

# HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH) held as a remote meeting via Zoom on Wednesday, 4th November 2020

PRESENT: Councillor S J Corney – Chairman.

Councillors E R Butler, D B Dew, I D Gardener,  
Dr P L R Gaskin, A Roberts and S Wakeford.

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors J A Gray and J Neish.

## **36 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7th October were approved as a correct record by the Panel.

## **37 MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

No declarations of interest were received.

## **38 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 had been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st November 2020 to 28th February 2021.

## **39 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020/21, QUARTER 2**

Consideration was given to a report by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) in which the Council's corporate performance for quarter 2 of 2020/21 was presented to the Panel.

Following the presentation of the report by the Deputy Executive Leader, the Chairman commented that, overall, the performance of the Council was commendable, particularly the low number of Key Actions and Performance Indicators rated red.

Councillor Gardener then raised the issue of employees' mental health. In response, it was confirmed that the Council had taken a number of steps in order to support staff with their mental health including: the provision of Mental Health First Aiders for confidential one to one conversations, virtual drop in sessions and ensuring managers check on the wellbeing of their staff.

Councillor Roberts addressed the potential effect of the second lockdown on the Key Actions rated amber. Members were reassured that the Council had already developed plans to mitigate the effects of the second lockdown on all the priority areas of activity.

Councillor Wakeford asked whether the Council had exceeded the target on Performance Indicator 3, number of homelessness preventions achieved, as a result of Court Action being suspended during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was confirmed that the suspension of Court Action had assisted the Council in this area but that proactive action had also been taken. In addition, it was noted that work with vulnerable people had been highly effective.

Concern regarding the amber rating for the affordable homes target (performance indicator 20) was raised by Councillor Wakeford. It was noted that the Council had adopted policies in relation to affordable homes the terms of which included requirements on the granting of planning permission and collaboration with a Registered Housing partner in order to build affordable homes on Council owned sites. Members were reminded that there could be a time lag between the Development Management Committee granting planning permission and the affordable housing being physically built. The Panel

#### RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to consider the comments raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel when considering the report at their meeting.

#### **40 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020/21, QUARTER 2**

By means of a report by the Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Council's financial performance for quarter 2 of 2020/21 was presented to the Panel.

In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources explained that the Council had exceeded the budget by £2.4m and this represented an overspend of 13.6%. It was explained that this was as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic response and the nationwide lockdown. The Chief Finance Officer stated that there was likely to be an additional £634k overspend because of the second nationwide lockdown. This would be as a result of closing One Leisure as well as a loss of rental income. It was noted that whilst the Council were hopeful that compensation from Government would cover the loss in One Leisure income, there would be no compensation in respect of the loss in rental income. The Panel was also informed that there was an underspend on Capital projects and that a review of the Capital Programme was being undertaken.

Following the introduction, the Chairman commented that the Council's finances appeared to be performing better than expected.

Councillor Wakeford then raised the prospect of the Council being unable to use Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) loans to purchase property under the Commercial Investment Strategy (CIS). It was confirmed that the Government had conducted a consultation on the PWLB and that the Council may have to

assess other funding options if it was to achieve the objectives of the CIS. The Panel,

**RESOLVED**

that the Cabinet be recommended to consider the comments raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel when considering the report at their meeting.

**41 TREASURY MANAGEMENT SIX MONTH PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

Consideration was given to a report by the Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) in which the Treasury Management Six Month Performance Review was presented to the Panel.

In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources stated that following consideration of it by Overview and Scrutiny, the report would be presented to Cabinet and then Council. The Chief Finance Officer informed Members that the Treasury Management report explained what ability the Council had to move cash around, the controls that were in place and the external factors that affected it. Members were informed that the Council's treasury management was in a sound position.

Councillor Wakeford commented that loans to other organisations appeared to be profitable for the Council, however it was clarified that the loans were agreed a number of years ago when the interest rate was higher. In addition, the Council initially borrowed the money from another lender at a similar rate and were only making a small margin of profit in order to cover administration costs.

**42 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.

Chairman