

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, 1 February 2023.

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 S J Conboy, S W Ferguson,
T D Sanderson and S L Taylor.

61. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4th January 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

62. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor S Howell declared an other registerable interest in Minute 22/67 as a Director of Social Echo.

63. 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 2023 to 31st May 2023.

The Panel were advised that further items relating to the Local Plan had been added to the Plan for consideration at March 2023 meetings and that the next Notice of Key Executive Decisions would show these when published.

Councillor Corney observed that the Tenancy Strategy had been on the Notice of Key Executive Decisions for over a year, however the expected delivery date had continually been adjusted. The Panel were advised that an update would be sought and reported back.

64. FINAL 2023/24 BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2024/25 TO 2027/28) INCLUDING CAPITAL PROGRAMME

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

Resources (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Final 2023/24 Budget and Medium-term Financial Strategy (2024/25 to 2027/28) including Capital Programme was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Harvey expressed praise for the report and thanked those involved in producing the budget for an excellent piece of work, a sentiment which was shared by the Panel.

Following a question from Councillor Harvey, the Panel heard that a planned temporary increase for Planning staff was included in the 2023/24 budget as an investment to help get the service back on track. It was further advised that once the service position was improved it would be in a position to generate some income for the Council through fees and charges.

Councillor Cawley asked for some clarification on this as the Fees and Charges document showed a planned decrease in Planning income, the Panel heard that there were recognised issues with recruitment and retention within Planning which were improving, but the forecasts were intended to not overestimate the potential income.

Following a question from Councillor Wells on the Community and Health line in Table 4b being significantly lower in 2023/24 than currently and also lower than subsequent years, the Panel were advised that the Officer would investigate the detail and report back to the Panel following the meeting.

Councillor Harvey asked for clarification on the damping adjustment in Table 2 and the Panel heard that this was linked to the re-baselining of the NNDR funding, the damping adjustments smooth the impact of this.

After a question from Councillor Pickering, the Panel heard that the agreed Council Principles underpinned and influenced the thinking and method when developing and setting the budget.

Councillor Gray commented that the purpose of the Panel was to scrutinise the report and to give Cabinet comments and thoughts to reflect upon rather than have a debate on the budget. He;

- reflected on unprecedented increase in government funding from the previous year which was good news for residents, whilst also allowing Council some flexibility on how that money be spent.
- further expressed caution over the ambition to drive net expenditure down, observing that whilst inflation is predicted to fall it has not yet happened, in particular whether the expected salaries in Table 7 were realistic

- whilst maintaining the current staffing levels.
- did not dispute the removal of the Huntingdon redevelopment project from the Capital budget but did enquire how realistic it remained to deliver the anticipated projects within the budgeted staffing costs.
 - challenged that the Fees and Charges in Appendix 2 did not match the rhetoric of keeping up with inflation or in line with neighbouring Councils, it was observed that this could be an area to develop.

Councillor Conboy thanked the Panel for their positive and constructive comments and commented that the opportunity to work with the shadow portfolio holder Councillor Jennings was a positive step forward.

Following the discussion, it was thereupon

RESOLVED

that the comments of Overview and Scrutiny be passed to the Cabinet for consideration when making a decision on the recommendations contained within the report.

65. 2023/24 TREASURY MANAGEMENT, CAPITAL AND INVESTMENT STRATEGIES

By means of a report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the 2032/24 Treasury Management, Capital and Investment Strategies was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Gleadow noticed the risk of a lack of specialist skills and asked how this was being mitigated after which, the Panel were assured that an additional member of staff would undertake training to assist in broadening the knowledge from the experienced Officer currently undertaking the work.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Gray, the Panel were assured that there had been no concern over Counter Parties over the past year which required urgent withdrawal of funds (although an investment with Thurrock BC had caused concern but had in the end been repaid on time) and that risk of investing generally had been minimised through use of DMO (Debt Management Office) and money market funds

Councillor Pickering enquired about the move to ESG products and the Panel were advised that whilst these products were still new to the market, an ESG compliance scoring mechanism is likely to be introduced by treasury advisors to help ascertain the right ESG investment products for the council's consideration and also that reporting on this and other ESG developments would be included in future treasury management reports in due

course.

It was thereupon

RESOLVED

that the comments of Overview and Scrutiny be passed to the Cabinet for consideration when making a decision on the recommendations contained within the report.

66. FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23 QUARTER 3

By means of a report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Finance Performance 2022/23 Quarter 3 Report was presented to the Panel.

Following questions from Councillor Blackwell relating to the one off payments for permanent staff, the Panel heard that these would be made in the March 2023 salaries and that staff would be advised of this by email following the meeting.

After a further question on staff retention from Councillor Blackwell, the Panel were advised that work was being undertaken to celebrate staff and recognise their achievements.

It was clarified to the Panel, following a query from Councillor Gray, that the early repayment of the People for Places and respective PWLB loans had still proved beneficial for the Council. 4.6 Councillor Gray further enquired whether more caution would be exercised following issues recouping money in relation to CCTV Shared Service staffing. The Panel were assured that the team were fully involved in ensuring due diligence across such matters, as was evidenced in the highlighted example.

Following questions from Councillor Cawley relating to the anticipated income for One Leisure, the Panel were assured that the figures were sustainable following the introduction of an improved sales management system and robust plans to deliver a better service than previously offered by a third party operator at the California Road site.

It was clarified to the Panel, following a question from Councillor Gardener, that following long term vacancies in the street cleansing service, three posts had been deleted after being identified as no longer required.

