

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH) held in Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 7 December 2022.

PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chair.

Councillors A M Blackwell, S Cawley,
S J Corney, I D Gardener, J A Gray,
J E Harvey, S A Howell, R Martin,
Dr M Pickering, R A Slade and N Wells.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors B A Mickleburgh, T D Sanderson
and S Wakeford.

42. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd November 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

43. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor S Howell declared an other registerable interest in Minute 22/45 as a Director of Social Echo.

44. 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 December 2022 to 31st March 2023.

45. HUNTINGDONSHIRE UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUNDING

By means of a report by the Corporate Director (Place) (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Huntingdonshire UK Shared Prosperity Funding Report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Gardener queried whether the Active Travel Feasibility Studies were purely for cycleways, in response to which, the Panel heard that all active travel suggestions were encouraged. The Panel heard about a specific example of the cycleway alongside the A1 from Brampton to Alconbury which did not link into Alconbury village, following which the Panel were assured that the lack of integration had been previously flagged with the County Council.

It was observed by Councillor Corney that the £150,000

earmarked for studies would not stretch far across the district, who then enquired whether any partnership working with local walking and cycling groups had been considered to ensure studies were not duplicated. The Panel heard that the Executive were keen to achieve viable routes for residents and partnership opportunities would be considered.

It was clarified to the Panel that the Council would look to support local businesses in decreasing their utility costs following an observation from Councillor Cawley regarding the wording of the report.

The Panel heard that the Council would look to support local businesses through specialist advice and were developing an action plan to maximise funding opportunities to businesses in both the short and long term.

Councillor Gray stated that whilst broadly supportive of the thrust of what is overall hoped to be achieved, he had concerns over the lack of detail contained within the report, expressly concern that all proposals were completely underdeveloped. It was further stated that greater detail alongside the business plans would be desirable before authority be delegated to others for decision making. The Panel were informed that external funding brought challenges of tight timescales but that this was something that the Executive were happy to reflect upon and come back with.

The Panel requested that the Cabinet consider adding the following recommendation to their report;

- To provide an update on the Huntingdonshire programme of activity to both the Overview and Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet within three months.

With the addition of this recommendation, the Panel

RESOLVED

to encourage Cabinet to endorse the remaining recommendations within the report.

46. MARKET TOWNS PROGRAMME - WINTER UPDATE

By means of a report by the Corporate Director (Place) (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Market Towns Programme, Winter Update Report was presented to the Panel.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Pickering on the Wayfinding project, who expressed concerns that the project may become a white elephant, the Panel heard that the project was one of the last remaining accelerated projects and is linked

to other planned projects allowing cohesion between multiple schemes. It was further stressed that the Joint Administration felt merit in continuing this project whilst also extending the project to include St Neots, it was felt that the project would help provide useful signposting for residents and visitors whilst providing each town with its own brand. Councillor Pickering further enquired about anticipated maintenance costs which may be associated with the project in the medium to long term and the Panel were advised that partnership working and advertising revenue would be sought to fund anticipated costs. Councillor Harvey observed that Huntingdon had previously had digital signage which had often been broken, and further questioned what appetite there was for such a board given the use of smart phones. Councillor Gardener agreed with the comments made by other Panel members and suggested that the funding could be spent on other matters given the current economic climate. The Panel heard that the previous administration had shelved the Wayfinding project but that the Joint Administration felt the project had value and had thereby reinstated it.

Councillor Corney requested clarification surrounding the various funding pots available for the projects identified in Ramsey and the Panel heard that the intention was to combine the funding available to give the projects the best opportunity to succeed.

Councillor Wells thanked Officers for their support with the work in St Ives, and requested updated timescales following the consultation extension. The Panel heard that the deadline had been extended to allow for the received responses to be given full consideration. It was further advised that minimal amends were anticipated for Ramsey and Huntingdon but amends were expected for St Ives to incorporate further information following the analysis of the responses.

Councillor Gardener observed that due to the number of feasibility studies having been undertaken in St Neots recently, the available funding could have been impacted and thereby not able to fulfil what originally hoped.

Following questions from Councillor Gardener, the Panel heard that the Council were working closely with St Neots Town Council to ensure cohesion between the Priory Centre project and the potential purchase of the Oast House property by St Neots Town Council.

Councillor Gray observed the tight deadlines for the Priory Centre project and queried the confidence of the administration in delivering the project on time. The Panel were advised that the project would be focusing on realistic deliverables and the team had established working relationships with partners to

ensure funding was secure and not jeopardised.

Following the discussion, the Panel observed that whilst they were generally in support of the recommendations they would like to see more detail on the Wayfinding project which it did not support.

It was thereupon

RESOLVED

that Cabinet be encouraged to consider the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel when making their decision on the recommendations.

47. INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING STATEMENT

By means of a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Community Infrastructure Levy Spend Allocation was presented to the Panel.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Gray on the delays relating to the allocated CIL funds, the Panel were advised that due to the economic climate and international supply issues, capital projects were experiencing delays nationally.

