

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH) held in the Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 8th January 2020

PRESENT: Councillor D B Dew – Chairman.

Councillors B S Chapman, J W Davies, Dr P L R Gaskin, K P Gulson, J P Morris, S Wakeford and D J Wells.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J C Cooper-Marsh, S J Corney and M S Grice.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Mrs S J Conboy, J A Gray, J Neish, K I Prentice, T D Sanderson and Mrs S Smith.

43 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5th November 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

44 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

45 NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel received and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) which has been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st January 2020 to 30th April 2020.

46 ALTERNATIVE BUDGET PROPOSALS FROM THE HDC INDEPENDENT GROUP

With the aid of a report by the HDC Independent Group Leader (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the alternative budget proposals from the HDC independent Group were presented to the Panel.

Councillor Gaskin asked what the benefit would be of adding £100k to the Community Chest Fund when the existing £60k had not been fully allocated. Councillor Sanderson, HDC Independent Group Leader, stated that if the Fund was advertised more prominently then there would be better take up, meaning more community organisations might benefit. It was noted by Members that the Community Chest Fund required greater advertisement and there was general agreement that this needs to be done before any proposal to increase the Fund was considered.

It was asked, by Councillor Morris, whether the consequences for the service of removing £100k from the Active Lifestyles budget had been considered. It was confirmed that this had not been considered but Councillor Sanderson stated that the HDC Independent Group would consider reallocating £100k from another budget line if it meant there were additional funds for the Community Chest Fund.

A suggestion was made by Councillor Chapman that money should be taken out of the Active Lifestyles budget but given to voluntary organisations who offered support services (e.g. Citizens' Advice Bureau) instead of the Community Chest. The reasoning for this was that, since voluntary sector funding had been reduced, the burden had fallen on Town and Parish Councils.

Members considered the suggestion to spend £600k on a Housing and Homeless Shelter; however, Councillor Gulson stated that a more detailed proposal would have to be completed before the idea was considered. In addition, it was noted that there needed to be a way to ensure the shelter helped those most in need locally. The Managing Director added that there were active work streams in this area, which should be completed before the idea was suggested again. There also was a Housing Taskforce operating across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough piloting various schemes and options.

Regarding the Youth Facilities Fund, it was suggested that it could be broadened out to organisations other than Parish Councils. However, Members drew attention to the fact that the funding came from the New Homes Bonus, which was due to cease in the next few years.

Whilst Members recognised the number of highways improvements funded through the Local Highway Improvements Fund, the Panel remained unconvinced that adding £100k to the fund was the best way to deliver further improvements.

RESOLVED

that the Panel's views on the Alternative Budget Proposal be conveyed to the Cabinet.

47 DRAFT 2020/21 REVENUE BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2021/22 TO 2024/25); INCLUDING THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME

With the aid of a report by the Finance Manager (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the draft 2020/21 Revenue Budget and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2021/22 to 2024/25, including the capital programme, was presented to the Panel. The Members were informed that 2020/21 would be challenging; however, the outlook over the course of the MTFS was positive and the Council was in a good position for that period.

Councillor Wakeford asked whether the Cambridgeshire or Huntingdonshire figures was considered to be representative of local wage growth. In response, the Executive Councillor for Resources stated that the Cambridgeshire figure was used.

Discussion took place on the risk associated with raising the minimum wage for the Council, particularly as the report stated there would be a minimal effect on cost. It was explained that the risk related to the cascading effect that raising the minimum wage would have upon the pay scales.

Following an expression of concern that a small change within the budget could have a significant change when delivering a service, the Panel was reassured that as the budget has been reprofiled, it was more robust. In addition, budget managers were more confident that the budget was deliverable. Councillor Wells then asked about the risk associated with the settlement and, in response, was informed that the settlement was draft but there was no expectation that the numbers would change.

Following a question about the main risks to the budget, the Panel was informed that one was funding from Business Rates and another was the frequency of adverse weather. It was noted that adverse weather had a substantial impact upon Operations in delivering their services. Members were informed that the Council had a reserve earmarked for specific items but did not have a general reserve to meet unexpected costs. A conversation then ensued on the budget for the Commercial Investment Strategy. The Panel was reminded that phase one had ended and that the Strategy would be refocussed.

Following a query on a café development at Priory Park/Riverside, the Head of Operations stated that a feasibility study would be carried out and options would be presented before a decision was made. A discussion then took place on car parking income. It was noted that as Members were discussing the budget all that could be identified was the total income and that any in-depth analysis could not be done based on an income line alone.

Councillor Morris asked a question regarding the reduction in employee costs for the Housing service. It was explained that due to a senior management restructure there was no longer a senior management recharge to the service. Members were reassured that there was no intention to reduce the number of staff within the service.

During deliberation on the Leisure and Health budget, the Panel was reassured that this year's budget for the service was challenging but achievable. In addition, it was noted that the losses accrued by the One Leisure site in Sawtry have been taken out of the budget as the Council is no longer responsible for the site. It was expected that there would be income from the Training Shed.

RESOLVED

that the Panel's views on the draft 2020/21 Revenue Budget and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2021/22 to 2024/25, including the capital programme be conveyed to the Cabinet.

(At 8.07pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor Mrs S Smith left the meeting and did not return.)

(At 8.30pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor T D Sanderson left the meeting.)

(At 8.32pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor T D Sanderson returned to the meeting.)

(At 8.38pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor J Neish left the meeting.)

(At 8.39pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor J Neish returned to the meeting.)

48 BURY VILLAGE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

With the aid of a report by Service Manager Growth (Policy, Infrastructure and Strategic Development) (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book), the Bury Village Neighbourhood Plan and examination outcome was presented to the Panel.

Members were pleased to see that the local community had the used the opportunity to engage in the process effectively and that Council Officers worked well with the Parish Council in producing the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Panel stated that the Bury Neighbourhood Village Plan was an excellent document and they encouraged the Cabinet to act upon the Examiner's report and then progress the plan to referendum.

(At 9.15pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillors Mrs S Conboy and J A Gray left the meeting and did not return.)

49 USE OF SPECIAL URGENCY PROVISIONS VERBAL UPDATE - COMMERCIAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Panel was informed that the Chairman of the Panel approved that an urgent item, regarding a decision relating to a Commercial Investment Strategy asset, could be considered at Cabinet without prior Overview and Scrutiny.

(At 9.21pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor K I Prentice left the meeting and did not return.)

(At 9.22pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor J Neish left the meeting and did not return.)

50 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.

(At 9.26pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor T D Sanderson left the meeting and did not return.)

Chairman