

## 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 Tuesday, 10 June 2025.

PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chair.

Councillors A Blackwell, S J Corney, I D Gardener, A R Jennings, R Martin, S R McAdam, Dr M Pickering and C H Tevlin.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors B S Chapman.

#### **4. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meetings held on 2nd April 2025 and 15th May 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **5. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillor S Corney declared an other registerable interest in minute 25/9 by virtue of submitting planning applications as part of his employment.

#### **6. 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.

It was noted the items had increased from 4 to 7 since the last work programme was populated and it was a struggle to read the additional pages. Disappointment was expressed that items had been added on last minute with little notice, especially Key Decisions and lack of a Parking update on the Agenda despite the discussions already held about this. In response, the Panel heard that Officers are working on this and an update would be sought with the intention of being added either to the Pending Agenda items or the immediate Work Programme.

## **7. OUTSTANDING RESPONSES FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The Panel received and noted the responses received in relation to questions arising at previous meetings of the Panel and heard that other outstanding responses would be sought.

## **8. ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGY**

By means of a report by the Economic Development Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), The Economic Growth Strategy Report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Gardener expressed his appreciation for the report and asked for clarification pertaining to page 54, noting the year read 2014 instead of 2024. The Council were asked how they are going to help the businesses in the district that struggle to hire additional staff due to the increase in National Insurance and Business rates as the report did not include this information. The Panel heard that this was a draft document and still had edits, ensuring errors will be corrected. They were advised this document is laying out the strategy of the Economic Growth Plan and not everything the team are currently working on. They cannot work by individual cost line and are focusing on ensuring Huntingdonshire is an attractive option to work and live in.

Councillor Pickering questioned whether the Council should be promoting areas within the district, rather than referencing Huntingdonshire itself due to the Local Government Reorganisation. He suggested maybe the Council should be looking towards their new identity rather than the existing one which isn't well known to people. The Panel heard that this strategy is designed for the present and that whilst there will be a restructure, the Huntingdonshire area will still exist. The strategy is designed to be entirely compatible and can work in a localised manner. It was reiterated to the Panel that the website for this will go live in July and the idea is to be the leading force in promoting the area and to be the example other Councils follow.

Councillor Martin expressed his disagreement with Councillor Pickering's point in relation to Huntingdonshire not having a known identity. He drew on the history of the district and advised the Council should be proud of this. He commended the team in their work on the strategy and encouraged the Panel to recognise this. He requested clarification on the use of Huntingdonshire economy being adaptable as he was unsure he agreed with this. The Panel heard that Huntingdonshire has a variety of key sectors, referencing advanced manufacturing, life science and the defence sector. The term adaptable was used as the Council are trying to be adaptable in supporting the

right sectors that the data says they should be focusing on. The Economic Development team remain flexible in their dealings with the local businesses for their needs in that moment in time. The Panel were reminded that Huntingdonshire's work force is not made up of a single business, it spans across different sectors as shown in page 6 of the report. Councillor Martin was appreciative of the confirmation and agreed with the use of adaptability.

Councillor Catmur referenced the Key Risks and that KPI's will be monitored closely, asking for confirmation of what they are and if these are the ones that should be closely monitored. The Panel heard that examples of the KPI's monitored are the Footfall figures from the market towns, business support provided by the team and the number of new people following the Linked-In page. It was reiterated that the report includes other metrics set out in the table which shows consultants the team have worked with and items the team has identified as things that must be worked on as they are indicators as to what is going on and the decisions that need to be taken internally. Councillor Catmur went on to ask if the risk of flooding in Huntingdonshire had been taken into account. The Panel heard that this has been considered and is covered in the Local Plan and that there will need to be a period of adaptability in relation to flooding and the effect climate change will have on businesses. It was heard that those strategies are more long term but the strategy being presented has the potential to last beyond 3 to 5 years and is something that can be taken forward to help with resilience.

Councillor McAdam expressed his agreement with Councillor Martin's comments regarding the history of the district, feeling this could be utilised to bring more tourists into the area. He referred to aims and statements in the report commented there was not a lot regarding how this would be achieved. It was suggested that case studies would be helpful and would like to know how we are helping a business prosper in spite of the current economical climate. The Panel were directed to view the delivery priorities set out in the report, which set the core objectives and the actions going forward. It was reiterated that this is a strategy document and not a step-by-step guide. They are not relying on just ambition but are working hard on the strategy and the hard work of the Officers involved.

