

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND CUSTOMERS) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Monday, 6th June 2016.

PRESENT: Councillor M F Shellens – Chairman.

Councillors P L E Bucknell, Mrs A Dickinson, Mrs L A Duffy, S Greenall, D Harty, Mrs R E Mathews, Mrs D C Reynolds, T D Sanderson, Mrs S L Taylor, R G Tuplin and J E White.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors S Cawley, R Fuller, R B Howe and D M Tysoe.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Finance and Performance) held on 7th April 2016 and the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Customers) held on 18th May 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

6. 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 June 2016 to 30th September 2016.

7. QUARTER 4 INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT AND PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2015/16

With the aid of a report by the Head of Resources and the Corporate Team Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Integrated Performance Report 2015/16 Quarter 4 was presented to the Panel. Members were informed that of the four Key Actions rated as red, three of them have not been included into the Corporate Plan 2016-18.

In response to a question on the key action of 'implement action plan to adopt the Local Plan 2036' and when would the Local Plan be completed, the Panel was informed that consultation would begin in Quarter 1 and the progress of the Local Plan relies on the outcome of the consultation.

The key action of 'develop a market town centre improvement

strategy and action plan for St Neots' would not be reported on in next year's Integrated Performance Reports as it won't be in the Corporate Plan. Following a question on the progress of the market town centre improvement strategy, Members were advised that the Council are willing to engage with St Neots' Town Councillors if they would like to progress the strategy.

Members were advised that sickness absence has been a significant issue for the Council. The number of staff on long term sickness has reduced and this would be reflected in Quarter 1 for 2016/17. In addition there is targeted action to enable managers to effectively manage employees return to work. The cost to the Council is £400k which equates to 23 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) and if the rate is reduced to the public sector average then the Council could employ an additional 12 FTE.

Following a question on the number of homeless acceptances in relation to the performance indicator of 'number of unintentional priority homeless acceptances' Members were informed that a strategic report on the topic would be presented to the Panel at its meeting in September 2016. Members were advised that there is increased homelessness as a result of the reluctance of private rented landlords to take people on benefits as the incentives for private rented landlords to take people on benefits are no longer working and private rented landlords are choosing to take people from employment.

In relation to a question on the performance indicator of 'number of affordable homes delivered gross', Members were informed that there has been a dip in the number of houses built however there are major housing projects being developed which will add to the provision of affordable housing.

The Panel was informed that the Registered Social Providers Working Group invited seven of the Housing Associations operating within the District to a workshop where all but one stated that they are planning on developing social housing.

During the discussion of the Budget Surplus Reserve, Members were informed that the Government Levy Payment is a compulsory payment however the rest of the surplus will be reallocated.

A discussion ensued about the possibility of using reserves to buy accommodation for temporary housing as this is seen as a more permanent solution than using bed and breakfasts. Following a question it was confirmed that the Council normally house on average 10 families in bed and breakfast however in the last two quarters the Council have housed between 20 and 30 families.

A Member questioned the need to spend £101k of the reserve on technology to enable staff to work flexibly, however the Panel were advised that by giving employees the flexibility to work offsite the Council could make economy savings greater than £101k by reducing office provision.

In response to a question regarding savings made on establishment

costs, the Panel were advised that through the Zero Based Budgeting process the budgets for posts that are no longer deemed necessary (usually vacant) will be removed and the post will be deleted.

The Panel discussed the possibility of establishing a Working Group to investigate how the Budget Surplus Reserve should be reallocated however it was decided that Councillors Mrs A Dickinson, Mrs L A Duffy, T D Sanderson and J White would speak with the Cabinet regarding the composition of the reserve.

Following a question from the Panel in relation to the Alconbury Weald Remediation, Members were advised that the funding would not be affected by the European Union referendum result as the Council are already in possession of the funding. The Panel,

RESOLVED

- 1) to seek further clarification for the underspend of Community Grants; and
- 2) to nominate Councillors Mrs A Dickinson, Mrs L A Duffy, T D Sanderson and J White to speak with the Cabinet regarding the composition of the Budget Surplus Reserve.

(At 7.14pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor S Cawley joined the meeting).

(At 8.18pm, after the consideration of this item, Councillor D M Tysoe left the meeting).

8. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2015/16 OUTTURN REPORT

With the aid of a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Treasury Management Strategy 2015/16 Outturn Report was presented to the Panel. Members were advised that the Council has a statutory obligation to report on the Treasury Management of the authority.

Following a query on the £10m the Council borrowed in 2008 the Panel were informed that at the time the rate was considered low. The money received is loaned out in order for the Council to make a return.

The Panel noted that regarding Inflation in the Economic Review section the report states that 'there is no indication that oil prices will pick up' which conflicts with what Members and residents are experiencing. In addition Members would like the local inflation figure added to the report the next time this report is produced.

9. DISPOSAL AND ACQUISITIONS POLICY - REVIEW OF NEW THRESHOLDS AFTER 12 MONTHS (JUNE 15)

The Panel received a verbal update by the Head of Resources on the Disposal and Acquisitions Policy – Review of New Thresholds After 12 Months. Members were reminded that they had received the

Disposal and Acquisitions Policy report in June 2015 and it was agreed that they would receive an update. In updating the Panel, Members were informed that the policy is working well and that the thresholds will not be reviewed.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT

With the aid of a report by the Internal Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Risk Management report was presented to the Panel. In reviewing the risk register, Members identified risks 53 and 107 as risks that the Council has little influence over and questioned whether they are worth including on the register. The Panel recommended that consideration be given to removing the low risk items from the register.

The Panel was concerned that risk 32 of poor site security at Eastfield House had exceeded the risk appetite category levels despite the building having adequate cover of CCTV cameras however Members were informed that the risk had been considered by Corporate Management Team and had been accepted.

Following a question regarding risk 57 that plant and equipment used by staff is not properly maintained, Members were informed that there is a possibility that there may be either no maintenance or maintenance by untrained employees.

Members recommended that the management of risk 58, information security policy is not followed, should be a priority. The Panel were informed that work on mitigating the risk was in progress however Members have stated that they would like to receive a report on the item at a future Panel meeting.

The Panel raised a concern that the risk that one of the parties could withdraw from the shared service agreement had not been fully considered. Members wanted to know what would be the implications of such an event. The Panel,

RESOLVED

- 1) that consideration should be given to removing low risk items from the register;
- 2) that a report about risk 58 should be submitted to the Panel at its meeting in September 2016; and
- 3) that the risk that one party could withdraw from the shared service agreement should be fully considered and included on the risk register.

11. EXCLUSION OF 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 any particular person (including the authority

holding that information).

12. REPORT REGARDING USE OF SPECIAL URGENCY PROVISIONS

Consideration was given to a report by the Democratic Services Officer on behalf of the Cabinet regarding the use of the special urgency provision. Following questions on the purpose of the report Members were informed that the Cabinet are required to inform Overview and Scrutiny when the special urgency provision is used.

The Head of Resources reminded Members that they will receive an update on the information contained within the report in the next quarterly update however currently the information is restricted.

13. RE-ADMITTANCE OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

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

14. 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 Customers and Economy and Growth.

15. 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. During discussion of this item, Members agreed that a report on the financial element of Section 106 should be submitted at the Panel meeting in September 2016.

Chairman