

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH) held in Meeting Room 0.1A and 0.1B, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 11th September 2018.

PRESENT: Councillor D B Dew – Chairman.
Councillors L A Besley, J C Cooper-Marsh, S J Corney, Dr P L R Gaskin, M S Grice, K P Gulson, J Neish and S Wakeford.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors D A Giles, J P Morris and D J Wells.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors R Fuller and J A Gray.

19. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5th July 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

20. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

21. 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 September 2018 to 31st December 2018.

(At 7.01pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor S Wakeford entered the meeting.)

22. CORPORATE PLAN 2018-2022 AND INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT 2018/19, QUARTER 1

With the aid of a report by the Corporate Team Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Corporate Plan 2018-2022 and the Integrated Performance Report 2018/19, Quarter 1 was presented to the Panel. Members were given background details on the development of the plan and the purpose of the plan.

A Member questioned whether the targets are challenging enough. It was explained that targets set are challenged by Officers and are informed by performance in previous years, national guidelines, statutory obligations and other benchmarking information, and also reflect resource availability, so generally would be more challenging compared to the previous year.

A specific point was raised regarding call centre satisfaction rates and

it was explained that the target covers a range of criteria from resolution of the call to had it been passed on to the relevant team.

Where no target has been set, the Panel was informed that this is where the Senior Officers and relevant Portfolio Holder thought the measure would be most useful, however, as it had not been used in the previous year and had not been previously collected, no target was set yet, but this could be added during the year.

In regards to achieving Green Flag status for Paxton Pits, the comment was made that this was setting a target already achieved and that a more beneficial target would be maintaining the Green Flag status for Paxton Pits. The target also includes achieving Green Flag status for Hinchingsbrooke Country Park and Riverside St Neots by 2020.

A Member commented that it could be more useful if the number of new affordable homes delivered was presented as a percentage of total homes delivered.

Some Members of the Panel commented that they would like the target for number of staff sickness days lost per full time employee to be lower than 9. It was explained to the Panel that the target is lower than last year's target of 10 days which was only just met.

In regards to total amount of energy used in Council buildings, a Member commented whether it would be possible to include mileage of Council vehicles within that target.

Attention turned to the Integrated Performance Report 2018/19, Quarter 1. The Corporate Team Manager introduced the report and covered the performance section and the Finance Manager covered the finance section. Members were informed of the revenue and capital overspend and the reasons for it. The Panel was reassured that Officers would work towards reducing the underspend by the end of the financial year.

On grounds maintenance, discussion ensued on how to align the Council's inspection standard with customer expectations as the latter is subjective. It was explained that customers tend to contact the Council when something is wrong and as grounds maintenance requests were down, this suggests that customers' expectations are being met.

The Panel commented that if the public knew which Council is responsible for maintaining which bit of land this would decrease the number of calls to the Council's Call Centre. It was explained that the relevant Portfolio Holder is currently working on a project in order to better manage such calls.

Members commented that they had concerns with the overspend in Operations and One Leisure however, it was explained that the relevant Portfolio Holders and Heads of Service would be in a better position to answer those concerns.

The Commercial Investment Strategy (CIS) was raised, by the Panel, as an area which could be susceptible to a decrease in income

however, it was explained that the majority of units owned by the Council through the CIS are small to mid-ranged units on trading estates and retail parks and are more resilient than those units located on the High Street.

The Panel raised the issue of recycling contamination and urged that more is done on educating residents on what materials can go into the recycling bin.

(At 7.09pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor L A Besley entered the meeting.)

(At 8.02pm, after the conclusion of this item, Councillor J A Gray left the meeting.)

23. HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

With the aid of a report by the Housing Strategy Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Housing Strategy Action Plan: report on 2017/18 outcomes and 2018/19 priorities was presented to the Panel.

In introducing the report the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Economic Development informed the Panel of the background detail to the Housing Strategy and that the strategy outlines what the Council wants to do. The Executive Councillor highlighted that one of the biggest achievements of the Housing Strategy Action Plan was the 363 successful homelessness preventions during 2017/18.

A discussion ensued regarding the empty properties at RAF Brampton. Members were informed that the Council have been in contact with the Ministry of Defence about using them however, the MOD has not indicated that it wants to lease them long term, additionally some of the properties require refurbishing.

Following a question about the Council's interaction with Luminus since it has been taken over by Places for People, the Panel was informed that the working relationship has improved. The Council has worked closely with Luminus on their development plan and that they are planning to introduce more affordable housing. In addition, following further discussion on Luminus, it was confirmed that Homes England regulate Luminus and all registered social providers.

Concern was raised that developers may avoid working with Housing Associations in delivering affordable housing as they (Housing Associations) have certain specifications. Members were reassured though that the delivery of affordable housing remains realistic.

In response to a discussion on rough sleepers it was confirmed that homelessness is not the same as rough sleepers. In Huntingdonshire, there are estimated to be four rough sleepers and if they presented themselves as homeless then they may receive temporary accommodation.

Following a discussion on empty properties, it was confirmed that the Council has an easy mechanism for reporting them however, the cost

of bringing some empty properties back into use far outweighs the results and that the Council should use the resources it has in delivering more beneficial actions of the action plan.

When a question arose regarding the Council's action of ensuring that the Council has a five year supply of Gypsy and Traveller sites, it was confirmed that it meant permanent sites, as sites for transiting travellers remains the responsibility of Cambridgeshire County Council.

A Member questioned the target number of affordable housing to be delivered in 2017/18. In response it was confirmed that target was the delivery of 167 affordable homes however, not all were completed in 2017/18 (123 completed). The Panel was informed that all 167 affordable homes will be completed.

Further to discussion on Priority One, Action Six, the Executive Councillor confirmed that the Council are reviewing all options in order to facilitate the delivery of affordable housing but warned Members that there is no easy option.

Following a question regarding the amount of emergency housing, the Panel was informed that the Council prefers the delivery of affordable housing but on occasions may seek to utilise that affordable housing as temporary accommodation in the first instance however, there is not enough and that is why the Council ends up using bed and breakfasts and hotels.

Confusion arose concerning the Council's partnerships with developers on large strategic sites. It was explained that those sites are defined as large strategic sites and the action does not preclude the Council from working in partnership on other sites.

The Panel endorsed the priorities for the Housing Strategy Action Plan 2018/19.

(At 8.10pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor J A Gray entered the meeting.)

24. 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 Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was presented to the Panel.

During the discussion on how to advance the work programme a Member commented that the Panel should focus on the topics that would make the biggest positive difference to the Council and the residents.

The Panel identified housing as an area which Members could effectively engage with and recognised there is a huge amount of work that could be done. A Member expressed their preference to prioritise the idea of increasing the supply of affordable housing.

The Panel agreed that a working group is established to finalise the work programme for 2018/19. The working group will consist of

Councillors D B Dew, J C Cooper-Marsh, J Neish and S Wakeford.
The other Panel Members are to feed their ideas into the group.

*(At 8.57pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillors R Fuller
and J A Gray left the meeting and did not return.)*

Chairman