

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, 4th March 2020

PRESENT: Councillor D B Dew – Chairman.

Councillors B S Chapman, S J Corney, I D Gardener, Dr P L R Gaskin, K P Gulson, J P Morris, A Roberts, S Wakeford and D J Wells.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor M S Grice.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors R Fuller and D Keane.

59 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5th February 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

60 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor D J Wells declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in relation to Minute Number 62 as Chairman of the St Neots Masterplan for Growth Steering Group.

Councillor B S Chapman declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in relation to Minute Number 62 as a Member of the St Neots Masterplan for Growth Steering Group.

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

61 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 March 2020 to 30th June 2020.

(At 7.02pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor S Wakeford entered the meeting.)

62 FUTURE HIGH STREETS FUND DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN

With the aid of a report by the Service Manager – Growth (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the Future High Streets Fund Draft Business Plan was presented to the Panel.

In introducing the Business Plan, the Executive Councillor for Housing and Economic Development informed the Panel that the Council were looking to submit the Business Plan to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government by 15th March 2020 and that the accompanying report listed the proposed interventions outlined in the Business Plan. In addition, Members were informed that the Services Manager – Growth attended a meeting at St Neots to present the Business Plan.

Councillor Chapman opened his remarks by praising the what the Officers and the Executive Councillor had done and stated that the Business Plan offered St Neots an opportunity to revitalise the town centre, although there were still challenges (e.g. congestion and shops closing) and the Councillor was disappointed that the proposed bridge scheme had been cancelled. Councillor Chapman added that if the housing developments in St Neots were to be successful then the town needed to be an attractive place for people and seek to serve their basic needs. In response the Executive Councillor stated that although there were challenges, St Neots was a town that had potential and that the Business Plan sought to repurpose the town centre. In regard to the bridge scheme, the issue was that the benefit to cost ratio fell below the acceptable limit, which was disappointing as £1m had been spent on developing plans.

Councillor Gulson commented that in regard to losing the bridge scheme, there appeared to be proposals contained within the Business Plan that mitigated for that.

As the Chairman of the St Neots Masterplan for Growth Steering Group, Councillor Wells addressed the Panel and stated that the Business Plans were a good piece of work and that they sought to build on the location of St Neots.

The Executive Councillor was asked by Councillor Gaskin for thoughts on options that were considered but not proceeded with such as the Little Paxton bridge. In response the Executive Councillor stated that the Little Paxton bridge was outside the area in terms of the Business Plan, however other groups were considering the idea. In addition the Panel was informed that the theory behind the idea of placing car parks on the edge of the town centre was to encourage people to stop their car journey on the outside of the town centre and therefore have a better experience inside the town centre.

Market Place pedestrianisation was raised and the Executive Councillor stated that pedestrianisation of the Market Place would be good for the town centre, however it was challenging as there would be local resistance.

A Member commented that the Business Plan was good piece of work which aimed to attract additional footfall or retain existing footfall.

Councillor Morris addressed plans for pedestrian and cyclist access on the bridge into the town centre and suggested that there should be more segregation between the two as it reduced the potential for conflict. In response, Members were informed that, the type of detail requested would come at a later stage when the plan entered the next phase.

RESOLVED

that the Council should submit the Business Plan to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government by 15th March 2020 be endorsed.

63 SHARED SERVICES BUSINESS PLANS 2020/21

With the aid of a report by the Corporate Director – People (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the Shared Services Business Plan 2020/21 were presented to the Panel. The Panel was informed that after five years of shared services, the services involved had stability and all three of them were achieving the savings targets that they had been set.

Councillor Wakeford asked about the future plans for the shared services. In response the Panel was informed that all three partners were keen to extend the shared service agreement. It was explained though that what the partners were looking for in the next five years would be different to the previous five years. It was confirmed that a final decision on whether to extend the agreement was required by the end of September 2020.

