

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, 1 March 2023.

PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chairman.
Councillors A M Blackwell, S J Corney,
I D Gardener, J A Gray, J E Harvey,
Dr M Pickering and N Wells.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S Cawley, S A Howell, R Martin and R A Slade.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors S J Conboy, T D Sanderson and S Wakeford.

71. MINUTES

A correction was made to the company name referenced in Minute 22/66 which should read; *Places for People*.

Following which, the Minutes of the meeting held on 1st February 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

72. RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Responses to Questions Arising from Previous Meetings Report was presented to the Panel. The Panel heard that in addition to the responses noted in the report, the Tenancy Strategy was expected in the May 2023 cycle of meetings.

73. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor A Blackwell declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in Minute 22/84 as an employee of Carter Jonas.

74. 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 March 2023 to 30th June 2023.

75. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

By means of a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Local Development Scheme Report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Gardener enquired what communication parishes could expect with regards to the scheme. The Panel heard that the Council was obliged to publish the details on the website but are planning to email local parishes to notify of its publication. It was further advised that local members could help this communication by informing parishes at any upcoming meetings.

Following further questions from Councillors Gardener and Wells, the Panel heard that in regard to Neighbourhood Plans, the newest plan takes precedence if there is any conflict between the strategic policies. Therefore any Neighbourhood Plans in development should continue as normal. Neighbourhood Plans that then have conflicting policies with the new Local Plan could be updated after the publication of the new Local Plan.

Councillor Gleadow enquired if sufficient staff and resources were available to the team to undertake the work, the Panel heard that this would be carefully monitored but the team were confident that current levels were sufficient.

Councillor Wells enquired whether drought conditions were considered as part of the Water Cycle Study. The Panel were advised that this study would look at all elements of water management alongside climate change predictions with all factors being brought together for consideration. The Panel further heard that neighbouring districts would also be taken into account in case of any implications for Huntingdonshire.

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.

76. DRAFT SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY METHODOLOGY 2023

By means of a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Draft Settlement Hierarchy Methodology 2023 Report was presented to the Panel.

The Panel heard in response to a question from Councillor Gardener, that travel times shown were during peak time however travel times to GP Surgeries were during non-peak times as this is when most residents would access that service. In response to a further question, the Panel heard that the frequency of bus services had been considered rather than individual operators and that the TING service had not been included at this point as it is unknown whether this service will still be available at the time of the Local Plan's final publication.

It was observed by Councillors Gray and Pickering that significant portions of the data for St Neots appeared to be out of date, with references being made to named businesses which had been out of business for many years, it was felt that this quality of data called into

question the validity of the report. It was confirmed that the data collection occurred some time ago and that the data would be updated prior to Cabinet in relation to St Neots and restaurants. The Panel heard that the team had used more in depth data to build a more comprehensive and relevant settlement assessment however, they were aware that more data quality checks were needed, it was hoped that town and parish councils would be able to assist in this task over the Summer.

Councillor Pickering observed that whilst it was useful to know how many residents could be served by a GP Surgery, it would be helpful to understand how many residents they are currently serving and therefore how sustainable this would be in the face of further development.

Following a further question from Councillor Pickering, the Panel heard that the Methodology needed to be tailored to Huntingdonshire in order to develop a robust plan which could then be scrutinised by the independent planning inspector, however all feedback received would be considered and adjustments made as the progress continues.

Following an observation from Councillor Corney on the 6 week consultation period causing issues to those parishes with bi or tri monthly meeting cycles, the Panel heard that although timescales were not statutory at this point, this would be the statutory timescale later on in the process, therefore by using this timescale the method would be more familiar in the final stages. It was agreed that following the meeting, town and parish councils would be contacted and advised of the forthcoming consultation with the option to speak to the Planning team if the 6 week period would cause them significant issues.

The Panel heard, following a question from Councillor Gray that any entirely new settlements would be considered separately to this document and would go through the usual Planning processes.

