

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, 6 November 2014.

PRESENT: Councillor R Harrison – Chairman.

Councillors P L E Bucknell, E R Butler,
I J Curtis, Mrs A Dickinson, D Harty,
T Hayward, P G Mitchell, P D Reeve and
M F Shellens.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors G J Bull and S Cawley.

51. MINUTES

Subject to the deletion of the words 'clarification as to whether' from the first sentence of paragraph four of Minute No.43, to be replaced by 'and received confirmation that', the Minutes of the meeting held on 9th October 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

52. MEMBERS INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

53. 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). In terms of forthcoming items of business within the Panel's programme, it was reported that the Estates Strategy was not expected to be available until December. A copy of the report on the Council Tax Base would also be provided to Panel Members at this time.

With regard to the preparation of the 2015/16 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy, the Panel were informed that it was proposed to present the draft Budget to Overview and Scrutiny in January 2015. Members were assured that this timetable would still enable changes to be made to the proposals up to the Council meeting in February 2015.

Having noted that the Corporate Director (Services) had met with the Chairman to discuss the way in which Officers could support the Panel in the presentation of the Budget this year, the Chairman explained that there would be an opportunity to discuss the Panel's aspirations for the 2015/16 Budget setting process at their December meeting. The Executive Councillor for Resources indicated that there would also be an opportunity for Members to discuss the Zero Based Budget process and use of the Star Chamber at this time.

54. CORPORATE PLAN: PERFORMANCE MONITORING

(Councillors J D Ablewhite, B S Chapman, D B Dew, J A Gray and T D Sanderson were in attendance for the discussion on this item).

The Panel considered a report by the Policy and Performance Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), which contained an update on progress against the key activities identified in the Council's Corporate Plan for the period 1st July to 30th September 2014. Following feedback from the first quarter a number of changes had been made to the format of the report and work was now being undertaken to identify a direction of travel in each performance area and to introduce a more rigorous internal quality assurance approach.

Having welcomed the progress that had been made in performance reporting, Members were informed that work was ongoing to define the 'acceptable variance' which meant key actions were identified as Amber. Members then proceeded to review the actions within the strategic themes that had been allocated to the Economic Well-Being Panel.

With regard to the 'Strong Local Economy' theme, Members discussed the action to deliver a programme of themed business information events and the efforts which were being made to encourage local businesses to take part. They were informed that turnout had increased gradually over the course of the last three years and it was the view of the Executive Councillor that these events were well attended. Consideration could be given to the subject matter and themes of these events further to promote attendance.

In terms of the action to commit to the Enterprise Zone skills strategy group, Members queried the expected output from this action. It was explained that work was ongoing to develop Enterprise Zone skills group activities and that early signs were encouraging. The development of a three year business plan for the skills hub would provide further detailed information.

In general terms, comment was made as to the absence of any clear measurable targets within this theme that could be used to quantify progress. The Executive Councillor for Strategic Economic Development and Legal was asked to give further consideration to this in advance of the preparation of the report for the third quarter. The Executive Leader explained that success of the Local Enterprise Partnership would be measured through the uptake of business rates and income from these.

In response to a specific question regarding the information that was available for employers who were considering relocating to the Enterprise Zone, the Executive Councillor for Strategic Economic Development & Legal undertook to circulate to Panel Members a web link to this information.

Having noted that the number of vacancies within the Development Management Team had had a direct impact on its ability to provide fast track pre-application advice, Members were assured that

progress would be made within the next quarter now that the vacancies had been filled.

In turning to the 'Ensuring we are a Customer Focused and Service Led Council' theme, Panel Members asked a number of questions regarding the key actions for 2014/15. In response, clarification was provided on the term 'Project Management Lean Processes' and updates were provided on the development of a full business case for previously identified energy reduction projects across the Council estate and on the appointment of a Graduate Trainee within the Corporate Team. The Corporate Director (Services) was asked to provide further information as to how the sample would be selected for the twice year postal survey of customers using the Council's Call Centre.

The Panel discussed the outcome of the Employee Opinion Survey and Members were advised that the new Corporate Management Team would now be working to address the issues which had been raised. Members welcomed the feedback that had been provided to staff and the positive actions that had now been undertaken in response to the survey.

