

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 3TN on Thursday, 12 June 2014.

- PRESENT: Councillor R Harrison – Chairman.
- Councillors P L E Bucknell, G J Bull, E R Butler, Dickinson, D Harty, P G Mitchell and M F Shellens.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S Cawley, I J Curtis and T Hayward.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors B S Chapman, R Fuller, J A Gray, Ms L Kadic and T D Sanderson

5. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Panel held on 6th May and 4th June 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6. MEMBERS INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

7. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel considered and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). Members were informed that a report on the partnership with South Cambridgeshire District Council would be submitted to their meeting on 10th July 2014. This meeting would start at 6pm to enable the Panel's comments to be considered at a Special Meeting of the Cabinet at 7pm.

8. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

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

9. POTENTIAL SALE OF HDC LAND AT HERMITAGE ROAD, EARITH

(Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Resources, was in

attendance for this item).

With the assistance of a report by the Lead Housing Strategy Manager (a copy of which is appended in the annex to the Minute Book) the Panel considered a proposal to sell Council owned land at Hermitage Road, Earith for affordable housing development. Following a brief introduction by the Executive Councillor for Resources, the Lead Housing Strategy Manager provided further information on the planning policy provisions relating to the site and on the requirements which had been placed on local housing associations who wished to submit a 'qualifying' bid. Members were informed that bids were assessed on two competitive criteria.

The Panel discussed the housing needs identified in the village housing needs survey and the Local Plan, the design and quality standards for the build and the capacity assessment of the site submitted by the successful bidder. Members stressed that the Council should retain the nomination rights to the affordable homes built on the site.

Having noted the value the land would have for alternative uses and the views of the Executive Councillor who suggested that the proposal struck a good balance between addressing the need for social housing within the District and generating a capital receipt for the Authority, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to dispose of the site at Hermitage Road, Earith on the terms set out in the report now submitted.

10. RE-ADMITTANCE OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

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

11. SERVICE DELIVERY OPTIONS FOR LEGAL AND IMD

(Councillors B S Chapman, Executive Councillor for Customer Services, and T D Sanderson, Executive Councillor for Strategic Economic Development and Legal, were in attendance for this item).

With the assistance of a joint report by the Managing Director, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the IMD Service Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was informed of the outcome of the Council's discussions with Local Government Shared Services regarding the potential partnership and delegation agreement for the sharing Legal, IMD and Revenues and Benefits services.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to endorse –

- (a) the cessation of negotiations with LGSS; and
- (b) the continuation of discussions with South Cambridgeshire District Council.

12. PROVISIONAL 2013/14 OUTTURN (REVENUE AND CAPITAL)

(Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Resources, was in attendance for this item).

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) outlining the provisional revenue and capital outturn for 2013/14. Councillor J A Gray explained that the improved position with regard to capital expenditure was primarily due to slippage that would be utilised in future years' capital programmes. In terms of the revenue outturn, the Council had ended the year in a better position than anticipated and Councillor Gray thanked officers for their hard work in this regard. Going forward, Members were advised that it was intended to undertake a Zero Based Budgeting review programme across the Council in preparation for the formulation of the draft Budget in December 2014. In recognition of the expected service transformation programme that the Council was embarking upon and the potential for investing in revenue generating capital projects, it was also proposed to transfer funds to earmarked reserves for these purposes. In concluding his remarks, Councillor Gray reiterated the need for the Facing the Future exercise to continue to generate savings and he outlined the Cabinet's longer term aspiration for the Council to become self-financing.

Having noted that the provisional revenue outturn revealed that expenditure was £2.2m below the level expected and the likely reasons for this, the Panel welcomed the presentation of financial information in the new format. In terms of the variations in revenue spending from the 2013/14 Budget and the provisional revenue outturn by service area, Members sought clarification on a number of matters including the earmarked reserve for CIL receipts and the contributions to additional grants under Financial Services. With reference to a forthcoming item to be discussed by the Development Management Panel, comment was also made with on the need to ensure that the arrangements for entering into Section 106 Agreements were robust. This matter was referred to the Environmental Well-Being Panel. Members then suggested that Councillor R B Howe should be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss the income profile for One Leisure, St Ives.