Councillor Tevlin thanked the Officers for the report and advised she would also be interested in seeing case studies, specifically from the UK's SPF funding and the Huntingdonshire Futures funding, something that will appeal to people to make an application and why they apply. She referenced the comprehensiveness of the report and suggested that the web page contain information that is clearly laid out and easy to read, possibly a Q & A section that will assist with signposting.

After a question from Councillor Jennings, the Panel heard that the compliments of transport in the area and the location of Huntingdonshire is considered a unique advantage due to its accessibility to other areas of the country within a day's ride on the train. The adaptability mentioned earlier in the meeting regarding Huntingdonshire's workforce and the natural assets are further unique advantages.

Councillor Taylor referenced the report highlighting the ambitions in the market towns such as vibrancy and that they make a place desirable to spend time in. She expressed her disagreement regarding the comments surrounding market towns having stable retail and hospitality businesses with the decline driven coming from professional and office space sector. She expressed that the retail sector, particularly in St Neots had declined which has created unemployment but agreed with the report advising the market towns will be affected by a changing economy. She asked if Parking charges had been considered and the effect they could have in relation to people coming to the market towns. Councillor Taylor made a motion to add a recommendation to the Cabinet reflecting this. The Panel heard that parking is beyond the remit of the strategy but acknowledged there are significant decisions which must be taken regarding parking charges and the impact they may or may not have. The Officers acknowledged they are not the sole authority and the report comments around the market towns are backed up by data that is evidenced based and that there are different trends to how the economy is perceived. They recognised the economy has been challenged in the last few years, with market towns feeling the brunt.

The Panel's attention was drawn to page 15 which discussed the fastest growing areas for jobs in the district and that it is a matter of data Vs perception. The Panel heard that market towns were seen to be evolving rather than dying, such as moving away from just retail and onto more leisure-based businesses. It was reiterated that if this strategy were adopted, it could affect the way other policies are made, such as Parking but the Panel were reminded that not all the parking in the district falls under their remit as there are private car parks as well which they have no control over. Councillor Taylor pushed for the recommendation previously mentioned.

The Chair advised that additional clarification was needed in response to the questions that had been raised by the Panel.

Councillor Martin referenced page 13 of the Strategy regarding the net migration based on age. He expressed his concern over the net migration of 15 - 19-year-olds. He asked why this was and the impact this will have on the strategy. He also drew attention to Ambition 1, What success looks like. He asked if the

Council would be turning down businesses if they would not help the Council reach a Net Zero target. The Panel heard that there is a lack of higher education, drawing on St Neots as an example. It was heard that they have been working with the Combined Authority to manage this such as reviewing transportation and access to training possibilities. The Panel were advised that the Climate and Economic strategies recognise that you can have a positive impact on climate, even if you have emissions.

Councillor Blackwell asked if the report will be a living document as the measures are being set on an annual basis and expressed concern about dealing with out-of-date data. The Panel acknowledged that the Action Plan should be updated more regularly and will appear on the Invest in Huntingdonshire website. They also heard that gathering the data is not without cost and isn't something they can do on a regular basis but they do work with the Combined Authority in ensuring key information is available.

The Chair acknowledged that many of the Panel had questions and the issues raised would be taken on board by the Officers. It was advised that Councillor Taylor take her questions regarding Parking offline and discuss this directly with the Officers.

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 within the report.

## **9. DISCRETIONARY FEES - PLANNING & PUBLIC PROTECTION**

By means of a report by the Head of Planning, Infrastructure & Public Protection (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Discretionary Fees - Planning & Public Protection Report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Martin requested confirmation as to when this was first discussed. The Panel heard that an exact date could not be provided but matters like this are discussed regularly with the Officers. Councillor Martin continued, referencing the Budget and Policy Framework procedure rules and claimed the procedure had not been followed in this instance, quoting Part