Members commented on the number of responses that had been received from local residents to inform the 2015/16 Budget process and queried whether this was a worthwhile exercise. Whilst the Authority was encouraged to consult by the External Auditors, the Executive Councillor for Resources indicated that he hoped to do so in a more effective way in future years. With regard to the Facing the Future programme, it was agreed that a copy of the full list would be made available to the Panel in due course.

On the presentation of the information and using the example of the staff satisfaction survey, comment was made that the progress update merely reported that it had been concluded and provided little information about the outcome of this exercise. The Executive Leader reminded Members that the development of the Council's performance information was an ongoing piece of work and that the identification of outcomes would be the next part of this process.

The Panel discussed the development of the website for consultation and engagement and the absence of a target date for the completion of this activity. Having noted that the development of the website was a longer term piece of work, Members were advised that the issues relating to links between the calendar, database and the website had now been resolved. The Executive Councillor for Customer Services was asked to provide details of the timeframe for the development of the website for consultation and engagement.

Finally, the Panel discussed the mechanisms for removing actions from the performance report once they had been completed. Members were of the opinion that items should not be removed until it had been agreed with the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that progress made against the key activities and performance

data in the Corporate Plan be noted.

55. TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE: 6 MONTHLY REVIEW

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

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing details of the Council's investments for the period 1st April to 30th September 2014. On this occasion the report included information on the Council's treasury management activity, a summary of performance and reference to the Council's treasury management indicators.

RESOLVED

(a) that the contents of the report be noted; and

(b) that the Cabinet be requested to recommend the Council to note the contents of the report by the Head of Resources on Treasury Management – Review of Performance: 6 Monthly Review.

56. GROWTH DEAL ROUND 2 (STRATEGIC ECONOMIC PLAN) UPDATE

(Councillor J D Ablewhite, Executive Leader and 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 Corporate Director (Delivery) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel received an update on the preparation of a response to the second round bidding process for Government Growth Deal funding. Members were informed that following the disappointing outcome of the submission of bids for round one, a collaborative approach led by the District Council had been adopted to the preparation of the second round bid. The Panel congratulated District Council Officers on the preparation of the bid in the limited time, which was available.

Having noted details of the specific projects relating to Huntingdonshire, which formed part of the bid, the Panel were advised that it had been difficult to gauge the likelihood that funding would be forthcoming as the Government's priority themes and the size of the funding pot were unknown.

In considering the contents of the report, Members acknowledged the positive benefits, which had been achieved from the collaborative approach in terms of improved future working relationships with the Local Enterprise Partnership. However a Member expressed concern that the Local Enterprise Partnerships was sufficiently accountable and transparent. In response, the Executive Leader reported that LEP Board Meetings were open to the public and the Minutes were published on the Greater Cambridge / Greater Peterborough Enterprise Partnership website. In addition, the involvement of the

Leaders of all local authorities within the Local Enterprise Partnership area and the funding arrangements helped to ensure that it remained accountable to local residents.

Following a comment about development at the Ramsey Northern Gateway and previous discussions on the possibility of providing an incubator unit in this area, it was suggested that the Economic Development Manager should provide the Panel with specific details outside of the meeting. However the Executive Leader recognised the importance of promoting growth in this area when opportunities emerged.

Having noted that the outcome of the second round bidding process was expected to be announced in December, it was agreed that a further update should be prepared at that time. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report and the progress made to-date with the submission of a bid for Growth Deal Round 2 projects be noted.

57. PROJECT CLOSURE REPORTS

(Councillor J D Ablewhite, Executive Leader of the Council was in attendance for this item).

The Panel considered a closedown report by the Managing Director (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) for the Multi-Storey Car Park in Huntingdon and the re-development of facilities at One Leisure, St Ives.

In his opening remarks the Chairman proposed that to enable Panel Members to give further consideration to the issues emerging from the report, to seek assurances that improvements had been made to Council processes moving forward and to test the robustness of the Council's approach, arrangements should be made for the Panel to convene a Project Management Select Committee in February 2015. He envisaged that the Select Committee would report its findings, together with any proposed recommendations to the Cabinet and Corporate Management Team and the full Council in April.

