

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERSHIPS) held in Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Thursday, 1 February 2024.

PRESENT: Councillor J E Kerr – Chair.

Councillors T Alban, M J Burke, S Bywater, J E Harvey, N J Hunt, M Kadewere, C Lowe, S R McAdam and G J Welton.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S J Criswell and D J Shaw.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors L Davenport-Ray, S W Ferguson and B M Pitt.

### **45. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4th January 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **46. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillor J Kerr declared an Other Registerable Interest in Minute 23/49 as a member of the St Ives Flood Action Group.

Councillor M Burke declared an Other Registerable Interest in Minute 23/49 as a member of the St Ives Flood Action Group.

Councillor T Alban declared a Non-Registerable Interest in Minute 23/49 as a member of the same band as the Officer presenting the item.

### **47. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel received and noted the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme and the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) which had been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st February 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2024.

The Panel were advised that a request had been made to create a Working Group to investigate Disabled Facilities Grants. Councillors were invited to express their interest in partaking to Democratic Services.

**48. THE GREAT FEN**

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the Officer was unable to attend the meeting and the item was deferred to a future meeting of the Panel.

**49. FLOODING MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

By means of a presentation by the Corporate Director (Place) and Cambridgeshire County Council's Flood Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), an update on Flooding Management was presented to the Panel.

Following an observation by Councillor Bywater, the Panel were assured that an updated Watercourse Policy had recently been introduced which allowed the County Council more rights when dealing with landowners.

The Panel were also advised, in response to a question from Councillor Lowe, that the Council could arrange street cleansing to be conducted following any culvert work to ensure that highways remain clear.

Following a question from Councillor Hunt, it was advised that dialogue was ongoing with local communities and Parish Councils to ensure that they were best prepared in the event of a flood.

In response to an observation from Councillor Lowe regarding the involvement of Drainage Boards in maintaining ditches and waterways, the Panel heard that a community newsletter was being introduced which would spotlight on organisations to better inform local residents of work being undertaken.

Further to an enquiry from Councillor Alban, regarding older estates where residents may have over time covered waterways, the Panel were advised to flag with the team if they became aware of any such scenarios to enable discourse in order to rectify.

**50. BUSINESS RATES DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY**

By means of a report by the Council Tax and Business Rates Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Business Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy was presented to the Panel.

Following a comprehensive introduction by the Officer and Executive Councillor, Councillor Kerr praised the new format of the report and stated that it was much easier to read, a sentiment which was echoed by the Panel.

There being no further questions, it was thereupon

**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.

## **51. UPDATE ON ALTERNATIVE LAND MANAGEMENT**

By means of a presentation and report by the Operations Manager (Environmental Services) (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), an Update on the Alternative Land Management Scheme was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Bywater expressed surprise at the level of detail within the report and thanked the team for their work, a sentiment which was echoed by the Panel.

Councillor McAdam observed that education on the scheme was key to going forward in caring for the local environment and stated that he would pass on the detail to Huntingdon Town Council to allow them to better understand the scheme.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Hunt about the long term future for the scheme, the Panel heard that the short term plan is to implement and test the knowledge provided by the ecologists and improving communications with local organisations. The Panel heard that once the scheme is established, there are plans to work together with the BioDiversity team and local Councils to further roll out and develop the scheme across the district.

## **52. SUPPORT TO THE FINANCIALLY VULNERABLE**

By means of a report by the Interim Corporate Director, (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), a report on Support to the Financially Vulnerable was presented to the Panel.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Alban, it was clarified to the Panel that some agencies such as Citizens Advice and Department of Work and Pensions were already based at Pathfinder House, in addition to this the report specifies opportunities to make agencies more accessible to communities across the district. Work was being undertaken to see which communities would benefit most from this outreach work and trials would begin once this had been established. It was acknowledged that there is a demand for appointments to be held via the telephone however, this work recognises that there is still a need for face to face appointments within the community.

Chair