

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in the CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER/STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 20 June 2023

PRESENT: Councillor S J Conboy – Chair.

Councillors L Davenport-Ray, S W Ferguson, M A Hassall, B A Mickelburgh, B M Pitt, T D Sanderson, S L Taylor and S Wakeford.

11 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17th May 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor B M Pitt declared an other registerable interest under Minute No. 23/13 by virtue of his membership of St Neots Town Council. He abstained from voting on the item.

13 MARKET TOWNS PROGRAMME - SUMMER UPDATE

See Minute No. 23/12 – Members' Interests.

A report by the Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) providing an update on activity across the strands of the Market Towns Programme for Quarter 1 of 2023/24.

The Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy and Housing reported upon progress with town centre improvements in St Neots with completion of the final designs and procurement of a contractor for work to commence early Autumn.

Having referred to comments raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth) at their meeting on 7th June 2023 specifically in relation to the communications plan being developed to inform St Neots residents on the planned works to trees in the Market Square, the Executive Councillor explained that a wider explanation would be provided as to the rationale behind the removal and replacement of the trees as part of the re-development of the town centre.

Attention was also drawn to the appointment of AOC as architect and technical advisors for the refurbishment of the Priory Centre, St Neots and Members were also appraised with further detail on the re-allocation of expenditure from the CPCA for new project proposals and the rebranding of the Masterplans for Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey as Vision documents.

Having had their attention drawn to the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth) including the communications plan on the tree removal

and a further update on the Old Falcon property would be re-visited as part of the next quarterly report as a private session.

Arising from questions from Members on the timescale of availability to the public of the final design of the Market Square and High Street in St Neots, the Executive Councillor reported that final discussions were being held with St Neots Town Council as key stakeholders in the project to ensure they were aware before wider public communication to be delivered within a few weeks. Discussion also ensued on the tender process for the redevelopment of the Priory Centre and incorporation of the CPCA legacy funding projects with the town centre improvements and encouragement to re-establish the relationship for residents of St Neots and surrounding areas with the town centre.

Whereupon, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

to note progress of the projects as part of the Market Towns Programme for Quarter 1 of 2023/24.

(Councillor B M Pitt abstained from voting on this item).

14 MID TERM REVIEW OF HOUSING STRATEGY 2020-2025

Consideration was given to a report by the Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on a mid-term review of the Housing Strategy 2020 – 2025. The Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy and Housing informed Members that following review it presented an opportunity to align the Strategy with the Council's Corporate Plan and Place Strategy and also to take account of the 2021 Census data that had not been reflected in the Strategy thus far.

In drawing attention to the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) held on 7th June 2023, the Executive Councillor confirmed the scope to include agricultural workers with a revised definition of Essential Workers to be issued by Government, addressed the issue of under occupation of social housing and scope for working with social landlords to manage the situation whilst respecting the rights of tenants and the review of Disabled Facilities Grants was expected to take place during the course of 2023/24 to address the anticipated growth in this area of need.

Whereupon, the Cabinet has

RESOLVED

- (a) to note the contents of the report now submitted; and
- (b) agreed to the Mid Term Review of the Housing Strategy 2020 – 2025 and Action Plan.

15 FIRST HOMES POSITION STATEMENT

The Cabinet considered a report by the Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the affordable housing product of First Homes and the Council's position statement in relation to development proposals that includes this form of affordable housing.

The Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy and Housing acquainted Members with background to First Homes that fall within the definition of affordable housing for planning purposes.

Having been informed by discussion at the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) held on 7th June 2023, the Executive Councillor confirmed that the statement had been updated to reflect their concerns, specifically in relation to the inclusion of self-employed classified as meeting employment within the District and gave assurance that the family connections criteria would include reference to adult children living in the area and any joint custody arrangements as sufficient local connection. Whereupon, the Cabinet has

RESOLVED

(a) to note the contents of the report now submitted; and

(b) agreed the First Homes Position Statement.

16 INDOOR AND BUILT SPORTS FACILITIES STRATEGY AND PLAYING PITCH AND OUTDOOR SPORTS STRATEGY

In conjunction with a PowerPoint presentation and report by the Sports Development Manager (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were presented with details of the new Indoor and Built Sports Facilities Strategy and Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy 2022 – 2043. The report presented a comprehensive review and assessment of facilities and pitches.