Councillor Pickering queried the funding marked for land north of St Neots and the Panel heard that this was Section 106 money relating to the Loves Farm development, further detail would be sought on this and communicated to the Panel.

Following the discussion by the Panel, it was

RESOLVED

that Cabinet be encouraged to endorse the recommendations within the report.

48. GREATER CAMBRIDGESHIRE PARTNERSHIP "MAKING CONNECTIONS" CONSULTATION

By means of a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Greater Cambridge Partnership Making Connections Consultation was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Gray complemented the Officer on the proposed response which was felt to strike to the heart of the issues and concerns shared by all. Following a question from Councillor Gray regarding the development of further park and ride sites within the district, the Panel heard that the Executive Councillor

agreed with the sentiment that there is a need to remain realistic about what may be achievable within the district and within the reach of the Greater Cambridge Partnership. The Panel were assured that the enquiry regarding development and infrastructure of park and ride sites was noted and the response would be adjusted to strengthen this suggestion.

Councillor Martin expressed concerns over the proposed charging within the area of the Addenbrookes hospital site, particularly that those using this route are potentially at a loss of income from illness or caring for a relative, additionally it was observed that those accessing this site for long term treatment may be unable to use public transport alternatives due to vulnerable health. This sentiment was echoed by Councillors Cawley and Gardener who added that they had jointly spoken to over 25 Parish Councils who also shared these concerns. The Panel heard that whilst sympathetic to these concerns, the Executive Councillor was not clear on an alternative option for this site due to the continued growth of the area and the impact this would have on its infrastructure.

Following an observation from Councillor Corney that more could be made of connecting rural areas, and the suggestion that to expand the response to have more emphasis on routes from both the north and west of the district to Huntingdon being included, the Panel heard that the response was aiming to be realistic in its expectations of what would be achievable.

Councillor Gardener suggested that improvements to local bus routes with regular and reliable services from rural areas into the towns would assist in connecting residents to Cambridge without the need for additional park and ride infrastructure. The Panel heard that the public transport responsibility lies with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, who are the Transport Authority and following a number of transport related consultations recently it remained important to continue to share feedback and concerns from the Council. It was observed that communication between the GCP and CPCA on this matter would be helpful.

Following the discussion, the Panel observed that they were generally in support of the response but would like to see stronger wording regarding waiving charges for those accessing the Addenbrookes sites and the development of park and ride sites within the district. It was thereupon

RESOLVED

that Cabinet be encouraged to consider the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel when making their decision on the recommendations.

49. FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23 QUARTER 2

By means of a report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Finance Performance Report 2022/23 Quarter 2 was presented to the Panel.

Following questions from Councillors Pickering and Gray relating to the drop in parking revenues and whether that trend was expected to continue, the Panel were advised that this was linked to the delay in the Civil Parking Enforcement Act but that further detail would be sought and communicated to the Panel.

Councillor Gray observed that the figures relating to One Leisure were concerning and questioned the Executive Councillor on his confidence in the recently approved plan to increase fees and charges across the leisure centres. The Panel were advised that One Leisure had been heavily affected by the increase in energy costs and the recent rise in minimum wage, but that significant debate had been had surrounding the increase to fees and charges. Councillor Gray reflected that this report had been published after the decision on fees and charges had been taken and thereby queried how the Cabinet had been able to make the decision without the supporting information. The Panel were assured that by applying the proposed fees and charges to the available Quarter One figures, the Cabinet had been able to forecast the impact this would have. The Panel were further assured that the figures would continue to be monitored so that further action could be taken to remedy lost revenue and footfall through commercial strategies or alternative pricing structures in the future.

Following a question from Councillor Blackwell relating to the reduction in Court Fees linked to Housing Benefit, the Panel were advised that the Officer would investigate the detail on the subject and communicate that back to the Panel.

Following the discussion, the Panel observed that they were generally in support of the recommendations being endorsed but requested that the Executive Councillor for Leisure attend a future meeting of the Panel to help answer questions on the financial details behind the decision to raise One Leisure fees and charges. It was thereupon

RESOLVED

that Cabinet be encouraged to endorse the recommendations within the report.

50. TREASURY MANAGEMENT 6 MONTH PERFORMANCE REVIEW

By means of a report by the Director of Finance and Resources

(a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Treasury Management 6 Month Performance Review was presented to the Panel.

Following a question from Councillor Harvey on lost income due to the early repayment of the Luminus loan, the Panel heard that anticipated income from interest payments on the loan had been reduced, however the early repayment option had been a clause in the original loan. It was further advised that some financial benefit had been received by repaying the loan to PWLB early and this would be shown in the next update of the report.

Councillor Gray questioned the figures shown in Table 6, specifically what the amount £2.8 million related to as it was thought to be too low for the whole portfolio. The detailed response to this will be sought by the Officer and reported back to the Panel.

Following the discussion, the Panel

RESOLVED

that Cabinet be encouraged to endorse the recommendations within the report.

51. 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.

Chair