

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMY AND GROWTH) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 6th October 2016.

- PRESENT: Councillor D B Dew – Chairman.
- Councillors R Fuller, I D Gardener, B Hyland, T D Sanderson, D R Underwood and K D Wainwright.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs B E Boddington, L George, D J Mead and D Watt.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors R Harrison, R B Howe and D M Tysoe.

26. MINUTES

The minutes for the meeting of the Panel held on 6th September 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

27. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

28. 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 October 2016 to 31st January 2017.

29. INVEST HUNTINGDONSHIRE WEBSITE DEMONSTRATION

The Executive Councillor for Business, Enterprise and Skills and the Economic Development Officer demonstrated to Members the Invest Huntingdonshire Website at www.investhuntingdonshire.co.uk. The Panel was informed that the website went live in May 2016 and has on average 100 hits a week.

The aim of the website is to showcase Huntingdonshire as a location of choice to live, work and invest. The site provides a platform to attract new businesses into the District as well as assist and support existing businesses to grow and prosper.

The website is designed as a point of reference and provides local companies with the ability to register and search for funding and business support opportunities, commercial properties, events and upload their details onto a business directory.

Members were reminded that the website serves as a tool to support and assist local Councillors and Parish representatives in their local engagement with business and community engagement.

Following a question regarding the internet connection and speed in Yaxley and Farcet and could anything be done, Members were informed that the internet service providers are responsible for the internet connection and speed however the local ward Member, District Council and County Council could collectively apply pressure for improvements.

In response to a question is there anything on the website that projects the improvements of the A14 to encourage business to locate here the Panel were informed that the website can be altered to accommodate future improvements.

Members were informed that the website is live and as information comes in the website will be updated.

Following a question regarding how to measure the successes of the website Members were informed that there will be Key Performance Indicators that will be presented within update reports and that website usage is one indicator.

30. REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES - CAR PARKS

With the aid of a report by the Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Review of Fees and Charges – Car Parks was presented to the Panel. By way of introduction the Executive Councillor for Operational Resources informed Members that as the level of government funding had been reducing year on year the Council has to review all income streams. The process identified a requirement to increase off street parking charges by £250k.

Members were reminded that the last time Parking Charges were reviewed was in 2013. Car Park Fees in Huntingdonshire are very competitive when compared with neighbouring authorities of Peterborough, Cambridge and Bedford. As part of the review the car parks are defined in the following categories: retail, commuter and recreational.

The Panel noted that officers and the Executive Councillor considered 12 options and the preferred option was number 12 which increased fees and charges by 20p in short stays and 30p in long stays. Included in the option was the introduction to of free parking after 3pm on Saturdays all year round.

In addition the Council will increase the cost of season tickets to £400 per year however Members were informed that the Council's season tickets remain competitive when compared to season tickets sold for the railway station car park and the car park opposite the railway station.

The installation of new car parking machines have been proposed at a cost of £51,700. The machines would allow users to input vehicle registration numbers to claim the free first hours parking in Riverside

St Neots and Riverside Huntingdon.

The Panel were reminded that the report before Members represents the starting point of the process before fee changes goes out for consultation with the public.

In response to the question of how is the consultation going to be measured Members were informed that the consultation will be measured in terms of the number of responses received.

Members commented that it is not fair to compare car park fees in Huntingdonshire with those in Peterborough and Cambridge as the fees in the cities are more expensive because there is more to do. It was noted that people who go to Peterborough and Cambridge will continue to go regardless of the car park fees in the District. Members thought more benefit would be gained by comparing fees with similar local authorities.

Concerns were raised that by increasing car parking fees people won't want to go into the market towns but would rather go to the retail parks or supermarkets where parking is free or pay a little extra and go into Peterborough or Cambridge where there is a larger selection of retail outlets.

When a question was raised in regards to the number of cars that could be displaced as a result of the increase in car park fees, the Panel was informed that the report is on car park fees and it is not a general parking report.

Following a question as to when all the options would be viewed by the Panel, Members were told that the options have not been brought to the Panel as the document outlining them was a technical document.

