

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, 4 October 2023.

PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chair.

Councillors A M Blackwell, S J Corney, I D Gardener, S A Howell, A R Jennings, Dr M Pickering, R A Slade, N Wells and G J Welton.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J E Harvey and R Martin.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors S J Conboy, T Sanderson and S Wakeford.

28. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6th September 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

29. RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The responses received to questions asked at previous meetings were noted.

30. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor C Gleadow declared a non-registerable interest in Minute 23/34 as a Ward Member for St Ives.

Councillor N Wells declared a non-registerable interest in Minute 23/34 as a Ward Member for St Ives.

Councillor A Blackwell declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in Minute 23/36 as an employee of Carter Jonas.

Councillor S Corney declared a non-registerable interest in Minute 23/36 as a member of the Development Management Committee.

Councillor I Gardener declared a non-registerable interest in Minute 23/36 as a member of the Development Management Committee.

Councillor R Slade declared a non-registerable interest in Minute 23/36 as a member of the Development Management Committee.

31. 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 and the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions which had been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st October 2023 to 31st January 2024 was noted.

32. PLANNING SERVICES UPDATE

By means of a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Planning Services Update was presented to the Panel.

Following a question from Councillor Corney, the Panel heard that the Amendment programme serves a purpose to ensure we provide an equitable service. Amendments are accepted on large-scale major applications and pre-application submissions are the forum for discussion of planning applications. The team were happy to listen to feedback from members in moving forward.

In response to a further question from Councillor Corney, the Panel heard that work was being undertaken on CIL governance with an ambition to have another CIL round in Spring 2024. Details likely to be brought back to the Panel. Applications would be invited after this.

The Panel heard that the Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement would be brought through the democratic cycle in December 2023 and would provide updates on projects.

Following a question on the reduction in agency fees from Councillor Slade, the Panel heard that following successful recruitment campaigns, many positions had been filled permanently but the team continue to monitor contractor costs.

In response to a question from Councillor Wells, the Panel heard that Town and Parish Councils were encouraged to engage with the team in regards to the work on the Local Plan, and that the team were open to suggestions from Members on the best way to effectively achieve this.

Councillor Gardener expressed concern that the Call for Sites had created confusion in some Parishes. In response, the Panel heard that a frequently asked questions section was being

developed for the website to help alleviate these concerns.

Councillors Pickering and Gleadow praised the work done by the team in the progress made thus far, a sentiment which was shared by the Panel.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

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

33. PLACE STRATEGY UPDATE

By means of a report and presentation by the Assistant Director (Strategic Insights & Delivery) (copies of which were appended in the Minute Book), the Huntingdonshire Place Strategy Update was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Gleadow observed that it was positive to see named individuals within the working groups and invited questions from the Panel.

Councillor Jennings enquired what would happen should the working groups wish to change direction once established. In response to this, the Panel were advised that it was hoped that the groups would organically evolve as the world around us changes. There will be constant communication to allow for this development and evolution as these groups are intended to mimic the voice of residents, however a further update would be provided to the Panel should there be a major shift in the focus of a group.

In response to a question from Councillor Howell, the Panel heard that the membership of groups would be monitored and expansion to the membership allowed to ensure effectiveness. Further to this, it was observed that it would be important for these groups to be inclusive and reflective of all communities across the district. The Panel enquired how to develop connections between their local communities and the groups. Councillor Gardener was pleased to see that rural communities from the district were represented within the groups, and further suggested that, as a major employer within the district, Kimbolton School should also be involved.

The Panel heard that the groups had been formed with volunteers and that they had identified the need to develop this membership across the local community. It is encouraging that this process has started but the local knowledge of Members would be appreciated to help develop this further.

Following question from Councillors Gardener and Slade, it was advised to the Panel that the Council's involvement with the groups was being kept to a minimum to ensure that the groups were not inadvertently lead by the Council, and that the venues for the meetings was being arranged by the group members. IN addition it would be investigated whether or not members would be able to attend meetings. It was further advised that the meetings held so far have been steering groups, some of which are journey specific and that members would be invited where appropriate.

Councillor Gleadow noted that this was an organic process which would constantly develop, and that because of this, it would be useful for the Panel to see regular updates to keep informed.

34. MARKET TOWNS PROGRAMME - AUTUMN UPDATE 2023-2024

By means of a report by the Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Market Towns Programme – Autumn Update 2023/24 was presented to the Panel.

The Panel heard, following a question from Councillor Jennings, that feedback from other Local Authorities on their experience with the wayfinding project had been sought and an update would be brought in the next quarterly report to the Panel.

Councillor Pickering expressed concerns on funding deadlines from the Future High Street Fund in relation to the Priory Centre project, however the Panel were reassured that although the project was working to tight deadlines, it was felt that these remained achievable. In addition, the team were working closely alongside the funding provider who had indicated that a commitment to spent the funding would be sufficient to secure the funding if the project timescales did slip.

Following a question from Councillor Corney, the Panel heard that the results of the Ramsey Parking Survey had been shared with the local Town Council, however these can also be shared with ward members if it has not yet filtered through.

Councillors Slade and Gardner expressed the importance of ensuring that communication with local residents is underway prior to the commencement of the project. The Panel were assured that the project would be project managed by Cambridgeshire County Council in partnership with Huntingdonshire District Council, an agile Communications Plan was in place, with any feedback or input from local Councillors welcomed.

Councillor Slade further enquired whether there was a conflict of interest with the appointment of CIC as they were also leading on the Inclusive Steering Group under the Place Strategy. The Panel heard that the Executive Councillor had no concerns over this but would follow up with Councillors outside of the meeting.

Councillor Gleadow raised a concern over the risk of inflation affecting the budget for the programme of works in St Neots market Square, following which, the Panel were assured that a detailed costing procedure had been undertaken to ensure a deliverable scheme could be achieved and that risk factors had been accommodated for within the budget.

Councillor Pickering observed that 7.4 related to sensors for Housing Association properties and enquired how these would be funded. The Panel heard that these sensors would be useful for the Environmental Health team in monitoring properties rented by Private Landlords and opportunities to co-ordinate with Local Housing Associations were being investigated.

It was observed by Councillor Slade that there had been negative press in St Neots relating to the Shopfront Scheme only being available to businesses in Huntingdon and St Ives. The Panel heard that the available funding had been solely for those two towns, however following several successful applications some funding remained available and it was believed that the funders may be open to negotiations to expand the scheme subject to a review of spend at the end of the next quarter, into the other market towns. Councillor Gardener further enquired whether this could in turn be opened up for Key Service Areas across the district, whereupon the Panel were advised that this funding pot was specifically for the market towns however, other funding opportunities would be investigated as they came to light.

Councillor Corney requested to record his appreciation for the hard work done by the team and noted that feedback received from colleagues across district and town councils is positive, a sentiment echoed by the Panel. Further to this, the Panel heard that regular engagement events were being built into the diary to provide further updates for Councillors and local Councils.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

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

21:01 Councillor A Blackwell and T Sanderson left the meeting.

35. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

36. MARKET TOWNS PROGRAMME AUTUMN UPDATE 2023-2024 (PART 2)

The Panel gave consideration to an exempt report by the Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager (a copy of which was appended in the annex to the Minute Book) on Market Towns Programme Autumn Update 2023-24 (Part Two) which was presented to the Panel.

The Panel heard from the Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager and Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy and Housing, who introduced the report and answered Members questions. Following the discussion, it was thereupon

RESOLVED

that an additional recommendation be passed to Cabinet for their deliberation when considering the report. In addition that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be passed to Cabinet for their consideration when making a decision upon the recommendations contained within the report.

Chair