2.1, part A of the Constitution. He reiterated that the Panel should have notified as soon as it came up. It was confirmed to the Panel that the notices had been presented correctly and the procedure has been followed. Councillor Martin confirmed that he fully supports the proposal of charging additional fees but would like to make the Recommendation that this not be delegated to Officers but charges to remain a decision of Full Council. The Panel heard that the Officers have adopted a new system 2 months ago which highlighted the upturn in Section 106 agreements which must be signed. This must reach the July Council otherwise they will be doing this at cost to the Council. The Panel were informed this had been brought to them in June to allow them time to scrutinise and be fully informed before Full Council in July. The Panel were also asked to consider agility when debating the proffered Recommendation suggested. The report is based on data and guidance that's been gathered by other Councils. The team are undertaking a viability assessment as part of the development of the Local Plan. If there are viability recommendations that suggest we need to make changes at pace, is the timescale to bring something to Full Council. Delegation needs to be crafted so there are no unintended consequences that could impact other work streams. Councillor Martin expressed his concerns about setting a dangerous precedent as this would be the only discretionary charge that could be changed outside of a Full Council meeting, if this were approved. It was confirmed that the Panel could make this Recommendation to Council and that the whole budget process must be separated from variations in-year to the budget which is why the issue is going ahead to Council to be considered. It was confirmed to the Panel that new legislation is coming that will introduce a new process and that Officers would like to be empowered in an appropriate framework to enable making those decisions in the best interests of the Council.

Councillor Taylor sought clarification as to Options 3:4:2 and 3:4:3 in the report, regarding making recommendations to Council. The Panel heard that, due to the nature of the report, it will go to Full Council in July. It is with the Panel tonight. The Chair requested further clarification from the Officer on the implications of delaying. The Panel heard that there are a number of 106 agreements which must be signed. These can wait until the decision by Full Council in July but having to sign them now then delay further would result in them being monitored for the next 30 years at a cost. They have a Developers Forum and would ask for assistance in this so they can bring the question of fees to the Forum. It was noted to the Panel that costs, such as PPA's are already included in the budget. Moving forward it would be the BNG monitoring fees. They will be able to do a budget bid for the new line in August to build that in going forward.

Councillor Jennings asked why the scale of charges couldn't be set at Full Council in July. The Panel heard that the challenge could be that one person spends more and the next will be paying less in comparison. The example made was householders being unduly penalised where the larger developer would be getting a much better deal. They are working with the Finance Team on cost recovery and will be using this and the cost of contractors as a basis of the rates that will be set. They have sought to get feedback from the Developer community but this does not fit in with the July Council meeting.

A solution offered to the Panel would be to limit the delegation for the current financial year only. Councillor Martin agreed to this amendment to his Recommendation. The motion was seconded by Councillor Gardener and the Chair opened the floor for comments on the motion.

Councillor Taylor advised she was happy with the report as it had been presented and believes in putting her trust in the Officers as they are doing this to cover costs, not to make money. It was confirmed to the Panel that they would be working closely with the Section 151 Officer in this.

Councillor McAdam expressed his support for Councillor Martin's amended recommendation and reiterated that whilst the Officers should be making the recommendations, the final decision should lie with the Councillors as they have been elected.

Councillor Pickering expressed concern that this could potentially deter investors from wanting to invest in Huntingdonshire. The Panel heard that this had been taken into consideration as they do not want to deter growth in the region. There is a statutory obligation to monitor BNG and anyone who is undertaking development. They are following guidance from the Planning Advisory service which is what their model is based upon. They intend to be transparent in their costs and will be publishing these on the website. It was confirmed that there will be a possibility of reducing or waiving fees for projects such as community development.

The Panel hears the new Recommendation and a vote is called. 8 Members are For, 0 Against and 2 Abstainers.

Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for Cabinet to make a decision upon the recommendations within the report, and additionally, the Panel request that the Cabinet consider adding the following recommendation to their report;

- 1) To be delegated to officers identified above for the current financial year only. Discretionary charges to be developed in consultation with relative Executive councillors as set out above but also include and Shadow Executive Councillors for planning and finance.

## **10. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024/2025 (QUARTER 4)**

By means of a report by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Corporate Performance 2024/25 Quarter 4 Report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Jennings expressed frustrations regarding P121, particularly the red items which were explained to be an anomaly and that they would be coming back up whereas with each quarterly report, they appear to be getting further away. The Panel heard that this view was respected, and this was a rare off year for the service and may be contributed to the Green Waste subscription as well as other factors. They are looking to fix this next year and that the service's ambitious targets are something that they are striving to achieve. Councillor Jennings went on to confirm the report advised the Green Waste subscription did not impact this and that missed bins is a big concern for residents. The Panel were advised there was nothing further to be said regarding this issue. The panel were made aware that the target for missed bins was an ambitious stretch target which the service would rather retain to strive for improvement, that performance remains ahead of the APSE comparator Councils.

