

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in the CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER/STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 18th June 2024

PRESENT: Councillor S J Conboy – Chair.

Councillors L Davenport-Ray, J E Harvey, B A Mickelburgh, B M Pitt, T D Sanderson, S L Taylor and S Wakeford.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor S W Ferguson.

11 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22nd May 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

13 COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the outcome of the first stage of a review of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) governance process relating to the prioritisation and spending of CIL funding by the Council as a CIL Charging Authority. In introducing the Report, Councillor Sanderson informed the Cabinet of the options that had been considered and of the benefits of working with town and parish councils. Further on the last point, training and support would be provided on the new arrangements to ensure applicants were able to achieve the key priority of unlocking future growth.

The Cabinet discussed in detail the Overview and Scrutiny Panel's comments. Particular reference was made to the recommendation that increasing the threshold for smaller applications should be reviewed in 12 months. It was argued that inflation since CIL was introduced meant the change was justified. Moreover, the last time applications were submitted to the Cabinet there had been no substantial challenge to the judgements made and all the recommendations had been approved. It would be more beneficial for the Cabinet to focus on strategic projects.

Executive Councillors went on to emphasise the importance of the transparency of the process, of engaging with applicants before bids were submitted and of feeding back afterwards on why applications had not been successful. Councillor Sanderson undertook to devise a timetable to report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED

- a) that the new CIL Governance arrangements based on the “Statement of Intent” as set out within the Report and associated Appendix now submitted be approved;
- b) that authority be delegated to the Corporate Director (Place) and the Chief Planning Officer after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Planning to develop, publicise and implement the new governance arrangements as soon as practicable including a transitional CIL round in 24/25 financial year;
- c) that authority be delegated to the Chief Planning Officer to make changes to the documentation required under recommendation b above associated with the new CIL Governance arrangements including the application form to improve understanding of requirements and submission of information;
- d) that the suggested increase in threshold for smaller funding applications from £50,000 to £100,000 with requests for CIL funding allocations over £100,000 being subject to decision by Cabinet be approved;
- e) that authority be delegated to the Corporate Director (Place) and the Chief Planning Officer after consultation with the Leader and Executive Councillor for Planning for the allocation of CIL funding for smaller funding applications requesting £100,000 or less CIL funding, including those from non-parished areas; and
- f) that authority be delegated to the Chief Planning Officer to take forward steps to develop a programme to work more closely with town and parish councils to align local and strategic priorities; and to develop a more programme-led, evidence-based approach including working with partner organisations with such programme being presented to Cabinet on an annual basis for agreement.

14 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24 QUARTER 4

The Cabinet gave consideration to a report by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager and the Performance and Data Analyst (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the Council’s progress with Corporate Plan actions, operational performance measures, corporate project delivery and the Contextual Outcome Measure dashboard. Members’ attention was particularly drawn to the figures for homelessness prevention and the time taken to process new claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax support, the number of affordable homes delivered and the improvement in Business Rates collection against the target.

Councillor Davenport-Ray expressed approval of the position reported relating to affordable housing and of the openness and transparency demonstrated by the projects and programmes update. Following a question by Councillor Taylor, the Corporate Director (People) stated that the pilot to support residents when they first arrived in the District focussed on key services at an important stage of their lives. Monthly updates would be compiled on referrals made through the project.

Having also commented on the position relating to affordable housing, Councillor Wakeford went on to outline his view that targets should be challenging but

realistic. In that context the Leader congratulated Officer teams on their performance but stressed the need when necessary to communicate clearly why some targets needed to be flexible. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the report be received and noted.

15 FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24 QUARTER 4

By means of a report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet considered the Council's revenue and capital financial performance for the financial year 2023/24. The figures were consistent with the draft Financial Statement and were better than forecast.

At the request of the Leader, the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources outlined the order of the deficit predicted in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy from year 3 in the context of national trends. On an associated question by Councillor Pitt about the Council's approach in this respect, the Leader recognised the future was challenging and this reinforced the need for good financial stewardship.

Regarding the discussions that took place at the Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting, Councillor Mickelburgh reported that he had expressed his displeasure to the External Auditor over their fees and stated that the Council expected to receive value for money.

Members were alerted to a forthcoming report to Overview on Scrutiny on the Council's productivity plans and how the Council would improve the use of funding and reserves. Having noted the reasons for the variances in the Capital Programme, it was

RESOLVED

that the report be received and noted.

16 TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT 2023/24

The Cabinet gave consideration to a report by the Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on treasury management performance for period between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024. Members' attention was drawn to the impact of higher than expected interest rates and inflation during the period.

Councillor Mickelburgh commented that receipts from the Commercial Investment Strategy property portfolio were lower than expected, but that this was the result of refurbishments being undertaken. He also referred to the technical accounting reasons for the value of a property being lower than the loan used to acquire it. The sale value would be higher than the figure reported.

In response to a question from Councillor Taylor, Councillor Mickelburgh outlined the arrangements for monitoring the condition of commercial properties and for verifying that those arrangements were effective.

Following a question by Councillor Davenport-Ray, the Financial and Treasury Accountant undertook to investigate how social benefits for the District might be reflected in the Council's treasury management and investment activities.

Having noted that, as requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, training in this area would be arranged, it was

RESOLVED

that the report be approved for submission to the Council.

17 HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP

With the aid of the Minutes of the meeting (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Waste and Street Scene delivered an update on the matters discussed by the Joint Group, whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group held on 19th April 2024 be received and noted.

18 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

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

19 CCTV SHARED SERVICE AGREEMENT

The Cabinet gave consideration to an exempt report (a copy of which is appended in the annex to the Minute Book) on the CCTV Shared Service Agreement. Having noted the scope the Council would have to consider alternative ways of operating that would give the service resilience and allow it to operate competitively, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the recommendations contained within the exempt report now submitted be approved.

Chair