(At 7.36pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillors B S Chapman and R Fuller left the meeting and did not return.)

a) APPENDIX 1 - LEGAL SHARED SERVICE BUSINESS PLAN 2020/21

In the introduction, the Panel was informed that it has been a stable year for the Legal Shared Service, although competing for technical resources in a local government environment was challenging. Whilst discussing the Legal Service's successful litigation cases for April to September 2019, Councillor Gulson commented that he expected a more robust target than 80% considering the success rate exceeded the target by 17.8%. It was explained the target was set at 80% to allow for those cases where the outcome was not clear cut. It was noted that the targets were set at the start of the process and would be reviewed going forward.

A concern was raised, by Councillor Gulson, that any ICT outages had a knock-on effect for other services in particular the Legal Service and that this had not been fully recognised. In response, Members were informed that the Management Board was aware that the Legal Service had been hit hard by ICT outages and this was partly due to the service using outdated systems.

Following a question from Councillor Wakeford in relation to concerns raised last year about the way satisfaction levels for the Legal Service were calculated, the Panel was informed that satisfaction levels were now calculated as per industry standard and that every customer was contacted directly with a request for feedback.

Following a query from Councillor Wells, a discussion on vacant posts in the Legal Service ensued and it was explained that market forces were affecting recruitment, however using paralegals and trainees was now being considered in order to fill vacancies.

b) APPENDIX 2 - ICT SHARED SERVICE BUSINESS PLAN 2020/21

In the introduction, the Panel was informed that this year the ICT Service had replaced the server, replaced a substantial amount of hardware and installed fibre optic cables. It was recognised that issues would arise, however the service knew where the risks sat. It was also stated that this coming year, the data sharing centre at Shire Hall would be moved to Sandford House, Peterborough, meaning that for a period of time there would only be one data sharing centre which was located at Pathfinder House.

Councillor Gulson asked if the cost and impact of ICT outages upon the various divisions had been calculated. It was explained that it was a consideration which was why there had been a transition to cloud-based services where the standard up time was 99.8%.

A concern was raised by Councillor Roberts regarding the potential rising costs for software licence purchases. In response it was explained that licence purchases were made in dollars and it was a risk the service was aware of.

Councillor Gaskin questioned the resilience of the ICT Service in the event of a pandemic flu virus such as the Coronavirus becoming more widespread. The Panel was informed that a level of risk had been considered in terms of staff downtime and face to face contact with residents and there were business continuity plans ready. In terms maintaining back office functions, through the Council Anywhere project the Council was well placed to cope with widespread pandemic flu. The majority of Officers had the ability to work from home and could access all the software they required.

Concern was raised by Councillor Wakeford that out of hours cover arrangements, particularly those which involved an outage, relied too heavily on the good will of staff and that the arrangements should be formalised. Members were reassured that work had been done to ensure that the need for out of hours support was minimal but that there was sufficient support when required.

A question was asked by Councillor Corney in relation to vacancies on the ICT Service Desk and whether the service was filling vacancies or looking to retain existing staff. In response the Panel was informed that the service was looking to retain staff. The Service Desk comprised entry level jobs, however as staff developed their skills they then moved onto more specialised roles.

Following a question about server downtime it was clarified that there was a major outage in November 2018 but no such outage had happened during 2019/20.

c) 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).

d) APPENDIX 3 - BUILDING CONTROL SHARED SERVICE BUSINESS PLAN 2020/21

Consideration was given to the Building Control Shared Service Business Plan 2020/21 (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book). It was explained that the reason the Business Plan was restricted was because it contained information on the market share the service had.

The Panel discussed the profile of staff, the challenges of managing an increasing workload and the balance of offering continuity or resilience. Members were reassured that: the profile of staff was heading in the right direction; the service was well placed to manage increasing workloads and that the service was placed to offer resilience but would provide continuity where possible.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to approve the Business Plans for each of the Shared Services attached as Appendices here and to authorise the Shared Services Management Board to approve final amendments to the Business Plans in line with comments received from all three partner councils.

e) RE-ADMITTANCE OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

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

64 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was presented to the Panel.

65 PANEL CHANGES

On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman formally welcomed Councillor Gardener and Councillor Roberts and thanked Councillor Davies for his time serving on the Panel.

Chairman