It was thereupon

RESOLVED

that the comments of Overview and Scrutiny be passed to the Cabinet for consideration when making a decision on the recommendations contained within the report.

67. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022-23 QUARTER 3

By means of a report by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Corporate Performance 2022/23 Quarter 3 Report was presented to the Panel.

The Panel were presented with an update on Corporate Performance by the Executive Councillor for Customer Services notably;

- Performance Indicator KA1 had been changed to Amber as was rightly requested by both the Panel and Cabinet in the Quarter 2 Report.
- Under Performance Indicator KA19, it was noted that the Warboys site had experienced delays due to adjustments being made to the application however this is expected to be heard at the April meeting of the Development Management Committee and will be progressed from there.
- PI1 was noted to be red as green waste recycling had been lower than expected following an exceptionally dry summer.
- PI20 early interventions on homelessness preventions had been more successful which had therefore resulted in a lower case work for homelessness cases which could arguably be a positive.
- The PI26 target is to be reconsidered as there does not appear to be demand for this from the voluntary sector.
- Under PI13, it was observed that Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support service had been heavily impacted by postal strikes which had consequently affected the length of time taken to process claims.
- PI19 noted that due to nationwide supply issues the final delivery was expected to be impacted.
- PI27 the Food Standards agency COVID recovery plan had resulted in changes to the operation of inspections and this had impacted upon the performance as a result.
- It was further observed that the eBilling scheme was delayed as the team had undertaken unprecedented but

vital work on the Energy Bills rebate.

Councillor Howell observed that the Good to Go scheme for charities was seen to be helpful purely for the purposes of Council funding and required a lot of work for the application process. The Panel heard that the team were mindful of this and would be reviewing in light of the lack of interest from the voluntary sector.

Councillor Gray observed that amber may be a more realistic indicator for KA5 as it was optimistic to claim this project was on track.

It was further observed by Councillor Gray that some indicators had no set target which therefore made it difficult to ascertain progress. The Panel heard that this was acknowledged and that the targets and indicators would be reviewed with the introduction of the new Corporate Plan in the coming months.

Councillor Cawley enquired whether an update could be provided on the backlog of both planning applications and also enforcement cases. The Panel heard that although work was being done on the quality of data available so that accurate reporting could be supplied, a further detailed response would be provided to the Panel after investigation.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Gleadow the Panel were assured that recruitment was ongoing to fill a long term absence within the Environmental Health team which had been covered by the team to this point. The Panel heard that the impact of COVID and COVID recovery was still being felt by the food industry and that the Food Standard Agency have had to react accordingly.

Following the discussion, it was thereupon

RESOLVED

that the comments of Overview and Scrutiny be passed to the Cabinet for consideration when making a decision on the recommendations contained within the report.

68. REVIEW OF REPRESENTATIONS ON OUTSIDE BODIES AND INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARDS

By means of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Review of Representative on Outside Bodies and Internal Drainage Boards Report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Gardener thanked all members and external bodies involved in the report, a sentiment which was shared by the Panel.

Having discussed the reasons behind the recommendations, it was thereupon

RESOLVED

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

69. EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR FOR LEISURE, WASTE AND STREET SCENE

Following a request made by the Panel at its December meeting, the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene attended the meeting along with the Interim Head of Leisure to answer questions from the Panel relating to the financial decisions behind the recently approved One Leisure Price Proposal 2023-24.

Following questions from Councillor Cawley who asked;

- to understand the financial model used to determine the pricing options and the assumptions of membership numbers used in the modelling,
- to understand the marketplace benchmarking that was used when setting the pricing options,
- to understand what impact on membership numbers had already been seen,
- whether there is a break-even point on membership numbers where financial sustainability becomes an issue.

The Panel heard that a percentage increase had been applied to lines within the One Leisure plan and then translated to a monetary value to give a predicted outcome, this is the same process that had been previously for One Leisure. The team were conscious that there were price sensitivities within the One Leisure products and as such the cost of a Platinum membership had remained static, however the price for a joint Platinum membership had been increased. The Panel were further assured that robust and detailed competitor analysis had been undertaken along with advice and information from the industry body UKActive. The business is aware that customers were lost during the COVID period and that there is now both increased competition within the market as well as changes to how people participate in fitness. However, work in continuing to reengage with previous customers as well as the conversion of casual gym users to membership customers. The Panel heard that January figures were positive and that annual customers historically fell within the January figures but were now staggered across the year.

Councillor Gray expressed concerns that there were discrepancies between the figures shown for staffing in the budget and MTFs considering the anticipated impact of the increase in minimum wage. The Panel heard that the team were confident that the budget was achievable however, this point would be re-examined and reported back to the Panel at a later date.

The Councillors expressed their support of the One Leisure brand and reiterated that they wished to be secure in their understanding of the figures to ensure the success of the brand.

70. 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.

Councillor Corney observed that work had previously begun on a Markets strategy which the Panel had anticipated to see in the democratic cycle, however this had not yet progressed and requested an update on the project.

It was further observed by Councillor Corney that the Panel had previously undertaken a study on Market Towns, it was enquired if further work could be undertaken on this or via the Market Towns Programme.

Councillor Gray commented that Management Information Dashboards would be helpful for both One Leisure and Planning services, recognising that the issues surrounding the Planning service had been ongoing for considerable time. The viability of these projects will be investigated and reported back to the Panel at a future meeting.

Chair