

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERSHIPS) held in Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Thursday, 2 November 2023.

PRESENT: Councillor J E Kerr – Chair.

Councillors T Alban, M J Burke, S Bywater, S Cawley, S J Criswell, J E Harvey, N J Hunt, M Kadewere, C Lowe, S R McAdam and D J Shaw.

APOLOGIES: No apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors .

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors L Davenport-Ray, S W Ferguson, M A Hassall and S L Taylor.

26. MINUTES

A correction was made to the third paragraph of Minute 23/25 which should have read *Following a question from Councillor Criswell*. Following this adjustment, the Minutes of the meeting held on 5th October 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

27. RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The responses to questions arising from previous meetings were noted. Following an enquiry from Councillor Alban it was agreed that a report on Local Lettings Plans would be investigated.

28. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

29. 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 and the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions which had been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st November 2023 to 28th February 2024 was noted.

It was requested by Councillor Cawley that a report on SEUK rankings be developed and brought to a future meeting of the Panel.

30. A14 TREE PLANTING UPDATE

Due to the inclement weather it was agreed by the Panel to move the

A14 Tree Planting Update to the beginning of the agenda as the presenter had a long journey after the meeting.

By means of a presentation by an Officer from National Highways, (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), an update on A14 tree planting was presented to the Panel.

The Panel were pleased to be informed that the planting tubes which would be used going forward were made of a biodegradable material and that the cost of the new style of tubes had been included within the original project budget.

Following a question from Councillor Kerr regarding the difference between sample and on site plant surveys, the Panel heard that although it was difficult to compare the two, the end result was very clear data allowing for better planning in the future. The Panel also were assured that cell grown plants would be used in the future and had been chosen due to their robust nature once planted. The Panel also heard, following a further question from Councillor Kerr, that planting within the central reservation was not practical as safety of road users must take priority, however any opportunities where areas could be planted without compromising safety would be investigated.

In response to a question from Councillor Shaw, the Panel were advised that community engagement was always encouraged and opportunities would be reviewed on a case by case basis. Councillor Alban also expressed concern that community engagement could be impacted due to multiple agencies being involved. Further details would be sought and shared with Members to allow for communities within the district to benefit.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Hunt on the reduced speed limit on the old A14 road, the Panel were assured that barrier replacement works were in progress with a review of the detrunking schedule by 2025. The Panel also heard, in response to a question from Councillor Lowe, that works on the A428 Caxton Gibbet to Black Cat section were due to commence in early 2024.

The Panel thanked the Officer for his time and an informative presentation.

31. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2024/25

By means of a report by the Review and Benefits Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25 Report was presented to the Panel.

In response to a question from Councillor McAdam, the Panel heard that precepts as whole should not affect Town and Parish Councils, as they are still able to set the overall precept as required, however the amount charged per household may change. The Panel were advised that work is currently being undertaken to draft the Taxbase, but the Taxbase setting decision cannot be taken until after the decision on the Council Tax Support Scheme.

Councillor Cawley praised the sentiment of the report but questioned where the money would be found to make up the shortfall. The Panel

were advised that the £1 million difference was made up across all authorities who make up the beneficiaries of Council Tax and that the impact on the District Council was anticipated to be £70,000. The Panel were assured that Council Tax precepts for the district would not be affected and that an increase in revenue streams would help to cover the shortfall.

Councillor Hunt enquired whether it was possible to see how much is currently spent by the Council Tax recovery team on these types of accounts and how much could be saved by the introduction of the new policy. The Panel heard that whilst this information was not readily available, there was an impact of taking recovery action on those that could least afford to pay as every court summons issued for non-payment incurs costs of £70.

It was observed by Councillor Shaw that the lack of response from Cambridgeshire County Council was surprising given that they would be most affected by the new policy. The Panel heard that the County Council were in support of the principles of the project and that two other Councils within the County had already implemented Council Tax Support schemes that offered up to 100%. In addition, Councillor Bywater stressed the importance of including Care Leavers within the group that the policy would benefit.

Following a question from Councillor Alban, the Panel heard that modelling suggested around 4% or 163 claims may be negatively impacted due to having income higher than the allowances, but that this number may reduce as claims migrate to Universal Credit. An exceptional hardship scheme would be in place to help support those negatively impacted to transition to the new scheme.

Whereupon, it was

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.

32. TRANSFER OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACES POLICY

By means of a report by the Assistant Director Strategic Insight and Delivery (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Transfer of Public Open Spaces Policy was presented to the Panel.

The Panel were assured, following a question from Councillor Shaw, that the intention of the policy was to create a set of rules to allow requests to be dealt with should they be received and that there were no specific parcels of land involved. The Panel were further assured that this policy purely covered open spaces and that there were a further two policies, all of which run concurrently, to enable the Council best management of its assets.

In response to a question from Councillor Alban, the Panel heard that the Council did not plan to approach local groups or organisations to offer to transfer land. It was further noted that a lease for open spaces would be preferable due to the complexities involved in transferring

permanent ownership of assets.

Councillor Bywater praised the flowchart within the report as bringing clarity to the process and helping members to signpost residents should a query be received.

Following the discussion, it was

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.

33. GARDEN WASTE SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

By means of a presentation by the Chief Delivery Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), an update on the Garden Waste Subscription Service Implementation was presented to the Panel.

The Panel heard, in response to a question from Councillor Lowe, that there would only be the option to pay annually for the service. Options for those residents on a lower income were being developed.

Councillor Cawley commented that the marketing plan was helpful to see but enquired about communication with residents choosing to partake in the scheme as well as positive messaging against fly tipping. The Panel were assured that a thorough communications plan had been developed to ensure residents were aware of what to expect as the service became live. It was further advised that proactive messaging was being planned around the issue of fly tipping and that this would be reactive to data received as the service rolls out. It was further confirmed that those residents not choosing to subscribe to the service could keep their existing bin if they so desired.

Councillor Bywater expressed concerns regarding rental properties with a high turnover of tenants potentially abandoning their bins. The Panel heard that a detailed response would be sought and reported back at a future date.

In response to a question from Councillor Lowe, the Panel heard that bins which were returned to the Council would be redistributed where feasible or recycled if at the end of their life cycle.

Councillor Alban observed that the Panel's decision to call in the project had been productive as it had allowed for robust development of the scheme. In response to a further question from Councillor Alban, the Panel heard that communication about the scheme would be distributed to all households on bin hangers alongside Christmas refuse collection details. It was also confirmed that the lower rate of £50 for three years would apply to all those residents who subscribe by direct debit by the required date and don't cancel within the three year period.

The Panel were assured, following a question from Councillor Shaw, that once the service was implemented, only bins from those properties that had subscribed to the service would be collected.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Harvey, the Panel were advised that a schedule had been developed for the Saturday local collection points and would be shared. The Panel were also assured that any potential community collection points would be assessed on a case by case basis.

Chair