

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, 4 June 2015.

PRESENT: Councillor G J Bull – Chairman.

Councillors T D Alban, P L E Bucknell, E R Butler, Mrs A D Curtis, L George, D Harty, B Hyland, J M Palmer, M F Shellens and J E White.

APOLOGY(IES): Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors R S Farrer.

IN ATTENDANCE: .

5. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 9th April and 20th May 2015 were approved as correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest 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).

8. ECONOMIC GROWTH PLAN REVIEW

The Executive Councillor for Strategic Economic Development and Legal introduced the report to the Panel.

Members questioned how Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) will manage the possibility of overheating in the demand for housing. The Panel were informed that economic and market indicators are monitored in order to prevent this, and that there is a requirement to attract new employees with relevant skills to the area. Members were reassured that this issue is not cause for concern.

The Panel raised the issue of affordable housing provision in the County, and it was explained by the Economic Development Manager that this topic is not a priority for the report presented as it is not critical to economic growth; this would be dealt with by another department in the Council, although it may be beneficial to 'knit' the two together in future.

The Panel congratulated the Economic Development Manager on the work completed.

9. PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS, INCLUDING FACING THE FUTURE

The report on Programmes and Projects was presented to the Panel. The report is intended as an update for Members on changes to the way projects are managed within Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC), including the new role of the Programmes and Projects Manager.

The Panel were informed that all existing projects have been categorised by the Project Select Committee and then allocated them to the most appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Panels. The Facing the Future project is closed, and now features eight projects.

It was explained to the Panel that project documents will now be held within the Sharepoint site, and Councillors can request documents from Officers.

Members queried the Pre-Initiation Process Map (appendix B) and whether the scrutiny process should be included. The Panel were informed that the diagram concentrates on the project at the conception stage, and that the scrutiny panels will come later on in the process.

10. CORPORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE MONITORING (QUARTER 4)

The Economic Well-Being Panel expressed appreciation on the clarity and simplicity of performance reporting.

With regard to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), Members were informed that discussions regarding major infrastructure are still ongoing. The Executive Leader confirmed that this would not affect development. The Panel enquired about the transparency of how CIL funds are spent by Parish Councils. It was noted that Parish Councils are not required to justify how CIL money is spent but HDC are working with partners to agree priorities in local areas.

The Panel commented that the targets included in the report on Council Tax and Business Rates collection were particularly high and enquired how the District Council had performed against the national average. It has subsequently been confirmed that 2014/2015 national outturn figures are not currently available but details will be included in future reports.

The Panel questioned staff sickness figures and references to staff satisfaction, commenting that the two matters did not appear to be reflective of one another. Members noted that issues surrounding staff sickness/ satisfaction were currently being addressed, with assurance that the Employment Panel were working to tackle these issues.

In conclusion, the Panel agreed that the report was an improvement on previous reporting and looked forward to seeing further development in future.

11. PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2014/15

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) considered a report on the 4th June 2015 by the Head of Resources on Provisional Outturn 2014/15.

The Panel were informed that money that has been saved in this time frame will be invested back into the Council.

Feedback on the report was positive, with discussion focussing on those savings achieved in 2014/15.

Members recommended that the report be approved by Cabinet.

12. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2014/15 OUTTURN REPORT

The Head of Resources presented the Treasury Management Strategy 2014/15 Outturn Report to the Panel. Members were informed that the report is one of three going to Cabinet and that it is received twice a year.

A Panel Member queried the position of the Council in terms of security when providing long term loans. Members were informed that all loans are decreasing loans, and that property is used as security to under pin the initial loan.

The Panel recommended that the report be approved by Cabinet.

13. DISPOSAL AND ACQUISITIONS POLICY

The Executive Councillor for Resources introduced the Disposal and Acquisitions Policy to the Panel. The report precedes the Commercial Investment Strategy which will be brought before the Panel in July.

The existing Disposal and Acquisitions system has been deemed to be too cumbersome to be efficient and amendments have been made in order to develop the Council's estate, establishing and enhancing revenue contributions from commercial investments. This, in turn, protects Council services in the future.

Members were initially concerned regarding the role of Scrutiny; they were informed that Scrutiny Member involvement is encouraged as this is a collaborative piece of work. Feedback to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be retrospective, due to strict rules regarding Members scrutinising decisions that they may have been involved in. The Chairman made it clear that the Panel has no opposition to this providing the decisions made are transparent.

The Panel recommended that:

- Where disposal and acquisition decisions are made, that these are retrospectively reported to the Panel.
- The new financial thresholds are reviewed 12 months following approval.

In both respects the Policy attached at Appendix 1 has been updated accordingly. Members recommended that this report is presented to the Cabinet, incorporating the recommendations made.

14. 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.

15. 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.

16. SCRUTINY

The 155th Edition of the Decision Digest was received and noted.

Chairman