

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (CUSTOMERS AND PARTNERSHIPS) held as a the remote meeting via Zoom on Thursday, 10th September 2020

PRESENT: Councillor D M Tysoe – Chairman.

Councillors T D Alban, B S Banks, S J Criswell, J W Davies, Ms A Diaz, Mrs A Dickinson, D A Giles, Mrs J Tavener and Mrs S R Wilson.

APOLOGIES: None.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Mrs M L Beuttell, S Bywater and D N Keane.

5 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 5th March 2020 and 17th June 2020 were approved as a correct record by the Panel.

6 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

7 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 2020 to 31st December 2020.

The Chairman invited the Executive Councillor for Corporate Services to update the Panel on the Council's Digital Strategy. In doing so, the Executive Councillor informed Members that the Strategy focused on how the Council used digital technology to improve the efficiency of its back-office processes and customer interactions. It would cover elements of people and process to ensure that as an organisation Officers had the tools and skills to fully utilise digital approaches and solutions to improve efficient and effectiveness of operations. The Executive Councillor drew attention to the fact that full fibre broadband was not covered by the Digital Strategy but would be within the remit of the Economic Recovery and Place Strategies. Members were informed that the Digital Strategy would update and refine rather than radically change the current arrangements. A more detailed update would be presented at the Panel meeting in October.

8 CAMBRIDGESHIRE HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

With the aid of a report by the Operational Manager (People) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency performance for 2019/20 was presented to the Panel. By way of background,

Members were informed that the three Councils had decided to extend the shared service agreement to 2022.

In 2019/20 there had been £2.2m spent on adaptation work in Huntingdonshire, £1.3m of which had been funded through the Better Care Fund. The average time to complete adaptation work, both small and large scale projects, had decreased since 2017/18. Currently a Business Case was being prepared for submission to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government seeking an increase in the amount the Council received in funding for statutory adaptation work. This was because there was a gap between what was received and what was required to be spent.

The Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency Manager added that a high percentage of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) work was related to bathing. In addition to this work the Agency was carrying out work on behalf of self-funders which had given the Agency an additional revenue stream. Members were informed that Cambridgeshire Homes Improvement Agency had been described by a Regional Advisor at Foundations as a dynamic and forward looking organisation.

In response to a question from Councillor Alban about the statutory adaptation work, the Panel was informed that the cost of the work carried out in Huntingdonshire had been in excess of the funding received therefore creating a funding gap. It was hoped the Business Case would mean the funding gap was reduced. It was highlighted that one of the issues for Huntingdonshire was its large aging population, which was more likely to need home adaptation work.

Councillor Alban then asked a question about self-funders and the service offered to them. In response Members were informed that DFGs were means tested, which meant that there were some residents who required adaptation work but who were not eligible for a DFG. This had led to a rise in self-funding adaptation work and in return the Agency had been able to offer advice and assistance and could source the appropriate contractors to carry out the work.

Following a question from Councillor Giles about whether the Fire Service got involved and whether the Agency had volunteers working for it, the Panel was informed that whilst the Fire Service did identify vulnerable people, they did not have much involvement with Agency work. It was also confirmed that the Agency did not use volunteers.

The Chairman concluded the item by stating, on behalf of the Panel, that the good work of the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency should be publicised more widely.

9 STREET CLEANSING SERVICE REVIEW

By means of a presentation by the Street Cleansing Manager the findings of the Street Cleansing Service Review were presented to the Panel. Members were provided with an overview of the service and key performance areas including internal performance inspections, number of service requests, the service request response rate, budget and cost per household. It was reported that Huntingdonshire District Council was currently the best performing benchmark

authority in relation to cost per household. A copy of slides is appended in the Minute Book.

Members were informed that the average age of the workforce was high as 22 operatives out of a total of 27 were over 55 years of age. There was a lack of people joining the industry but Officers were looking at apprenticeships as a way of addressing this issue.

The Panel was informed of a number of innovations being undertaken by the service, including the installation of bin sensors, which would mean bins were emptied when required rather than on a regular basis.

Following the presentation Councillor Giles asked whether the new recycling bins were effective in assisting the Council in meeting targets and reducing costs. In response, the Panel was informed that there had been positive feedback about the recycling bins and that after an initial bedding in period people were now using them appropriately. In addition, the Council was currently achieving a 60% recycling rate and contamination was low. The latter was important as a contamination rate over 7% meant financial penalties of up to £100k could be imposed on the Council.

Councillor Dickinson asked why Ramsey did not have a specially dedicated team but was informed that Ramsey did not require one. Councillor Dickinson also suggested that the Council should continue to provide written information to accompany the electronic information as not every resident had access to social media or the internet. The Street Cleansing Service Manager assured Members that the Council would continue to provide information in both formats.

The Street Cleansing Service Manager was asked by Councillor Wilson whether the roll out of recycling bins and bin sensors could be spread across the District. In response, the Panel was informed that the current situation was under review and that if successful and circumstances justified it, then it was something which could be implemented across the District.

A comment was made by Councillor Alban that communication could be improved if Refuse Operatives stuck messages on top of bins. Such a practise was already employed to convey the messages about Christmas bin collections. The reasoning for this was that a higher number of residents would be exposed to the communication if it was placed on top of the bin.

10 REPRESENTATIVES ON EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS, ANNUAL UPDATE REPORT 2019/20

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the 2019/20 update on the representatives on external organisations was presented to the Panel.

Following a question by Councillor Giles, the Panel was informed that the report was key because it provided democratic accountability and transparency, as well as informing the Council of crucial updates from the external organisations. Given the importance of the report, Members stated that they would like representatives to be reminded of the role they had as well as the responsibilities

that went with it, including providing appropriate feedback to the Council via the report.

Councillor Alban expressed concern that some internal drainage boards (IDBs) intend to increase their levies, therefore placing an additional financial burden upon the residents of Huntingdonshire. In response, the Panel was informed that that the Council had no influence over IDB levies but that in some cases the increases were justified, such as for maintenance. However, Council representatives could work with IDBs and where possible identify alternative funding sources to a levy increase. When the Council had been informed that an IDB intended to increase its levy, the Council included appropriate provision in its financial planning as the precept collecting authority.

Councillor Wilson commented that whilst some representatives had stated they had attended a particular number of meetings some had simply said they attended 'all' meetings. She suggested that in future all representatives should specify how many meetings they had attended. In response, the Panel was informed that it was not always known how many meetings the external organisations held during the Municipal Year. Also an external organisation's intended number of meetings does not always reflect the number of meetings that actually take place.

11 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY APPOINTMENT TO THE HUNTINGDONSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

RESOLVED

that Councillor Mrs J Tavener be appointed as the Panel's representative to the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership and that Councillor Mrs S R Wilson is appointed as the substitute Member.

12 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 Panel reviewed the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme.

Following a short introduction from the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny), the Chairman stated that the purpose of the Work Programme was to enable Overview and Scrutiny to achieve a tangible benefit for the Council and provide added value. The Chairman asked Members to volunteer to contribute to at least one study topic.

Chairman