Concern was raised that there was no mention of blue badge holders within the report even if it was just to mention that they would continue to receive free parking. In response the Panel was informed that a line regarding blue badge holders would be useful. In addition Members were informed that in areas where blue badge holders are charged for car parking the holders tend to park on yellow lines.

In response to a comment about continuously increasing car park fees, Members were informed that the fees had not been reviewed since 2013 and have therefore not increased since then.

A Member asked what data is collected and has there been any modelling done in respect to a decrease of vehicles on the car park. In response, Members were informed that the data collected is information gathered from ticket sales and that the modelling completed is based on current usage. The Panel believed that the Cabinet should know the risks of increasing car park fees which include a potential reduction of car park users and subsequent reduction of revenue.

In response to a question of how much revenue does the car parks receive and what is the cost of providing them, the Panel were informed that the car parks receive £2.5m a year however an answer

was not provided for the cost of providing them.

Following the question of does the Council know which car parks the season ticket holders use and what evidence is there that season ticket holders travel to London on the train, Members were informed that the Council knows what town season ticket holders use and that the evidence for season ticket holders traveling to London is anecdotal evidence as no formal evidence has been gathered.

In response to a question regarding Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Car Park Members were informed that the car park is outside the scope of the report however there will still be charges applied because there has been an issue in the past with hospital patients parking their vehicles at the site all day and preventing park users from using the car park.

A Member asked does the Council know how many spare spaces there are in the car parks at certain times of day to which the response was not currently however the new machines would provide higher quality data. In addition there is an Annual Parking Report which has greater detail on the car parks and will be circulated to the Panel.

A comment was made in relation to the options which is if the options are going to be presented at Cabinet then they should be presented to overview and scrutiny first. In addition a concern was raised that the decision has already been made and that the report was only for information. The Executive Councillor for Operational Resources assured Members that there will be a consultation.

Another Member, who had previously worked with other local authorities on parking reviews, stated that this is the only time that they have seen car parking fees treated as a stand alone item and not as part of a parking strategy. In addition the Member informed the Panel that there is no evidence that fees increases or reduces footfall however they do determine how long people stay in the towns. Concluding they believe that the report lacks vision and should have looked at all options.

The Panel agreed that they were disappointed with the report and that they would prefer to scrutinise the whole process including all the options. The Panel,

RESOLVED

to recommend to Cabinet that the Panel convenes a task and finish group to review car park fees as part of an overall parking strategy and that the consultation is put on hold until the group has completed its work.

(At 8.21pm, during the consideration of the item, Councillor R Harrison left the meeting and did not return.)

31. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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

the progress of its activities since the last meeting. The Panel agreed to add the work stream of car park fees on to the Panel's work programme.

Members did not support the creation of a Task and Finish Group for background work on the Local Plan To 2036 however they did support the Chairman becoming the Panel's expert on the issue.

The Panel supported the inclusion of the topic of devolution on to the Panel's work programme and have requested that the relevant Executive Councillor attends a future Panel meeting to explain what devolution means for the District and answer Members' questions.

The Community Resilience Plan including relationships with Parish and Town Councils and the County Council was raised as an issue that the Panel would like to review and have extended an invitation to the Executive Councillor for Community Resilience to attend a future Panel meeting and explain what work has been completed thus far.

Members supported the inclusion of the Housing Strategy onto the work programme. The Panel agreed that the Housing Working Group (formally known as the Affordable Housing Working Group and the Registered Social Providers Working Group) be resurrected to review housing policy as and when required. The Panel would also like to invite the Executive Councillor for Planning Policy, Housing and Infrastructure to a future Panel meeting to discuss the future of the Housing Strategy.

The Panel agreed that the Town Centres/High Street Viability topic is to be included onto the work programme and would like to invite the relevant Executive Councillors to future meetings of the Panel to discuss the latest developments. Members would also like to extend an invitation to Town Council who have adopted Marketing Strategies.

(At 8.49pm, during the consideration of the item, Councillors R B Howe and D M Tysoe left the meeting and did not return.)

Chairman