

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 September 2024.

- PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chair.
- Councillors A Blackwell, S Cawley,
S J Corney, I D Gardener, S A Howell,
A R Jennings, R Martin, D Terry and N Wells.
- APOLOGIES: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor Dr M Pickering.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors J R Catmur (virtual), L Davenport-Ray, S W Ferguson, B A Mickelburgh, T Sanderson and S Wakeford.

23. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10th July 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

24. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor I Gardener declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/26 by virtue of being the Cambridgeshire County Councillor for Alconbury and Kimbolton.

Councillor A Blackwell declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/27 by virtue of being an employee of Carter Jonas.

Councillor A Blackwell declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/28 by virtue of being an employee of Carter Jonas.

Councillor S Corney declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/28 by virtue of being a land owner with a site submitted under the scheme.

Councillor A Blackwell declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/29 by virtue of being an employee of Carter Jonas.

25. 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 and the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions which had been prepared by the Leader for the period 1st September 2024 to 31st December 2024 were presented to the Panel.

26. EAST PARK SOLAR FARM

By means of a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the East Park Solar Farm report was presented to the Panel.

In response to a question from Councillor Howell, it was confirmed to the Panel that the Memorandum of Understanding was signed off in April 2024 and that collaborative working with other local authorities was in place where possible.

The Panel were assured, following questions from Councillor Cawley and Councillor Martin that ward Councillors would be communicated with to stay apprised of progress in relation to the technical matters which will be within the Council's remit for the Development Consent Order process.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Blackwell, the Panel heard that renewable and low carbon energy were key targets within the Local Plan and it was felt that this development helped the Council to deliver these targets as well as aligning with the Council's Climate Strategy. It was noted that this development was of national significance therefore would be developed ahead of the Local Plan timescales alongside recognising the challenges in delivering sustainable energy within the district. The Panel also heard that landscaping of the development would be detailed and developed as the project progressed.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made upon the report recommendations.

Councillor Blackwell left the meeting.

27. LOCAL PLAN: FURTHER ISSUES AND OPTIONS

By means of a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Local Plan: Further Issues and Options report was presented to the Panel.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Wells, the Panel were assured that the development of the new Local Plan was a long process and that resourcing of this had been noted within the Council's MTFS and a Local Plan reserve in addition to this. The Panel were further assured that there were sufficient resources to develop the Plan as it currently stood but that this would be carefully monitored to ensure smooth process in the event of any changes occur to plan-making nationally, or in response to local ambitions. It was noted that the Planning team were specialists in Planning and Plan making and that they were able to call on consultants for specialist evidence gathering as appropriate.

Following further questions from Councillor Wells, Howell and Martin,

the Panel heard that a robust Communications Plan was being developed with the Council's Communications Team which would include the let's talk Huntingdonshire website along with information being available in local libraries across the district, including the mobile library, banners in car parks, parks and on refuse vehicles along with exhibitions in towns and villages across the district. The Panel heard that there would also be further sessions for Town and Parish Councils. Members were also advised that where they had additional suggestions or were aware of gaps in communication it would be appreciated if that could be communicated to the team as soon as possible to assist in the development of the Communications Plan.

Members were assured that the Executive Summary was designed to signpost the reader to the sections which they were interested in or that were relevant to them.

In response to a question from Councillor Gardener about the dates for the local exhibitions, the Panel were assured that the dates and locations of these would be communicated out to Members once they were available. Following a further question from Councillor Howell, the Panel heard that exhibitions within local venues would be held between 2pm and 8pm to be as accessible as possible for residents and that the exhibition information would also be available online. Further to an additional question from Councillor Cawley, the Panel were assured that a Member's briefing note with key points would be communicated as part of the Town and Parish briefings including a communications pack with posters and leaflets to those attending the briefing to allow for Councillors to communicate with their local parishes and residents.

Following a question from Councillor Terry with regard to planning applications, the Panel were assured that as the Local Planning Authority a decision on applications did need to be made and that comments from residents and businesses were taken into account as part of this decision making process. They were also assured that the structure of the Further Issues and Options consultation paper includes in each chapter a section on 'what you said' this shows what people said at the last consultation and these comments follow through to the development of the options presented in the paper. The Panel also heard that National guidance stated that local Council's are required to have a Local Plan and the current work was intended to refresh the existing plan to ensure that it was relevant to the needs of residents and the district as a whole.

In response to a question from Councillor Jennings relating to the absence of an option with an alternative choice under Section 10, which was available in every other section, the Panel heard that the team would investigate this and the response would be communicated back to the Panel at a later date.

Councillor Martin observed that Section 5 appeared to focus on generating new business in the district rather than growing the employment opportunities already available in the district. The Panel heard that the team were working closely with the Economic Development Team to develop complementary evidence bases that not only will inform the Economic Growth Strategy but also feed into

the production of an economic evidence base and that as part of this surveys will be undertaken with local businesses. The team has also attended and will be attending business events to spread the word.

The Panel were assured following a question from Councillor Howell that the Internal Drainage Boards and Middle Level Commissioners had been consulted to date and that this communication was ongoing.

In response to a question from Councillor Gardener over the clarity of the wording on pages 117 and 118, the Panel heard that the team would investigate this and the response would be communicated back to the Panel at a later date.

Following a question from Councillor Cawley who observed that Options A and B within the Transport and Connectivity section were very similar, the Panel heard that the team would investigate this and the response would be communicated back to the Panel at a later date.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made upon the report recommendations.

