

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 November 2023.

PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chair.

Councillors A M Blackwell, I D Gardener,
J E Harvey, S A Howell, A R Jennings,
R Martin and Dr M Pickering.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S J Corney, R A Slade, N Wells and G J Welton.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors S W Ferguson, M A Hassall and B A Mickelburgh.

37. MINUTES

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

38. RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The responses to questions asked at previous meetings were noted.

39. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor S Howell declared a registered interest in minute 23/45 as an employee of the NHS and a trustee of Booth and Hawke.

40. 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 November 2023 to 28th February 2024 was noted.

The Panel were advised that the Officer due to present the Review of the Council's Risk Management Strategy had been unavoidably delayed, therefore it was agreed to move the item along the agenda to accommodate this.

41. FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24 QUARTER 2

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 Report 2023/24 Quarter 2 Report was presented to the Panel.

Following a question from Councillor Jennings, the Panel heard that any underspend still showing as forecast by the end of quarter 3 would be looked at and opportunities for any such amount, including the possibility of adding to reserves would be considered.

The Panel were advised following a question from Councillor Gleadow that the overspend on the Fareham project was due to the refurbishment works.

Councillor Gardener observed that under Operations in Appendix 1, it was suggested that work to clear watercourses would be reduced, however Councillor Gardener advised that the watercourse in Hinchingsbrooke Country Park can affect flooding in the neighbouring villages, specifically Alconbury if it is not kept clear, therefore maintenance of this watercourse would be greatly appreciated by local residents.

In response to a question from Councillor Jennings, on conflicting information surrounding Civil Parking Enforcement, the Panel heard that there is a capital and revenue side to this and that adjustments were due to be made to clarify this.

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.

42. TREASURY MANAGEMENT 6 MONTH PERFORMANCE REVIEW

By means of a report by the Director of Finance and Corporate 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 Gardener, the Panel heard that investment properties are revalued annually, the valuations take into account rents received (and lease lengths) so although there is an awareness of empty units at present, specifically at the Rowley Centre, the property value figures will not be adjusted until the 2023/24 year end.

Councillor Martin further enquired about the liquidity of the Council and how this compared to past years. The Panel were advised that the last couple of years had a similar look whereas historically before that there had been lower cash balances, especially by the end of the financial year (when less council tax is collected) when cash balances could be near zero. The current liquidity levels are expected to be maintained in the short term to medium term, and it was observed that as the cash balances are in part as a result of significant CIL reserves, future CIL receipts and projects are likely to affect the cash balances.

The Panel were advised that a revised table, on properties included within the "Existing Portfolio" grouping, would be added to future Treasury Management reports as an appendix following an enquiry from Councillor Martin.

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.

43. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

By means of a report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Review of the Council's Risk Management Strategy was presented to the Panel.

Following a question from Councillor Jennings, the Panel heard that there is a clearly defined risk appetite across all risks facing the Council, clarifying and simplifying the approach in the previous strategy which broke this down by cross cutting function, and falling in line with partners. The Panel were also advised that the original strategy would be shared via email to help highlight the adjustments in the updated strategy.

The names of the key officers who make up the Assurance Board were advised to the Panel, in response to a question from Councillor Harvey, with further details of the Board to be circulated following the meeting.

Councillor Martin observed that the risks highlighted within the Risk Management report did not appear to marry with the risks mentioned within reports which are presented to the Panel. The Panel were advised that all reports brought to the Panel should highlight the risks, however there may have been discrepancies whilst the strategy was being updated, this would be rectified moving forward.

Councillor Gleadow praised an excellent report but expressed concern over the seniority of the ownership of risks. The Panel were assured that whilst some risks are more appropriately managed at a strategic level, there is also accountability across all risk by senior managers.

Following a further concern raised by Councillor Martin on the difficulty to recruit into the 3C Shared Services Legal Team, the Panel heard that this was a national issue, however would be managed through the use of locums as necessary.

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.

44. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK REFRESH

By means of a report by the Performance and Data Analyst (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Performance Management Framework Refresh was presented to the Panel.

The Panel had no comments to make on the report and it was

RESOLVED

that this fact be passed to Cabinet for their consideration when making a decision upon the recommendations contained within the report.

45. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24 QUARTER 2

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 Report 2023/24 Quarter 2 was presented to the Panel.

In response to a question from Councillor Harvey regarding KPIs 3 and 4, the Panel heard that the forecast for KPI 3 was being reduced due to delays from partners therefore a realistic forecast was being reported, with the target and ambition to deliver more remaining unchanged. In addition, the Panel were advised that the Council were very mindful of the struggles experienced by residents. However, again there were other agencies involved whilst would affect the number of completions. The Panel were assured that the Council has several meetings booked to continue to develop these scenarios into the best and most efficient results for our residents.

Councillor Jennings observed that the Riverside Park project in Appendix C was still showing as a green status when there were known delays, the Panel heard that this project was being overseen by the Major Change Board and that statuses are reviewed by that Board, with deadlines revised only after formal change requests are approved. Concerns about project statuses reported in Appendix C can be included in comments from the Panel and considered by Cabinet.

Councillor Blackwell expressed concerns over the levels of staff sickness and turnover shown in PI25 and PI26. The Panel were assured that the reported figures were being assessed against the 2023/24 targets for the Council, compared well with historic levels and followed national trends. It was further assured that work was being undertaken to look at how sickness absence was recorded to allow long-term sickness to be separated out and give a more detailed picture for year end.

It was noted that the targets within the report had been agreed and set via the democratic cycle under the Performance Framework Management report. It was recognised by the Panel that the performance targets were set up initially with the understanding that

they would be subject to review in light of experience. Councillor Blackwell expressed concerns that there were several discrepancies between the quarterly report and the actual status of performance. The Panel were assured that the figures and performance status were regularly shared with senior management within the Council to allow for intervention as required, it was also noted that many projects remained on course to achieve their targets by year end. The Panel were assured that new targets would be set for the next financial year to reflect actual performance and experience.

In response to a question from Councillor Martin, the Panel heard that in the future it was hoped that targets would be more ambitious however a base line was being set in the current financial year and opportunities to develop this in the future would be investigated.

Following a question from Councillor Martin PI12, the Panel were advised that the target set took into account the efforts being made within Planning on dealing with backlog cases and the impact this may have on in-year performance. In response to a question from Councillor Howell on KA21, the Panel were assured that these projects were in progress and on course for completion by the end of the year, therefore the project status remained at green.

The Panel were advised, following a question from Councillor Gardener, that more details would be obtained regarding the type of temporary accommodation used under PI9 and this would be reported back at a future date.

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.

Chair