Members were acquainted with the background to the study, the findings of the report including the coverage, the context locally and nationally and provided a summary of the outcomes of the Strategies to address future provision.

Arising from questions from Members on funding criteria for swimming pool provision, the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene explained that Government funding was facilitated through Sport England and the Head of Leisure and Health confirmed that they had been engaging with operators of Sawtry Swimming Pool in preparation of fact finding work to support an application for funding once the framework was released and was anticipated to take place in July – August 2023 with the outcome expected late August – September 2023.

Further discussion ensued on the encouragement of team sports, particularly with focus on the rural areas and behaviour change and the availability of existing provision that had been reflected in the Strategies. The Strategies would be published to help support the wider communities and clubs to support further funding in local areas to encourage wider participation.

In addressing the comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) held on 8th June 2023, the Executive Councillor drew attention to the recognition of availability of gymnastic facilities for residents within a 30-minute drive within the Strategies and confirmed the Hinchingsbrooke Sports Hall facility provision as well as support for running groups and events acknowledged within the Strategies.

In expressing her support for the Strategies, the Executive Leader on behalf of the Council placed on record her recognition for the service of the Sports Development Manager who was leaving the authority after 18 years' service. Whereupon, the Cabinet has

RESOLVED

- (a) to approve the Indoor and Built Sports Facilities Strategy and Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy 2022 – 2043; and
- (b) to recognise the strategic recommendations as set out within the Strategies as outlined in Appendices 2 and 4 of the report now submitted.

17 OXFORD TO CAMBRIDGE PAN-REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

Consideration was given to a report by the Interim Managing Director (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on proposals for a locally led partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge region following approval by Government. The formation of the Oxford to Cambridge Partnership (OCP) will assist in maximising opportunities for businesses unlocking an initial £0.5m of funding to assist the region in a more positive position globally, as well as developing the environmental programme that may assist Huntingdonshire, as well as opening up opportunities for further cross-boundary discussions across the region.

The Council has committed an initial £10k, with no long-term commitment, but it was noted the OCP was still emergent in terms of the governance and structures going forward. Reflecting on the comments of Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) held on 8th June 2023, the Interim Managing Director confirmed the reassurances that were made to the Panel that the OCP was not the Ox-Cam Arc and did not reflect the commitments under this scheme, particularly surrounding housing growth or other aspects previously covered.

Members expressed their support for participation, in raising the profile for the area and having a key role in cross border negotiations and membership of the OCP which outweighed the risk of not participating, whilst balancing this against the programme of activities and requirement for the development of new homes.

The Executive Councillor for Climate and Environment expressed concern with the proposal, particularly the potential effects on the local environment with growth in the economy, risks in the administration of the partnership, although balanced against a pan-regional public transport project that would have the effect of reducing carbon emissions.

In concluding, the Executive Leader supported the concerns raised but re-emphasised the difference between the OCP and the former Ox-Cam Arc project and believed that the Council should be participating with the ability to influence development of the OCP, whilst acknowledging the need for housing development, balanced against economic growth through a sustainable approach and reserved the right of the Council to re-consider their position of participation going forward.

Whereupon, the Cabinet has

RESOLVED

- (a) to approve the participation of Huntingdonshire District Council in the Oxford to Cambridge Partnership (OCP) as it becomes formally recognised and funded by Government as a Pan-Regional Partnership (PRP);
- (b) to appoint the Executive Leader as the Council's representative on the OCP; and
- (c) to authorise the Executive Leader, in conjunction with the Managing Director/Corporate Director (Place), to be provided with powers of appointment and delegation to the emerging governance model of the OCP.

18 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23 QUARTER 4

With the aid of a report prepared by the Business Intelligence & Performance Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were presented with an update on the delivery of the Corporate Plan 2022/23 and project delivery.

The Executive Councillor for Customer Services summarised the progress made in delivering the Key Actions for 2022/23 over the reporting period where it was noted that improvements had been made in 13 out of 17 indicators where it had been possible to compare with the previous year and some areas that had not been improved had been affected by unavoidable external factors. In line with the corporate objectives, the Executive Councillor highlighted improvements in attendance at One Leisure, the outstanding performance in the delivery of new affordable homes, a higher percentage of major planning applications and household extension applications processed and lower percentage of missed bin collections which he attributed to the consistent hard work of the Officers involved.