In terms of the forthcoming base budget review, the Panel discussed the methodology for this programme and noted that updates on progress would be received on a regular basis. Members acknowledged that this would be a resource intensive process.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to endorse the recommendations set out in the report now submitted.

13. 2013/14 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT

(Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Resources, was in attendance for this item).

In accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management and with the assistance of a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel considered the Council's treasury management performance for the year ending 31st March 2014. Following an introduction by the Executive Councillor for Resources, the Head of Resources provided further detail on each section of the report. Members were advised that the Executive Councillor for Resources intended to transform the existing Treasury Management Advisory Group so that it adopted a more strategic approach towards treasury management activity.

In considering the contents of the Annual Report, Members discussed the Council's borrowing and investment activity during the year, the counterparty lists and the risk to the Council. Having noted that the downgrading of the long term rating of the NatWest Bank had resulted in its removal from the Council's counterparty list for investment purposes, the Panel was informed that NatWest would continue to be used for operational banking purposes. In response to a question whether this would have an impact on the charges incurred by the Council, Members were advised that it was not expected that the budget would be exceeded. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to note the contents of the report and associated annexes now submitted.

14. OUR ROLE IN SUPPORTING THE PROSPERITY AND VITALITY OF THE MARKET TOWNS

(Councillor T D Sanderson, Executive Councillor for Strategic Economic Development and Legal, was in attendance for this item).

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Members considered a proposal that the content of the debate on 'the prosperity and vitality of the Market Towns' held at the Council meeting on 30 April 2014 could give direction to a potential scrutiny study on the subject. Having noted a suggestion that Mr B Grimsey should be given the opportunity to address Members prior to any detailed study work being undertaken, Councillor Ms A Dickinson explained that Mr Grimsey offered an alternative perspective to the Mary Portas scheme and that he might provide an interesting and thought provoking presentation. In light of the contents of the presentation, the Panel could then develop the scope any potential study. Clarification was received that Mr Grimsey did not work for Action for Market Towns.

In response to a question by Councillor M F Shellens, Councillor T D Sanderson undertook to establish the current position with regard to the relocation of businesses into the Chequers Court development. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that Mr B Grimsey be invited to give a presentation to a future meeting of the Panel, to which all Members of the Council would be invited.

15. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing details of studies that were being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Social and Environmental Well-Being. In response to a request by Councillor E R Butler to be kept up-to-date with developments at the Great Fen Project, the Chairman of the Environmental Well-Being Panel outlined the ongoing activities at the Project and suggested that arrangements could be made for Members to tour the facility if there was sufficient interest.

Councillor P G Mitchell reported that the Clerk to the Middle Level Commissioners would be attending the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) on Tuesday 17 June 2014 to deliver a presentation on flood risk in Huntingdonshire.

16. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) PROGRESS

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing progress on matters that had been previously discussed. It was envisaged that the first performance monitoring report associated with the new Corporate Plan would be available in September 2014. With reference to the Panel's continuing review of the Council's gross costs, Councillor P G Mitchell undertook to speak to the Head of Resources and report back to the Panel as necessary.

Having received an update on the current position of tenants of the Creativexchange in St Neots, it was agreed that this item could now be removed from the progress report. In view of the absence of any response from the Local Enterprise Partnership to the Panel's request for a presentation on its Business Plan, the Chairman undertook to pursue this matter with the Executive Leader.

With regard to the Panel's previous request for post-project information on the development of the Huntingdon multi-storey car park and One Leisure, St Ives, Councillor M F Shellens indicated that the report on the former should include the occupancy rates of the multi-storey car park in comparison with the forecast projections within the Business Plan.

17. SCRUTINY

The Panel considered and noted the latest edition of the Decision Digest (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book).

Chairman