The Managing Director then proceeded to introduce the report, which identified the lessons which had been learned from the roll out of the schemes and outlined improvements to the Council's project management arrangements going forward. Members' attention was drawn to the detailed recommendations set out in Section 3.4, of the report, which were intended to provide robust arrangements to monitor the performance of One Leisure St Ivo and the Huntingdon Multi Storey Car Park and ensure that capital projects are subject to appropriate appraisal and governance procedures in the future. Copies of the report had been provided to the Leader and the relevant Portfolio Holder.

The Executive Leader explained that ultimately the two schemes had delivered two significant longer term assets for the community, however he accepted that there had been significant failings with the

delivery and execution of both schemes. In this regard the suggestion by the Chair to establish a Select Committee to give the report and project management generally further consideration was welcomed.

Having welcomed the candour of the report, Members then proceeded to discuss a number of the issues emerging therefrom. Councillor M F Shellens reminded Members that he had expressed a number of reservations about the projections incorporated within the business plans for both projects. He also questioned the extent to which the Cabinet and Senior Officers had taken these reservations into account during the decision making process leading to approval being given for the schemes to proceed. In response, the Chairman reminded Panel Members of the opportunity they had to invite Cabinet Members to attend Overview and Scrutiny Panels to justify their decisions. The Managing Director also suggested that the spirit in which the current report had been prepared should offer some degree of reassurance about future decisions.

In response to a question with regard to responsibility and accountability for authorising the schemes to proceed, the Executive Leader confirmed that the decisions the Cabinet had been asked to take, given the information that was provided, were sound. Members were reminded that both schemes had been considered by Overview and Scrutiny, the Cabinet and the full Council, and that whilst the Council's Strategy was a matter for determination by elected Members, the delivery of individual schemes was entrusted to Council Officers. On these occasions there had been a clear failure in process. The Overview and Scrutiny Panels would have an important role pre-scrutinising future schemes.

With reference to the recent media coverage on the subject, a Member expressed concern that the issue had appeared in the public domain prior to Members having had sight of the report. In response, the Panel were informed that the report had been published in accordance with statutory timescales and these included distribution to the press.

In commenting on the Panel's discussion on this item, the Executive Councillor for Resources emphasised the importance of learning from mistakes and drew attention to the changes in the management and culture of the organisation which had now been introduced. Members were also informed that investment decisions within One Leisure were being made the responsibility of the Centre Managers as opposed to financial officers.

Having welcomed the preparation of the report, which signalled a clear change in culture and approach for the Council, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that arrangements be made to convene a Select Committee in February 2015, involving all Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) and representatives from the Social and Environmental Well-Being Panels; and
- (b) that the Scrutiny & Review Manager be requested to prepare a report for the Panel's December 2014 meeting outlining

some suggested terms of reference for the Select Committee.

58. WORK PLAN

The Panel received and noted a report by the Scrutiny and Review Manager (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 number of specific observations concerning the Council's waste collection policies, the Chairman suggested that these should be raised with the Environmental Well-Being Panel. In noting that the Environmental Well-Being Panel were currently reviewing the policies, Councillors P L E Bucknell and P D Reeve reiterated their interest in attending the next meeting of the Working Group that was undertaking this work.

In recognition of his involvement with the Great Fen Project Steering Committee and the Middle Level Commissioners, Councillor P G Mitchell undertook to provide an update on their activities to the Panel's next meeting.

59. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) - PROGRESS

The Panel received and noted a report by the Scrutiny and Review Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) outlining the progress that had been made on matters which had previously been discussed. With regard to the Panel's future Agenda items, it was reported that efforts were being made to arrange a presentation on the prosperity and vitality of the Market Towns for the meeting in December. An update on the Facing the Future programme would also be presented to the Panel at that time.

60. SCRUTINY

The Panel considered and noted the latest edition of the Decision Digest (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). In so doing, Members commented on recent press reports concerning neighbouring authorities and moves towards unitary status.

Chairman