The Executive Councillor further presented the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) held on 7th June 2023 that focussed on the measures and quality of some of the data and it was explained that all 27 indicators next year would have a target as well as an intervention level to provide further reasoning behind the RAG status.

Members commented upon the strength of the report despite some the external factors that had presented some challenges in achieving the targets and the Executive Leader echoed the sentiments of the Executive Councillor for

Customer Services in expressing her gratitude for the dedicated and hard-working staff and acknowledged their efforts in the delivery of the corporate performance and every aspect of Council services delivered on behalf of residents.

Whereupon, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

to note the progress made against the Key Actions and Corporate Indicators in the Corporate Plan and current projects, as summarised in Appendix A and detailed in Appendices B, C and D of the report now submitted.

19 FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23 QUARTER 4

The Cabinet has considered and commented upon the revenue financial performance for the financial year 2022/23 (as detailed in Appendix 1 and summarised in paragraph 3.2 of the report now submitted) and considered and commented upon the capital financial performance for the financial year 2022/23 (as detailed in Appendix 1 and summarised in paragraph 3.3 as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report now submitted).

A report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Services was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) presenting details of the Council's financial performance for the financial year 2022/23.

The Cabinet's attention was drawn to an explanation by the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources on an explanation as to the draft accounts for 2021/22 which had been attributed to audit delays and there was no suggestion of any issue with the accounts, nor any impropriety and the delay was not unique to the Council.

The Director of Finance and Corporate Services drew Members' attention to the financial performance highlights that included net expenditure for 2022/23 at £20.9m, with an underspend of £476k against a budget of £21.5m. The underspend was attributed to higher interest rates received on the Council's bank balances and higher prices received on recycling credits and assisted by the leasing out of excess office space, procurement savings and managing staffing costs. Pressures on the budget resulted from the cost-of-living crisis, with the significantly higher electricity costs impacting the leisure centres' swimming pools and temporary accommodation costs.

Addressing the capital expenditure budget, with expenditure low at £10m compared with the approved budget of £42m, this was attributed to delays due to COVID and had carried forward £18m to 2023/24 for identified expenditure or projects with agreed plans. A review of the remaining expenditure had resulted in previously approved projects not being carried forward as a result of approved spend already included in new projects approved as part of the 2023/24 budget or there was no longer a need for this expenditure.

Having welcomed the report and in noting the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) held at their meeting on 7th June

2023, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources provided an explanation as to the point raised by Councillor A Jennings at One Leisure St Neots presenting a saving on utilities which had been attributed to a saving presented against their forecasted budget that had been re-calculated in Quarter 3 of 2022/23.

In noting the timing around the publication of the final accounts and delay from the Auditors and they had been requested to provide an update on presentation of the final figures, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- a) to note financial performance for the financial year 2022/23 (as detailed in Appendix 1 and summarised in paragraph 3.2 of the report now submitted); and
- b) to note the capital financial performance for the financial year 2022/23 (as detailed in Appendix 1 and summarised in paragraph 3.3 of the report now submitted)

20 TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT 2022/23

With the aid of a report prepared by the Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were updated on the Council's treasury management activity for 2022/23, including investment and borrowing activity and treasury performance.

Attention was drawn by the Financial and Treasury Accountant to the investment activity that had taken place and the significant increase in interest rates compared to the start of 2022/23, as well as a reduction in long-term borrowing activity representing a reduction of £4m by year end and activity in investments. The Commercial Investment Strategy properties had attracted a yield of 7.5% compared to current interest rates and a yield of 3.98% on the Council's property fund.

Having had their attention drawn to the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) at their meeting on 7th June 2023 particularly in relation to the change in rental value of the Rowley Centre, St Neots as opposed to the value of the asset and further confirmed that the borrowing was all fixed, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the treasury management performance for 2022/23 be noted and recommend the report to Council for consideration.

21 HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP

The Cabinet received and noted the Minutes of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group held on 21 April 2023.

Chair