

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, 10 July 2024.

PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chair.

Councillors A Blackwell, S Cawley,
S J Corney, I D Gardener, S A Howell,
R Martin, Dr M Pickering and N Wells.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors A R Jennings and D Terry.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors S J Conboy and S Wakeford.

15. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5th June 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

16. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor S Corney declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/18 as a member of the North West Cambridgeshire Conservative Association whose office is based within the Ramsey Mews.

Councillor R Martin declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/18 as a member of the North West Cambridgeshire Conservative Association whose office is based within the Ramsey Mews.

17. RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The responses to questions asked at previous meetings were noted.

18. 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 and the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions which had been prepared by the Leader for the period 1st July 2024 to 31st October 2024 were presented to the Panel.

19. MARKET TOWNS PROGRAMME SUMMER UPDATE

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

In response to a question from Councillor Pickering, the Panel heard

that in relation to St Neots, only a small number of the shop front grants had been successful, this was due to the remaining applications not fulfilling the criteria for the scheme. The recommendation was that the scheme is expanded to include areas outside of the market towns and previously unsuccessful applications would have the opportunity to reapply.

Following requests for clarification from Councillor Cawley and Councillor Gardener over the proposed purchase of an additional location for the Cromwell Museum and the long term ownership of that property, the Panel were assured that whilst the ownership would sit with Huntingdon Town Council, grant agreement documents would have clauses built in to protect this asset and clarify the use of funds from any future sale.

The Panel heard, following a question from Councillor Pickering, that the gas boiler at the Priority Centre was in good working order and it was not planned to replace this until necessary. In addition it was noted that the current timescales for the project were based upon industry standard assumptions but that it was hoped that additional efficiencies could be established once a contractor was appointed.

Councillor Catmur enquired whether any further hidden risks were anticipated within the St Neots market square project, following the discovery of a previously unidentified pipe through the project, following which, the Panel were advised that all the interrogation into the ground works was now complete, therefore no other unexpected discoveries were anticipated. The Panel were further assured that tolerances had been built into the project timescales and that this was not expected to impact the overall project timescales.

In response to a question from Councillor Martin, the Panel heard that the objections received for the Priory Centre application were no unexpected and that the team were working through those comments. The Panel were also advised that 80% of the anticipated works were internal works and that the external works were looking to bring a more vibrant visual impact for the centre. Work was continuing with the team liaising with planning consultants, conservation team and English Heritage to provide the best solution for all.

Councillor Martin praised the overall plans for the Ramsey project but expressed concern that the proposed pop up shops may affect the street scene and visibility for existing and established businesses. The team were assured that retail champions had been employed to ensure that the scheme would benefit all residents and business owners. The Panel was also assured, following an enquiry from Councillor Catmur, that the popup shops and pedestrianisation of the area were being developed to be accessibility compliant.

Following a question from Councillor Gardener regarding the location of sensors on the Great Ouse River, the Panel heard that detail on this would be sought and brought back to the Panel.

Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations

20. HUNTINGDONSHIRE PLACE STRATEGY UPDATE

By means of a report and a presentation by the Assistant Director (Strategic Insights and Delivery) (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book) the Huntingdonshire Place Strategy Update report was presented to the Panel.

Following questions from Councillors Gardener and Cawley, the Panel heard that the Council would be developing its own priorities for the district as it acknowledged that due to working with the County Council, the current plan could not be changed but that the Council could influence future plans. It was also confirmed that local flood groups were not prohibited from applying for funding under the environmental innovation category. It was also acknowledged that although funding was limited, it was also a quick process and alternative funding options were recommended to groups as appropriate.

In response to a question from Councillor Howell on Member involvement, the Panel were advised that this had been hugely successful in giving partners a voice and opportunities to develop this for the future would be investigated and developed.

The Panel were assured, in response to a question from Councillor Martin, that opportunities with health partners were being developed, it was observed that this was a complex field but that the Council aimed to work in conjunction where possible or alternatively in parallel to ensure the best possible outcome for residents. Councillor Martin expressed concern that health partners were unwilling to be influenced by the Council, however the Panel were assured that the development of a Health and Wealth Strategy would address these concerns and would be brought through the democratic cycle in the coming months.

In response to further questions by Councillor Martin and Gardener on the upcoming mayoral elections and how this would affect the CPCA's transport plans and projects, the Panel were assured that a pipeline of projects had been committed to. The Panel were also assured that the Council was aware of the issues in the delivery of the TING bus service and that concerns had been raised with the CPCA to resolve the matter.

Councillor Martin expressed concern that there was an emphasis on buying and eating locally within the strategy but that there did not appear to be a proportionate focus on farming within the district to deliver these objectives. The Panel were assured that many layers existed within the policy and that farming along with associated innovation and technology was well represented.

21. PRODUCTIVITY PLANS

By means of a report by the Corporate Director (People) (a copy of which was appended in the Minute book), the Productivity Plan report was presented to the Panel.

In response to a comment from Councillor Martin, the Panel were

assured that regular benchmarking against industry standards and other neighbouring authorities took place, and that the proposed increase in productivity would not be at the expense of quality. Following a further question from Councillor Martin, the Panel heard that the plans would be embedded within the organisation through key metrics and the Corporate Plan. By using strategic engagement and reporting across the organisation, best practice could be employed for all. It was also noted that the Workforce Strategy would address the required skills and capabilities going forward which would allow for key actions and best practice to be embedded within the culture.

Following a concern raised by Councillor Blackwell regarding the lack of numerical targets, the Panel were assured that metrics and KPIs would be used to measure in each area but that these were already being captured in the performance reports which are regularly brought through the democratic cycle and were therefore not duplicated within this report.

Councillor Pickering observed that there was an issue with some of the links contained within the document, this was noted and the correct documents will be circulated to the Panel following the meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor Wells regarding the 4 day working week model used at South Cambs District Council, the Panel heard that the Council was constantly monitoring best practice and evidence of what works, and continually review opportunities to be more effective. Following a question from Councillor Cawley, the Panel were advised that the aim was not to reduce residents abilities to contact the Council but to reduce the need to contact, by working harder there should be less need to contact the Council. In response to a further question from Councillor Cawley, the Panel heard that AI opportunities were being investigated where they could provide benefit to the Council, with the example of note and minute taking being given as an opportunity currently being explored.

Whereupon it was thereby

RESOLVED

that the comments from the Panel would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.

22. CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

The Panel were advised that the item was withdrawn from the agenda as the report had not yet been received from the Local Government Association and that it was intended to be heard at the next full Council meeting.

Chair

