

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (CUSTOMERS AND PARTNERSHIPS) held in Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Thursday, 3 February 2022.

PRESENT: Councillor D M Tysoe – Chairman.

Councillors T D Alban, B S Banks,
R D'Souza, I D Gardener,
Mrs M Kadewere, C Smith, Mrs S Smith,
R J West and Mrs S R Wilson.

APOLOGY(IES): Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors D A Giles and H V Masson.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor J Neish.

38. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6th January 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

39. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

40. 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 February 2022 to 31st May 2022.

41. HUNTINGDONSHIRE TREE STRATEGY REVIEW 2020 - 2030 ANNUAL UPDATE

By means of a report by the Arboricultural Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy Review 2020 – 2030 Annual Update was presented to the Panel.

Councillor D'Souza complemented the team on a thorough and illustrative report, before asking for clarification on the Biosecurity Strategy. The Panel heard that this Strategy enables the Council to manage tree stock across the district and monitor the spread of pests and diseases. The Strategy

also ensures the protection of woodland biodiversity as well as limiting risks in the transmission of tree diseases.

Following an additional question from Councillor D'Souza relating to section 3.4 of the report, the Panel heard that software is being implemented by the team to map and identify all Council tree stock, with a proposed completion date of winter 2022.

Councillor D'Souza further enquired if the team were engaged with any local community groups. It was clarified to the Panel that the team are engaged with a variety of groups across the district including local schools, woodland creation projects and forest schools. The team also works with local communities on tree planting projects which create a sense of ownership and pride within the community.

Councillor Wilson praised the report and the work involved, however she commented on the poor tree survival rate on some new development sites. The Panel heard that the team were aware of some very poor establishment rates, however due to the current workload of the Enforcement Team, alternative options were being worked up to address this and to ensure collaborative ways of working going forward to benefit new developments and tree stock across the district.

Following a further question from Councillor Wilson, the Panel were advised that the Council manages the trees within the district for which it is responsible and also provides guidance for residents and landowners on tree problems, such as applying common law rights on pruning.

Councillor Alban stated how impressive and fascinating the report was and also praised the Alconbury Weald development for their use of mature trees in their planting schemes. Furthermore, it was asked whether responsibility for tree survival on new developments belonged with the developers. The Panel heard that mature trees are more expensive but that prestigious developments may choose to plant these. It was also noted that younger trees were both quicker to become established and more cost efficient therefore tended to be preferred by developers. It was also confirmed that a working group would be established to allow for the creation of an action plan focusing on maximising the canopy cover across the district by 2030.

Following an enquiry by Councillor Gardener on collaborating with local flood groups, the Panel were advised that due to restrictions by the Environment Agency, tree planting could not be established alongside watercourses, however works were ongoing to ensure ditches and balancing ponds remained effective. Furthermore it was noted that whilst the Council was

not the responsible authority regarding flooding, the team would endorse any collaborative working with those authorities to assist action against future flooding.

Councillor Banks praised an excellent report and enquired about the horse chestnut blight that has spread in recent years. The Panel were informed that whilst leaf minor moth does not have a cure, it is not detrimental to the species.

Having welcomed the report, it was thereupon

RESOLVED

that the Panel note the report and endorse the recommendations within the report.

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