workers by Government in the future, the Council would expect this type of demand to be identified as part of Housing Needs Surveys in local parishes the Council would then use opportunities to meet that demand, within existing policy in the Local Plan.

Following a question from Councillor Pickering, it was acknowledged that whilst an ongoing issue of under occupation of social housing exists, it is a sensitive issue. The Panel were assured that the Council would continue to work in partnership with Social Landlords to manage the situation as proactively as possible in line with the tenancies of those residents affected.

In response to a question from Councillor Harvey regarding Disabled Facilities Grants, the Panel heard that a piece of work would be planned to review and assess the current need and anticipated demand in this area.

Following an observation from Councillor Blackwell on the alarming statistics surrounding dementia sufferers, the Panel heard that the report outlines the importance of the work being undertaken in aligning the stark challenges faced by the Council.

Having praised a comprehensive report, it was thereupon

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be passed to Cabinet for their consideration when making a decision upon the recommendations contained within the report.

9. FIRST HOMES STATEMENT

By means of a report by the Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the First Homes Statement was presented to the Panel.

Following a question from Councillor Pickering, the Panel heard that self-employed residents would be classified the same as employed residents in respect of meeting employment within the district criteria.

Councillor Blackwell expressed concerns that by including siblings within the criteria, the scheme would be subject to abuse. The Panel were advised that a sibling connection had been retained within the scheme in line with LGA guidance however it could be reflected upon.

The Panel were assured, following a question from Councillor Howell, that once identified as a First Home, a restriction would be placed with the Land Registry to ensure that this status remained in perpetuity.

It was clarified to the Panel, following a question from Councillor Harvey, that the reference to a connection with older children within

the report was not intended to exclude a connection with younger children.

In response to a question from Councillor Martin, it was confirmed to the Panel that those who are employees of a Huntingdonshire business but that work from home, would satisfy the employment connection.

It was thereupon

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be passed to Cabinet for their consideration when making a decision upon the recommendations contained within the report.

10. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT, 2022/23 QUARTER 4

By means of a report by the Business Intelligence & Performance Manager Performance and Data Analyst (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Corporate Performance Report 2022/23 Quarter 4 Report was presented to the Panel.

Following a question from Councillor Jennings on the lack of set targets on some of the performance indicators and status indicators, the Panel heard that the team were aware of some discrepancies within the report, however this would be addressed and the proposed changes to the reports in 2023/24 would resolve this issue for the future. It was further advised, that for every measure in the new corporate plan there would be a target and intervention level set.

In response to a question from Councillor Pickering, the Panel heard that the measures for garden waste would be improved as it was acknowledged that the weather could greatly affect this measure, especially with the impacts of climate change. Going forward, a more appropriate target would be set for the 'percentage of waste that is recycled' and the inclusion of a 'weight of waste collected per household' to ensure that not only waste recycled but the efforts to reduce waste overall could be tracked by Officers and Members.

Councillor Gleadow observed the improvement shown within the planning service and praised the team for this achievement.

It was thereupon

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be passed to Cabinet for their consideration when making a decision upon the recommendations contained within the report.

11. FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23 QUARTER 4

By means of a report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Finance Performance Report 2022/23 Quarter 4 Report was presented to the Panel.

Following a question from Councillor Harvey on the reduction seen by CCTV in section 3.2, the Panel heard that this was due to additional variable income that was not achievable.

The Panel heard, following a further question from Councillor Harvey, that the A14 Contribution, early repayment, in section 3.3 had been researched and it was felt that the option taken held the most benefit for the Council.

Councillor Jennings praised a very comprehensive report but enquired about an expected utilities saving at One Leisure St Neots. The Panel were advised that the detail would be checked and confirmed back to the Panel.

Councillor Blackwell expressed concerns over Council Tax arrears mentioned within the report, the Panel were advised that work would continue to recover these arrears and that this would be monitored.
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Following a question from Councillor Harvey, the Panel heard that some long term vacancies had been removed from the MTFs where there were no plans to recruit.

The Panel heard, following a question from Councillor Gardener, that fleet maintenance was ongoing in line with the Climate Strategy, with great success, with the aim to maintain current fleet rather than invest in new vehicles.

It was thereupon

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be passed to Cabinet for their consideration when making a decision upon the recommendations contained within the report.

12. TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT 2022/23

By means of a report by the Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Treasury Management Outturn Report 2022/23 was presented to the Panel.

Following a question from Councillor Pickering, the Panel heard that the increase in the overall property value of the Rowley Centre St Neots was due to the unit occupied by Cineworld having returned to full rent (valuations being based on rent yield), from the reduced rent during the COVID pandemic.

In response to a question from Councillor Jennings, it was confirmed to the Panel that all borrowing was on fixed rate terms, the majority being borrowed from the Public Works Loans Board, in addition there is a small loan from Salix Ltd at fixed 0% interest.

The Panel heard, following an observation by Councillor Blackwell, that an inconsistency in the report relating to People for Places in section 3.1 would be corrected to Places for People.

In response to a question from Councillor Harvey, the Panel heard that the reduction in property value of the existing portfolio shown in Table 8 was due to a decrease in rent and estimated future yield at two locations which impacted on the property value, it was also advised that new valuers had been appointed which had resulted in some valuation changes.

It was thereupon

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be passed to Cabinet for their consideration when making a decision upon the recommendations contained within the report.

13. CORPORATE PLAN TARGETS 2023/24

By means of a report and presentation by the Chief Operating Officer (copies of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Corporate Plan Targets 2023/24 was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Jennings observed that some Performance Indicators were set substantially below the targets achieved in the past year. The Panel heard that this was to allow the team to clear the existing backlog and would provide a long term benefit.

The Panel heard that due to residents being able to self-serve via the website, the nature of the calls received by the call centre had become more detailed which had resulted in changes to call handling. This had resulted in a better service for residents who were able to have their enquiries resolved by the call centre on first contact whilst still maintaining good call handling times when benchmarked against other local Councils. Following a further question from Councillor Martin on how the call centre data would be presented, the Panel heard that this would be developed as the year progressed.

Councillor Martin expressed concerns that Performance Indicator 11 was not ambitious enough and enquired whether a higher intervention level would be possible. The Panel heard that a lot of the factors involved were outside of the Councils control and relied on other organisations therefore it was felt that the targets were realistic.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Gardener, the Panel heard that the progress of the Market Towns projects would be seen across the spectrum of Corporate Plan Targets.

In response to a question from Councillor Blackwell surrounding sickness targets, the Panel heard that these had been kept in line with national averages due to the diverse nature of roles across the workforce, however work would be undertaken to ensure intervention levels were consistent with those of neighbouring authorities.

Following a question from Councillor Martin surrounding Performance Indicator 13, the Panel were advised that the detail would be sought and reported back to the Panel at a future date.

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 Gardener requested that he remain on the Flooding Working Group for any future meetings given his involvement in the Overview and Scrutiny Flooding Study and given the flooding issues which had occurred within his Ward.

Councillor Howell enquired whether it would be possible to look at a study involving Business Development in the future.

Chair