Councillor Gardener observed that parishes which border the A14 may be able to advise on alternative and more realistic routes used by residents to safely access the road and that he was currently working with National Highways on improvements in this area.

The Panel heard, following a question from Councillor Pickering, that there is limited interaction between this report and the Call for Sites report at present, there will be more interaction as the process develops.

Councillor Harvey enquired whether further education colleges were included within the secondary school information detailed, the Panel were advised that this would be checked and reported back. Following a further question the Panel heard that Dentists were not included due to the mainly private and chargeable nature of the service.

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.

77. DRAFT LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

By means of a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Draft Land Availability Assessment Methodology Report was presented to the Panel.

Following observations from Councillor Gray, the Panel heard that an update to the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2017 in the form of Integrated Water Management Studies was underway which would address all aspects of flooding from recent years including surface water run-off from new developments.

The Panel heard, after a further question from Councillor Gray, that the approach to windfall sites had changed. The team were currently using available data for sites of less than 10 houses to formulate predictions for the future. It was acknowledged that this wording would be adapted to clarify the windfall definition and the methodology.

Councillor Wells queried why recently refused applications appeared in the list of sites to review at 2.10 in the report. The Panel heard that under the methodology, current planning policy cannot be taken into account, therefore these sites would be reviewed however may be refused again in the future once the planning policy has been reapplied.

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.

78. CALL FOR SITES

By means of a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Call for Sites Report was presented to the Panel.

The Panel heard, in response to a question from Councillor Gardener, that in relation to flood mitigation measures, the Council would take a steer from the owners of land on what they would like it to be considered for. Should the land owner put forward a site for a particular use it would be assessed for that use. The only instance when an alternative use may be considered on a site would be if, for instance, someone put forward a site for a particular commercial use and in consultation with Economic Development colleagues it is revealed that there would be a better market for an alternative

commercial use.

Councillor Blackwell enquired how resources would be managed and ensure that accurate data is recorded, the Panel heard that the Call for Sites form asks the landowners or site promoters to submit a lot of the data themselves, which will be checked to ensure the consistency of sources, in some cases extra information regarding the source of the data may be requested so that it can be double checked. In terms of resources, site assessments will be done primarily within the team but it is hoped that the wider planning team could assist with some assessments, this will partly depend on the number of sites received.

Concern was expressed by Councillor Blackwell over the form itself, observing that it appeared difficult to navigate and uninviting, she expressed concern that small landowners would be put off. The Panel were assured that the online version of the form was a lot more user friendly and that guidance notes were provided to assist in its completion however a further check of the form would be undertaken prior to its publication. It was anticipated that many sites would be presented across the district, and advised that landowners have the options to seek professional support and guidance which in turn would help manage the teams resources.

Following questions from Councillors Gray and Pickering, the Panel were advised that this form could be used to submit all types of sites including green spaces and renewable energy. A plan was being developed with the Communications team to help maximise this message.

The Panel heard, following a question from Councillor Gardener, that policies in neighbourhood plans could not be used to assess the sites. This will be a planning policy 'off' assessment of sites, so the technical assessment of site will disregard both the Local Plan and any Neighbourhood Plan. The submitted sites will be consulted on later as part of a further issues and options consultation, giving the opportunity for communities to put representations in on the sites in their area, and whether they support or object or suggest alternative uses. This would include parishes with Neighbourhood Plans. This may also identify desirable sites to parishes which had been unavailable at the time of their neighbourhood plan's creation and could then be included if they wished in a future update of their plan.

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.

79. HUNTINGDONSHIRE PLACE STRATEGY UPDATE

By means of a report by the Corporate Director (Place) (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Huntingdonshire Place Strategy Update was presented to the Panel.

Concern was expressed by Councillor Gardener that up to now

engagement had mainly been focused on urban areas of the district but was pleased to see that it was planned to consult with rural areas which make up a large proportion of the district. The Panel were reassured that work was ongoing in rural areas and would continue to be an ongoing dialogue to ensure engagement across the whole of the district

Following a further question from Councillor Gardener regarding the change in operator for the TING service which has created confusion and loss of confidence amongst residents, the Panel heard that this would be further investigated and reported back.

