

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, 8th December 2016.

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

42. MINUTES

The Minutes for the meeting of the Panel held on 3rd November 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

43. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

44. 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 December 2016 to 31st March 2017.

45. REVIEW OF STREET MARKETS (HUNTINGDON AND ST IVES)

With the aid of a report by the Business Development Manager (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the Review of Street Markets (Huntingdon and St Ives) was presented to the Panel.

The Executive Councillor for Environment, Street Scene and Operations introduced the report by reminding Members that the market service was in decline and loss making but since the new Markets Officer, Mr Salmon, had been appointed the service has recorded a profit this financial year.

The Panel received a PowerPoint presentation from Mr Salmon highlighting the issues and solutions for the market service. Members were informed that previously 40-45% of space was given away for free however since the introduction of placement studs the traders have kept within their pitch and the amount of space lost has reduced.

In conducting research, evidence suggests that markets tend to do

better when there is a high footfall and as such the plan for the Huntingdon street market is to move the market along the High Street to capture the main footfall in the town.

The Markets Officer stated that the Council have sought approval for the plan from the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Huntingdon Town Council. It is the Council's intention to work with Cambridgeshire County Council to amend the traffic regulation order and close the road on Wednesdays and Saturdays. It is hoped the change will have happened by the end of March 2017.

Members were informed that the St Ives market will be reviewed and currently Officers are looking to run the market in a way that would not require a road closure.

Following a question regarding the charging regime and the competitiveness of the Council's Market Service, the Panel was informed that the charge is £17.50 per 10 foot pitch and £11.50 for a 2nd pitch. The Markets Officer reminded Members that whilst the Council wants to be competitive it also wants to generate an income.

The average age of market traders was discussed however the Chairman reminded the Panel that young entrepreneurs at present are trading from their bedrooms as opposed to trading on a market stall.

A Member welcomed the work done on the Market Service as it is long overdue and needed a change. The Panel supported the work in Huntingdon and look forward to seeing the plans for St Ives.

46. HUNTINGDONSHIRE LOCAL PLAN TO 2036 AND INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING UPDATES

With the aid of the report by the Head of Development (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Huntingdonshire Local Plan To 2036 and Infrastructure Planning Updates was presented to the Panel. Members were informed that the report provides the most up to date position on the Local Plan.

The Panel was informed that the consultation on wind energy development has been extended by two weeks and beyond Christmas to enable everyone a chance to participate and comment.

Members were informed that the completion of the Cambridge Sub Regional Model by Cambridgeshire County Council was six months later than originally expected, Officers have made considerable efforts to seek to ensure that the timescale for the Statutory consultation on, and submission of, the Local Plan is only one month later than anticipated in the previous reports.

In response to a question regarding the number of Gypsy and Traveller pitches the assessment indicates are needed, it was confirmed that the number mentioned by the assessment is for the duration of the Local Plan.

The Panel commended the work the team has done.

(At 7.22pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillors R C Carter and J White left the meeting and did not return.)

47. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel received and noted a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of studies being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Communities and Environment and Performance and Customers.

A Member questioned the Bus Departure Levy study being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Customers). The Panel was told that the Bus Departure Levy was suggested as a potential income stream through the Zero Based Budgeting process however the study has not been progressed.

48. 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 the progress of its activities since the last meeting.

Members noted that the Cabinet have decided that a task and finish group on car parks will be conducting a root and branch review of parking and will look at the strategy as a whole. The Panel have indicated their willingness to get involved.

The Panel have expressed their interest to invite the Executive Councillor responsible for community resilience and for parking to a future Panel meeting to set out their vision.

(At 7.39pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor J A Gray entered the meeting.)

49. COMMERCIAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Chairman reminded the Panel that the Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources has been invited to attend the meeting so that he could give Members more information on the Commercial Investment Strategy (CIS) and how the Strategy has contributed to the economic growth of the District.

In giving background detail the Panel was informed that before the creation of the CIS the Council's property portfolio was worth £20.8m and that the plan was to sell it. A report was commissioned and it found that whilst the portfolio was generating income there was a number of processes that the Council was failing to do however the Cabinet decided that it would not sell its property portfolio.

The Commercial Investment Strategy was developed with consultants EC Harris and they concluded that as the investments were all in Huntingdonshire the Council should make future investments in a wider geographical area outside of the District. The consultants also suggested that as the type of properties the Council had in its portfolio was mainly light industrial, consideration should be given to widening

the type of properties the Council invested in.

The consultants also provided a tool for the finance team which indicates to them what returns would be received on particular investments. This is important as the Council need to prove that a particular commercial investment represents good value for money for the tax payer.

Members were informed of the commercial investments the Council has invested including the purchase of a £1.4m property at 2 Stonehill, Stukeley Meadows, Huntingdon in the year 2015/16. The property is currently yielding in line with the Council's expectations. The other investment made in 2015/16 was the £2.5m investment in the Churches, Charities and Local Authorities Mutual Investments Trust Property Fund which is yielding at around 4%.

In the year 2016/17, the Council have made two commercial investments including an office block in Hitchin for £2.185m with a yield of 7.4% and a retail park in Sudbury for £6.5m yielding 6.9%. Both properties are freehold and purchased with cash.

When asked would the social aspect of investments be considered in the future, the Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources stated that at the current point in time his mandate is to maximise income for the Council in order to pay for Council services. In addition the Members were informed that a social return means a lower monetary return.

The Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources informed Members that consultants EC Harris did suggest that the Council could invest in housing so that does remain an option but the returns are lower than commercial investments.

A Member asked are the Council looking at making investments with partner organisations in which the Executive Councillor stated that it does remain an option particularly as the Council are able to act fairly nimbly.

Following a question regarding the conclusions of the Peer Review, which came to a different opinion to the Executive Councillor, and how to reconcile those conclusions with the mandate the Executive Councillor has, the Panel heard that the Council are not adverse to investments within the District but it is recognised that there is a need to have a wide portfolio. In addition Members were informed that the Peer Review focused on how to use money to build things that wouldn't get built.

Chairman