Councillor Taylor requested clarification in relation to action 34 within the Corporate Plan specifically for more detail regarding the expressions of interest to develop the Local Skills Implementation plan. St Neots was presented as an example of having received 10 under the CPCA skills capital grant funding. Councillor Taylor wanted to understand what this looked like and how much involvement the local community had with this. The Panel heard this would be taken away and responded to by the Officers. Councillor Taylor wanted to see a performance relating to the new funding that will be received to assist in completing projects. The Panel were advised the Officers would not report on funding for projects that had not begun yet as this could prove to be a never-ending task. The Panel also heard that the project for Quarter 4 is now completed, and anything further would need to be discussed with the Portfolio holder and

the coming year's budget setting process would be the time to explore future funding further.

Councillor Gardener conveyed disappointment over the PI18, 9% reduction in household waste recycled and reused since the implementation of the Green Wastes subscription service. PI20 confirms household residual waste has increased and believes this is a bad look for the Council as this is not very 'green' since this has resulted in 247,000 tonnes of additional waste to go to landfill. The Panel heard that being unable to collect food waste had been an issue, but this would be resolved next year by introducing the new food waste service from April 2026. They also heard that waste is measured by weight resulting in a disproportion shift in the percentage recycled when considering changes in green waste as food waste is heavier than for example recycled plastic. Huntingdonshire is working at the forefront of the implementation of Household food waste collections as part of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Waste Partnership and has received transition funding from the government to support the establishment of separate household food waste collection. This service will go live in April 2026.

Councillor Corney expressed his thanks to the Community Action Team service and commended them on the job they do. He requested clarification on what occurred in October/November of 2024 to push the fly tipping numbers into red and asked if any events at the recycling centres had an impact on this. The Panel heard that the hours of operation for the recycling centre had changed and were operating reduced seasonal hours. The Panel heard further explanation could be discussed with the Community Action Team as the Officers investigate fly tipping thoroughly and would have a greater understanding of this matter.

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 within the report.

#### **11. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024-25 (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 2024/25 Quarter 4 Report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Martin was appreciative that time was made for the

report to be run through with him ahead of tonight's meeting. He wanted members of the public to understand that though this shows an overspending amount of £56,000, they are in fact £4 million better off than first set out in the budget. He reflected on the tough decisions they potentially wouldn't have had to make if they had known this would be the outcome. The Panel heard that £2 million of that £4.2 million was included within the budget as contributions to the Workforce Strategy to the Future Financial Sustainability earmarked reserves. The additional 2.2 million contributions to earmarked reserves were funded by additional interest receivable on cash investments. The Council has higher cash balances, and the interest has remained high. It was advised that if the interest changed or if they had not been as prudent in budget setting, the result would be very different, and it is impossible to predict when or if interest rates will change.

Councillor Jennings expressed his thanks for the table and its usefulness. He brought attention to the debt owed to the Council over a year old, referencing the £165, 000 owed to HDC for 3CICT services, wanting clarification about what this is and the likelihood of its recoverability. The Panel were informed that this is a primarily debt owed by Cambridge City Council for services. The new Chief Digital and Information Officer is on top of this and leaning heavily to get this debt paid. Councillor Jennings requested a layman's explanation for the Panel relating to the reduction in minimum revenue provision as he struggled to understand its meaning. The Panel heard that this is a statutory provision to repay debt. The provision is made up of many assets. This is based on the previous year's capital programme. It is best practise to review this annually and recalibrate it. If you don't have to make as much provision, that allows more money for Service provisions.

Councillor Taylor sought clarification on where the funding for the health and wealth building came from that was put aside at full Council. The Panel heard that this was a matter taken to the Overview & Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) Panel. A full discussion and presentation were given by Officers. The next steps are leading towards a small pilot scheme of grant arrangements. This issue falls under the remit of the other Scrutiny Panel and further clarification can be found in those papers and the recording.

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 within the report.

## **12. TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT 2024/25**

By means of a report by the Director of Finance and Resources (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Treasury Management Outturn Report 2024/25 was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Gleadow expressed her appreciation for the new Treasury Management Outturn report format, the graphs made the report a much easier read.