The Panel were advised, following a question from Councillor Wells regarding the Council taking a more active role in rewilding and biodiversity of its own green spaces across the district, that this point was noted and that the team would take this away and ensure that commitment is as strong in this document as in other supporting strategies.

Concern was expressed by Councillor Gray over the detail contained within the Strategy and that it appeared that a lot of detail was still work in progress. The Panel heard that the Strategy is a long term vision but encapsulates feedback received so far, and will continue to adapt as the conversation continues. The Council is facilitating this plan but will work with partners to implement this over the coming years. The Panel were assured that more refinement and detailed actions would follow alongside the implementation of the Corporate Plan. Councillor Gray expressed further concern that some of the Strategy may be aspirations of the coalition but questioned if this was what residents of the district wanted, especially if public funds would be used to implement them. The Panel were assured that engagement with residents would continue to ensure the best interests of both residents and the district.

Councillor Gardener enquired how the Strategy would be updated following the proposed engagement with rural areas later in the year. The Panel heard that whilst there were no further mass rounds of consultation planned, there would be continued engagement alongside the help of all Councillors and the Strategy would be subject to constant reflection alongside an annual review process.

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.

80. CORPORATE PLAN 2023-2028

By means of a report by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Corporate Plan 2023-2028 was presented to the Panel.

Arising from a question asked about the last time the Corporate Plan

was submitted, Members' attention was drawn to the differences between the current Plan and the previous one.

Following a question from Councillor Harvey on the measures associated with the mental health aspects of Priority 1, it was pointed out that many areas of the Plan constitute preventative measures rather than aimed at solving existing issues. Furthermore, some areas, including this one, are the responsibility of partner organisations, so measures will be developed in conjunction with them.

Councillor Gray observed that given the importance of having suitable targets for operational performance measures that are both realistic and stretching, it would be helpful for the Panel to have sight of the proposed targets for 2023/24. Having received agreement to this request, 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.

81. HUNTINGDONSHIRE UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUNDING - UPDATE

By means of a report by the Corporate Director (Place) (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Huntingdonshire UK Shared Prosperity Funding Update was presented to the Panel.

Members have commented that the programme resourcing and timeline appear to be challenging. Councillor Gray has also been advised that funding for the activities listed in Table 2 has not yet been confirmed.

A request has been made for details of the geographical locations of all of the activities.

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.

82. MARKET TOWNS PROGRAMME - SPRING 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 was presented to the Panel.

During its deliberations on the report the Panel focussed on St Neots Market Square. In response to a question from Councillor Gardener

on whether the Panel will be consulted on the detailed design of the Market Square, Members have been advised that any such input will be through the local consultation process over the coming months. Following a further question from Councillor Corney, Members have sought assurances that the stakeholder database is fit for its purpose and any engagement is on the final iteration of the design.

Councillor Gray requested that any projects that are amber or red are reported to future meetings.

Following a question from Councillor Harvey regarding the Wayfinder project, the Panel heard that there would be an informal briefing to members in the coming months with potential for a more formal report into the democratic cycle should there be sufficient time and appetite for this.

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.

83. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

84. ST NEOTS MARKET TOWN PROGRAMME (OLD FALCON INN & MARKET SQUARE)

The Panel gave consideration to an exempt report by the Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager (a copy of which was appended in the annex to the Minute Book) on St Neots Market Town Programme (Old Falcon Inn and Market Square) which was presented to the Panel.

The Panel heard from the Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager, who introduced the report and answered Members questions. Following the discussion, 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.

85. RE-ADMITTANCE OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

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

86. CABINET FEEDBACK: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW OF REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES AND INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARDS

By means of a report by the Cabinet (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet Feedback: Overview and Scrutiny Review of Representatives on Outside Bodies and Internal Drainage Boards Report was presented to the Panel.

It was thereupon

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet feedback be noted.

87. 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.

Chair

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