

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY JOINT PANEL held in the Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Thursday, 10 August 2023.

PRESENT: Councillors T Alban, A M Blackwell,
S Bywater, S Cawley, S J Corney,
I D Gardener, J E Harvey, S A Howell,
N J Hunt, A R Jennings, M Kadewere,
J E Kerr, C Lowe, S R McAdam,
Dr M Pickering, D J Shaw, R A Slade and
N Wells.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors M J Burke, S J Criswell, R Martin and G J Welton.

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

6. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED

that Councillor C Gleadow be elected Chair for the duration of the meeting.

Councillor C Gleadow in the Chair.

7. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor D Shaw declared an Other Registrable Interest in Minute No 9 by virtue of the fact that he had recently taken up employment as an Environment Officer with the Environment Agency's Waste Team.

8. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED

that Councillor J Kerr be appointed Vice-Chair for the duration of the meeting.

9. HOUSEHOLD GARDEN WASTE SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE CALL-IN

Pursuant to Minute No 05/23 of the meeting of the Joint Panel held on 6th July 2023, Members gave further consideration to the proposed Garden Waste Subscription Scheme, the introduction of which had been approved by the Cabinet on 18th July 2023, but which had been called-in by Councillors Alban, Bywater, Cawley, Corney, Criswell, Gardener, Jennings, Lowe, Martin and Welton. The Joint Panel's deliberations were assisted by an updated report by the General Manager for Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Minute

Book).

In response to a question by Councillor Alban, the Interim Managing Director confirmed that legal advice had been obtained on the options available to the Joint Panel, which were to refer the matter back to the Cabinet for further consideration or to allow the Cabinet's decision to be implemented immediately. The Constitution did not allow reference to the Council as the decision was in accordance with the Council's policy and budget framework. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services confirmed this opinion in her capacity as S151 Officer.

The main reasons given for the call-in coalesced around finance and consultation. Following a question by Councillor Jennings the Joint Panel discussed changes that had been made to Appendix 5 since the original report was published. It was established that the MTFs contained assumptions, but information had been received from the County Council that meant the figures should be revised. It was suggested that the changes that have been made, the reasons for them and the implications for the Council should be reported to the Cabinet when it considered the outcome of the call-in.

Councillor Jennings asked a further question about the evidence obtained from other local authorities on uptake of their garden waste schemes. The General Manager for Operations referred to the Charity WRAP, which contained information on 60 local authorities.

Councillor Alban asked a question about how the proposal had emerged. A process had been established involving Joint Administration political groups to identify and examine options to improve the Council's financial position. The proposal to introduce a subscription service emerged from that process. The process did not identify any other options, so without the subscription service it would be likely the Council would have to make service reductions and Executive Members preferred not to do this. Councillor Alban pointed out that it had been identified by officers as a potential option a number of years previously.

Councillor Corney expressed the view that the proposal was of such significance that it should be subject to public consultation. It was suggested that the consultation should seek views on alternative configurations of the service such as putting longer periods between collections. It was further argued that given the absence within the Council of ideas for other ways to improve the Council's financial position suggestions also should be requested in this respect.

Councillor Cawley drew attention to the environmental impact of the proposal. Members were informed that it was foremostly being put forward for financial reasons. Information on environmental matters had been obtained but a full analysis would be highly complex and the impact in the particular circumstances in Huntingdonshire would not be known until the scheme had commenced operation. 70% of waste management authorities in the Eastern Region had already introduced similar schemes so comparison data should be readily available. It was, therefore, been suggested that the environmental impact of the scheme was monitored and formally reported on.

Further on consultation on the proposal Councillor Ferguson pointed

to Executive Councillors' legal obligation to give weight to the likely outcome of any consultation and, instead he was of the view that they were elected to take difficult decisions such as the one under consideration.

Councillor Pickering related an extract from a letter from a Member of the previous Administration which, in 2013, put forward an argument in support of introducing charges for emptying second green bins.

Councillor Gardener asked a question about how garden waste would be collected. Following discussion on the operation of collections, it was established that further engagement would take place with Town and Parish Councils. This provided Members with some reassurance over its public impact in the first instance and subsequently for the evolution of the scheme through an iterative process.

After questions asked by Councillor Bywater, it was confirmed that the financial projections did not include salary inflation but took into account other inflation. Income from the garden waste scheme would help to put the Council in a position where it could consider future salary increases.

Further discussion established that the sensitivity analysis did not include figures for lower rates of uptake of the service as experienced at many other councils. It was suggested that the table in the report should be revised to include uptake rates from 15% so the Council was aware of the full financial implications of the proposal.

Councillor Jennings asked a question about the 'breakeven point'. It was explained that the service sought to cover its own costs so if there were significantly lower levels of subscriptions than expected, proportionately fewer officers would be required and vehicles, fuel and insurance costs would be lower. The service could be scaled up and down as determined by the numbers who subscribed. The cost of delaying the introduction of the service by one year would be £2m. Even if the uptake was lower than expected, there would still be a contribution to the MTFS.

Having stated he understood a petition was being prepared for submission to the Council, Councillor Bywater suggested that the Council should assess the impact of the proposal on those residents whose income only just exceeded the level that meant they were classed as vulnerable.

At the conclusion of the discussion it was recognised that the Joint Panel had received a considerable amount of detailed information to assist the call-in process had provided robust challenge in relation to proposal.

A Motion for a recorded vote having succeeded, a proposal was made by Councillor Alban and seconded by Councillor Bywater that the Cabinet be recommended not to proceed with the introduction of the Garden Waste Subscription Scheme owing to a lack of comparison data from other local authorities and insufficient evidence on which to base the decision. On being put to the vote Councillors Alban, Bywater, Cawley, Corney, Gardener, Jennings Lowe voted in favour and Councillors Blackwell, Gleadow, Harvey, Howell, Hunt

Kadewere, Kerr, McAdam, Pickering, Shaw, Slade and Wells voted against it. The motion was, therefore, declared to have been lost.

At the conclusion of the deliberations, the Cabinet were requested to take into account the points made during their consideration of the outcome of the call-in and, in particular, the following were emphasised:

- the change to Appendix 5 should be identified and an explanation for it provided;
- the Council should monitor and formally report on the environmental impact of the scheme;
- the Council should consult on the principle of charging and on alternative ways of organising the service and also seek suggestions that might help to improve the Council's financial position, and
- the sensitivity analysis should be revised to include lower rates of uptake (suggested 15%) up to 2028.

Chair