

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, 2 October 2024.

- PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chair.
- Councillors A Blackwell, Catmur,
I D Gardener, S A Howell, A R Jennings,
Dr M Pickering and N Wells.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S Cawley, S J Corney, R Martin and D Terry.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor S J Conboy.

34. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4th September 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

35. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

36. 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 October 2024 to 31st January 2025 were presented to the Panel.

37. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

By means of a report by the Corporate Director (Place) (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge Report was presented to the Panel.

In response to a question from Councillor Pickering, the Panel heard that the group would be returning to the Council in Spring 2025 to review progress and to agree the Council's action plan. This visit would mark the end of the formal process but the Council could repeat the review again in the future.

It was clarified to the Panel, following a query from Councillor Wells, that Recommendation 7 was marked as amber status and paused whilst the Overview and Scrutiny Panels undertook

a period of self scrutiny and development following recent training.

Councillor Catmur observed that the word ensure had been used in abundance throughout the document and felt that as the definition of this word is to guarantee this was potentially misleading in it's intentions. The Panel were advised that this was a stylistic choice by the LGA and would feed this back. It was assumed that this wording had been used to underline the seriousness of the recommendations, which was taken on board by the Council.

It was observed by Councillor Blackwell, that several action timescales were to be confirmed as well as actions assigned to vacant posts. The Panel were assured that the details on this would be clarified and developed once the recruitment process had been completed and that actions would be redistributed across the project team as appropriate.

Following questions from Councillor Gleadow and Councillor Jennings the Panel were assured that there was a long term vision for the Council and that this would continue regardless of the political landscape. The current administration were aware that they were custodians of the vision and that the evolving structure would be fit for an incoming administration to continue. It was noted that there was continual evolution within local government and by developing a dynamic structure the organisation would be reactive to change, regardless of the administration, whilst still striving to achieve the long term aims for the best interests of residents.

The Panel were further assured, following an additional question from Councillor Gleadow that a robust Communications Plan was in place and that this would focus equally on internal and external communications. It was noted that there would be changes in how the Council engages with the public and that there would be opportunities to ask residents what they want and to develop how this aligns with the Council's plans. Councillors were also encouraged to bring concerns of the public forward and that there would be opportunities to develop this within the Scrutiny process.

It was observed by Councillor Gardener, that it would be helpful to see regular updates on the progress and development of the action plan at Scrutiny. It was agreed that this would be a productive way forward. The Panel also heard that climate resilience would be built into the Local Plan in order to future proof it. It was reminded that the Local Plan will be fully reviewed based on the evidence provided, therefore residents were encouraged to feed into the consultation process.

Councillor Pickering expressed surprise that only one action

had been aligned with Recommendation 1, following which, the Panel heard that the detail underneath the action would be vast and gave officers a clear steer on what to prioritise to achieve the desired outcomes. It was also noted that some reorganisation was likely in order to realign with the corporate strategy and key objectives and in order to make better use of the resource available. There would be a challenge to not be too prescriptive in approach but to work smarter and harder in addition to utilising and maximising funding opportunities as they become available. It was observed that a potential restructure would allow for the introduction of roles identified as critical within the review.

It was clarified to the Panel, following a query from Councillor Pickering relating to the action for Recommendation 2, that the Communications team were investigating how best to fulfil the action and whether the Communications team or the related service would drive each set of communications, this action will be developed following the findings from this.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Panel would be added to the Council report to allow for visibility during their consideration of the report.

Chair

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