Councillor Martin agreed with Councillor Gleadow in that the report was very detailed and asked for confirmation of any issues that are foreseen that will negatively impact the good financial position (specifically in relation to treasury management) the Council is currently in. The Panel heard that interest rates are a concern, the forecasts received are from for the Bank of England lending rate rather than general investment interest rates, in addition the Council has a lot of money invested with the DMO and there is little historic evidence, and as a result a risk, in relation to how far and fast the DMO interest rates could fall if general interest rates start to drop (ie DMO could fall faster due to other factors). The DMO is used as there is a guarantee from the Government that they will repay it investments. Another factor to consider is global unrest and how that impacts the economy such as driving inflation or interest rates. The Russia-Ukraine war breaking out was drawn on as an example of this.

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 within the report.

## **13. GARDEN WASTE FINANCE**

By means of a presentation by the Head of Operations (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Garden Waste Finance item was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Martin reiterated that he was still not in agreement with charging for the Green waste service but understands this is the way the Council are moving forward. He asked if the implementation cost was included in the revenue costs. The Panel heard that it was not included but confirmed they implementation costs were £400K than originally predicted as

they managed the collections in-house.

In response to further questions from Councillor Martin, the Panel heard Cambridgeshire County Council oversee the recycling centres and that they do not monitor footfall. They do track the amount of waste by tonnage, confirming that green waste increased by 788 tonnes in the last 12 months. It cannot be confirmed if this was due to the introduction of charging for green waste or if it was seasonal. They also heard that ultimately, since introducing the charge for green waste, they collected 2498 less tonnes of waste overall.

The majority of the missed bins was from residual waste, not green waste and that was mainly due to losing 6 fulltime and experienced members of staff to long-term sickness which hits the service hard as much of that role relies on experience which takes time to build.

It was reiterated that the average target for missed bins set by the Council was 75 per 100K collections for Huntingdonshire and 72 by other Local Authorities. In 2023/2024, the final result was 39.8 missed bins per 100K. The service wanted to be ambitious in retaining this target for the 2024/2025 year. It was confirmed that unit costs were well below average when compared to the 16 other Local Authorities and that, whilst it is showing as red, the figures we have are enviable.

Councillor Pickering asked if the organic matter had been recovered from the residual waste. The Panel heard that the Officers do not have access to that information as Huntingdonshire are the collection authority, not the disposal. This is under the remit of Cambridgeshire County Council. It was confirmed that Cambridgeshire County Council are working hard to find the best way to deal with the residual waste.

Councillor Jennings admitted that he had been wrong in his previous stance regarding the estimated take up levels where he felt they were too high an estimation. He congratulated the Officers on the 65% take up achieved in the first year and asked if they think the rest will sign up later in the year. The Panel heard that this was difficult to forecast but some residents have signed up for the service ahead of the renewal date and sometimes doing this multiple times which shows satisfaction with the service. There are currently just under 51K subscriptions with a steady stream of 300-400 per week still coming in.

Councillor Taylor acknowledged that it was a hard decision in her previous role as portfolio holder to agree to this but believes it was the right decision, especially after hearing the figures that have come from it.

Councillor Gardener confirmed he still does not agree with this

service, drawing on his other role as a County Councillor and believes this is shifting costs from one Authority onto another and that this won't work once the Local Government Reorganisation happens. The Panel heard that once the reorganisation happens, this should get picked up and could result with one authority who will be doing the collection and disposal. It was also heard that 8K less tonnes of residual waste resulted in a saving of nearly £1 million for Cambridgeshire County Council this year.

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 within the report.

#### **14. CORPORATE PLAN - NEW PERFORMANCE INDICATOR-TARGETS AND TOLERANCES**

By means of a report by the Head of Policy, Performance & Emergency Planning (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Corporate Plan - New Performance Indicator Targets and Tolerances Report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Jennings expressed his pleasure that his previous comments regarding One Leisure targets had been incorporated in the Plan. It demonstrates that Scrutiny does work in practise.

Councillor Martin agreed with Councillor Jennings and expressed his thanks for the adjustments that had been made based on the feedback provided previously. He expressed an interest in receiving further data and statistics from other organisations as this would provide a rounder picture which will aid in the scrutinising process. The Panel heard that it had been a difficult year for reporting due to people leaving but they now have two new Officers who have agreed to continue assisting with the reporting.

Councillor Taylor expressed her concern and reminded Members that setting targets is a good thing, but it must be remembered that behind the data is humans and the cost of setting targets that are unattainable could be demoralising. The Panel heard that they have always been cognizant of that and that they are trying to encourage people, drive performances and reward excellent performance. This is carried out with the consent of the Service owners, and they try not to set unattainable targets. They have adjusted 2 on the report for this reasoning.

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 within the report.

Chair