

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND CUSTOMERS) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 1st November 2017.

PRESENT: Councillor D M Tysoe – Chairman.

Councillors K M Baker, Mrs B E Boddington,
R C Carter, Mrs L A Duffy, S Greenall,
Mrs R E Mathews, J M Palmer,
Mrs D C Reynolds, M F Shellens,
Mrs S L Taylor and R J West.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor J A Gray.

33. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6th September 2017 was approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

34. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

35. 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 1st November 2017 to 28th February 2018.

36. INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT 2017/18 - QUARTER 2

With the aid of a report by the Corporate Team Manager and the Finance Manager (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the Integrated Performance Report 2017/18 – Quarter 2 was presented to the Panel.

The Corporate Team Manager introduced the report covering the Performance Section. Members were informed that the number of actions on track has increased since quarter one. It was highlighted that performance clinics will be held focussing on delivering continuous improvements. This is a new initiative where there will be a discussion with Heads of Service on areas of concern. In response to this a Member commented that they thought that the number of key actions rated green (84%) was commendable and that the performance clinics could prove valuable.

Despite the small improvement, a concern was raised in regards to DFGs and that whether the District was getting its fair share. In response the Panel was informed that the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency Manager will be attending the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Environment) in

December 2017 and one of the areas they would be covering is Disabled Facility Grants (DFGs).

The Panel commented that the percentage of calls answered by the Call Centre was, in their opinion, not acceptable. In response the Member was told that the target is 90% and details of what actions the service is taking to recover their performance is the sort of exchange that should be covered by the performance clinic. Some Members argued that there might have to be a trade-off between the number of calls answered and the comprehensive answers they give to enquiries unless more resources are allocated.

Members expressed concern over the level of sickness in the Council and the target, which was perceived by Members to be high. In response, the Panel was informed that sickness has reduced since last year and that the target is reasonable given recent performance. Also there are variations across services as some have much higher levels of sickness than others. In comparison, the public sector average is over 10 days. The Panel was reminded that a workforce report, which has more details on sickness levels, will be presented to the Employment Committee at their next meeting.

Following a question regarding the number of employees on long term sick leave, Members were informed that in total there had been 22 employees on long term sick in Quarter 2 and of these all but 5 cases had been resolved.

The Finance Manager presented the financial performance section of the report to Members. The Panel was informed that the overspend on both the revenue and capital budgets has doubled. The revenue overspend is £0.8m and the capital overspend is £0.6m. The reasons for the overspend, and its impact on the Medium Term Financial Strategy, were explained to the Panel.

The Panel was informed that as part of the Commercial Investment Strategy the Council have completed a purchase in Fareham, Hampshire, however a Member asked why a loan had been taken out to purchase the property. In response the Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources stated that a part of the Commercial Investment Strategy was based on borrowing money to purchase properties. The loan for the property in Fareham is an interest only loan at a fixed rate and the money received in rent is greater than the interest.

The Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources informed the Panel that the Council faces some uncomfortable decisions regarding where to make savings in order to balance the budget.

Following a question regarding the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP), it was confirmed that the Council had expected to spend £1.8m but has actually spent only £80k.

In response to the question about the Zero Based Budgeting savings and the Amber and Green ratings, Members were informed Green meant that that the Council expect to make those savings by the year end and Amber means the Council expect to make some of the savings by year end.

Progress against savings targets were discussed, particularly in light of the waste round reconfiguration where savings were not achieved. In response, the Panel was informed that it is disappointing that the waste round reconfiguration hasn't delivered the savings intended. In addition, the failure to make savings is sometimes down to over ambitious savings targets.

The Panel wanted assurances that the budget for ICT will be more accurate for 2018/19 and were informed that the Head of Resources has been pushing hard for a more accurate figure from ICT budget holders.

In regards to the capital budget slippage of £2.3m, the Panel was informed that there is an agreed capital programme for 2017/18 and that the Cabinet have agreed the slippage from last year to this year.

Following a question in regards to the outstanding commercial rent of £701k, Members were informed that the number is large however it is coming down. The Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources added that the Council are not approaching the debt in a timely manner and it is very labour intensive to do so. The Panel were advised that most of this is being collected monthly by direct debit and will be paid by the end of the current financial year. In addition, a new system will be introduced to assist however it is currently a year late.

A Member asked a question regarding One Leisure however they and the Panel was reminded that there is a Task and Finish Group reviewing the value for money of One Leisure and they will report back to the Panel once they have finished. In addition to this another Panel are responsible for scrutinising One Leisure.

The Panel was informed that once the lease has been signed then the investment at the One Leisure site in St Neots will continue and the 3G pitch project will commence.

(At 8.00pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor M F Shellens left the meeting and did not return.)

37. TREASURY MANAGEMENT SIX MONTH REVIEW

With the aid of a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the Treasury Management Six Month Performance Review was presented to the Panel. The Principle Account introduced the report to Members and outlined the contents of the report.

A Member asked a question in regards to the loan given to Luminus in light of the merger, in response it was confirmed that the loan is secured against property and that as a result of the merger Luminus would be in a stronger financial position and more able to pay back the loan.

The Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources explained the different types of Public Works Loans that can be taken out and added that the Luminus loan is a capital and interest loan and that Luminus are also paying capital and interest back to the Council.

In response to a question regarding the impact of the Commercial Investment Strategy upon the Council's budget, the Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources stated that the CIS produces in excess of £2m per annum and that if the Council did not have that income then Council Tax would have to increase considerably to offset the cost.

(At 8.08pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds left the meeting.)

(At 8.08pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds returned to the meeting.)

38. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROGRESS

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Panel reviewed all the Panel's work programmes since the last meeting.

A Member stated that they saw no point in continuing with the Cambridgeshire County Council Budget Scrutiny. The Panel resolved to remove the item from the work programme.

(At 8.21pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor J A Gray left the meeting and did not return.)

Chairman