

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 on Thursday, 3 September 2015.

PRESENT: Councillor G J Bull – Chairman.

Councillors T D Alban, E R Butler,
Mrs A D Curtis, R S Farrer, B Hyland,
M F Shellens and J E White.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors P L E Bucknell, L George, D Harty and J M Palmer.

IN ATTENDANCE: C Mason, J Slatter, A Dobbyne, Councillor D Tysoe, Councillors J Gray, R Howe, and R Harrison.

129. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 9 July 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

130. MEMBER'S INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest received from those Members that were present.

131. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel received and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which has been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1 September to 31 December 2015.

132. INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE MONITORING (QUARTER 1)

The Executive Leader of the Council introduced the Integrated Performance Monitoring (Quarter 1) report to the Panel, emphasising the achievements made which have contributed to Huntingdonshire District Council being one of the best placed Councils financially in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area.

The Chairman of the Panel led the discussion by congratulating those involved in the report on the presentation of the information and the improvements that have been made.

The Panel were informed that the success of projects and events (which are analysed in Appendix B) will be measured by attendance and feedback. In the future the Council will be cutting back on this

type of scheme and will work alongside other agencies collaboratively to make such events more targeted, and they will continue as long as there is some value and that it is contributing to the local economy.

Councillors queried whether the decline in employee expenditure for One Leisure is a permanent reduction and whether that leaves the group short staffed. Councillor Robin Howe, The Executive Member for Commercial Activities, explained that the reduction in staff levels and operational costs will continue. In terms of staffing, the majority of the savings have come from management restructure, rather than reducing the number of staff.

It was confirmed to the Panel that reductions in wage costs will be impacted minimally by further minimum wage increases and that the appetite for change within the Council means that One Leisure aim to be as competitive as possible.

In response to a question about business rate collection, the Executive Councillor for Resources stated that the Council was capable of achieving the target by the end of the year.

It was confirmed that income from the sale of land on St Mary's Street would be invested through the Commercial Investment Strategy in order to generate additional revenue for the Council

The Panel recommended the report in full to Cabinet.

133. COMMERCIAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Councillor Jonathan Gray, the Executive Councillor for Resources, introduced the Commercial Investment Strategy report to the Panel. The report sets out the high level strategic approach taken in terms of investments, the approach to risk and a balance in the Council's portfolio. The Panel were informed that the information will be broken down further and that a Business Plan will follow on from this report.

It was explained that the investments the Council have at the moment are both high tough and high risk; diversification will reduce the risk and in the process will allow the Council to find other ways of delivering services rather than cutting them.

In terms of locality in future investments, the Panel heard that the location of potential property investments is not restricted to Huntingdonshire. Diversification of investments is important and allows the Council to expand the commercial portfolio. The Council consider this to be investing in the UK economy and there will be no overseas element.

Subject to Cabinet agreeing that a quarterly report on CIS performance be submitted to Overview and Scrutiny, the Panel has endorsed the recommendations for Cabinet to approve the Commercial Investment Strategy and the "enhanced as is" model of governance arrangements set out in the report.

134. ZERO BASED BUDGETING

The Zero Based Budgeting (ZBB) Report was presented to the Panel by Jonathan Gray, the Executive Councillor for Resources. Councillor Gray provided a brief background to explain the basics of ZBB to the Panel, informing Members that the process has been broken down into three different strands (Tranches). By the conclusion of Tranche 3 in November 2015, all services will have been subject to the detailed ZBB process.

The Head of Resources, Clive Mason, referred the Panel to Appendix 1 of the report, which lists the projects that Heads of Service presented to the 'Star Chamber'. The Appendix lists a range of innovative projects such as:

- Relocation of the Call Centre;
- 'One Stop Shop' multi-agency customer service' hub and
- procurement of IT systems

The Panel were informed that Officers have endeavoured to create progressive plans to deliver savings. There is more work to do to identify savings but the Council is moving in the right direction.

The Chairman of the Panel took this opportunity to acknowledge that work completed, and congratulated those staff members involved for being part of the ZBB.

Panel members queried the reductions in repairs and maintenance and were advised that these charges will now be payable by tenants as the additional charges currently in the terms and conditions, which should yield an income rather than a reduction in expenditure. The transformation work will deliver better outcomes for less money, making the Council more effective.

The Panel were informed that consultancy costs in Planning Services would be reduced through a wider range of expertise as a result of sharing services.

135. IMPLEMENTATION OF AUDIT ACTIONS

The Panel have endorsed the contents of a report on the implementation of outstanding audit actions prior to its consideration by Cabinet and has questioned the need for Overview and Scrutiny to consider this matter in future.

136. LANGLEY COURT - LOAN TO LUMINUS

The report was introduced to the Panel by the Executive Councillor for Resources, Jonathan Gray. The Panel were informed that the report proposes the transfer of a piece of land to Luminus to enable the redevelopment of Langley Court to proceed and updates Members on the terms of a loan to Luminus.

The Executive Leader added that when considering the corporate

objectives, the housing needs assessment has been the driver in this project, as there is a clear need in the area for additional care facilities. It was explained that as adult social care becomes a wider issue, the Council need to work with strategic partners to deliver solutions. The fundamental need is the driver behind the loan, rather than commercial interest or need.

The Chairman commented that the decision to complete this plan has been long awaited, and the Panel were in agreement that those recommendations included in the report should be approved.

137. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel received and noted a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of studies being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Social Well-Being and Environmental Well-Being.

138. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROGRESS

With the aid of a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel reviewed the progress of its activities since the last meeting.

139. SCRUTINY

The 157th Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

Chairman