Councillor Corney left the meeting.

28. LOCAL PLAN: LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENTS

By means of a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Local Plan: Land Availability Assessments report was presented to the Panel.

Following a question from Councillor Howell relating to whether sites were assessed on a case by case basis or whether neighbouring sites were also taken into account, the Panel heard that that the sites are assessed as separate entities but that the Further Issues and Options consultation asks for comment on specific growth options and other factors that will help to inform the final package of sites that would be allocated, taking into account responses and further evidence to understand their impact as a whole in settlements.

Councillor Martin expressed concern over heritage sites in the vicinity of identified sites, whereupon the Panel were assured that although the initial assessment only considered the immediate area of the site, the impact of a site on heritage assets in the wider local area are taken into consideration as part of the sustainability appraisal. If a site is eventually allocated in the local plan and heritage assets are nearby, criteria would be included within the allocation to ensure this is addressed appropriately as part of any planning application put forward.

Following questions from Councillor Jennings, the Panel heard that the consultation would be residents opportunity to comment on sites

and that it would be helpful to receive those comments even if they were in agreement with the comments within the assessment to reinforce the assessments.

The Panel were assured following a question from Councillor Gardener that an interactive map is available to residents which would allow them to identify sites both within their own and neighbouring parishes so that they may comment accordingly on how this may impact them.

The Panel heard, in response to a question from Councillor Martin, that responses were all treated equally irrespective of who had submitted them, however this is influenced by the level of detail provided.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made upon the report recommendations.

Councillor Corney re-joined the meeting.

29. LOCAL PLAN: INITIAL SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

By means of a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Local Plan: Initial Sustainability Appraisal report was presented to the Panel.

Following an observation from Councillor Howell on the quality of the data listing local services, the Panel were advised that local Parishes had been asked for their input on this and that the data was as good as the feedback which had been received. Following a further question from Councillor Martin on the dates of the data within the report, the Panel heard that Stage A of the process had been completed 2 years prior and that more relevant up to date data would be introduced as the project developed through the Stages.

In response to an observation from Councillor Gardener relating to the TING bus service, the Panel heard that the information in the report was relevant to a point in time and was the information provided by transport providers across the district.

The Panel were assured, following a question from Councillor Martin that several environmental bodies would be consulted as part of the process including the Environment Agency.

Following a further question from Councillor Gardener, on the amount of houses that have been built in comparison to the potential amount of houses proposed, the Panel heard that this information is included in the Further Issues and Options consultation document in chapter 6. The amount of houses required will be developed and incorporated as outcomes of the NPPF consultation are known and included as the Plan moves forward.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made upon the report recommendations.

Councillor Blackwell re-joined the meeting.

30. FENS AND LINGS RESERVOIRS UPDATE

By means of a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), an update was provided on the Fens and Lings Reservoirs Development. The Panel heard that due to the timescales of the non-statutory consultation, delegation had already been taken in order to meet the deadlines set.

In response to a question from Councillor Gleadow, the Panel heard that a number of job opportunities were expected, both in the development and construction phase of the project and also following the completion of the project via related tourism. In light of this the Council's response underlined the opportunities for Huntingdonshire residents to these jobs and looked to identify any skills gaps thus ensuring training opportunities be developed in order to provide maximum opportunities for residents.

Councillor Martin observed that ward members had been engaged in the initial response and consultation process and that this involvement had been very much appreciated.

31. 3C ICT SHARED SERVICE REVIEW

By means of a report by the Chief Operating Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the 3C ICT Shared Service report was presented to the Panel.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Wells, the Panel heard that an independent consultant had been utilised to identify 7 options and the Chief executives of the 3 Councils had collectively agreed the recommendation option within the report.

Councillor Martin requested that a report on Shared Service performance be brought annually to the Panel as had been the case previously. The Panel heard that the new arrangement would be implemented by September 2025 and would be reviewed annually to measure performance against agreed success criteria. The Panel were also assured that the governance arrangements were detailed within the appendix. Following a further question from Councillor Gleadow, the Panel were advised that the current shared services partnership arrangements were due to end in September 2025 and that the new agreement would be a 5 year extension.

In response to a question from Councillor Wells, the Panel heard that the new agreement would focus on satisfying the identified user needs and that project delivery would identify additional capabilities required in order to fulfil this. The Panel were assured that the review

had regalanised and reenergised the service and that this process would be replicated into the future review of the shared legal service.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Cawley on alternative options should there be a dispute between partner Councils on the way forward, the Panel were assured that by developing the agreement across the 3 Councils the proposed recommendation and way forward had been thorough discussed and developed to ensure smooth progression.

The Panel heard, following a question from Councillor Gleadow, that Huntingdonshire were already the host employer for the shared service and that the employment liabilities were contained within the existing partnership agreement. The Panel were further assured that there was a mix of permanent and fixed term contract staff in line with employment terms across all three Councils.

In response to a question from Councillor Blackwell relating to the appointment of the CDIO, the Panel were assured that the recruitment would be by the Chief Executives of the 3 Councils.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made upon the report recommendations.

32. FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024/25 QUARTER 1

By means of a report by the Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Finance Performance Report 2024/25 Quarter 1 report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Jennings and Councillor Martin enquired about the money set aside within the forecast for the Community Health and Wealth Building Fund noting that the Strategy, which had yet to be approved and adopted by the Council, it was observed that it was unexpected to see this within the budget prior to it's approval. The Panel heard that this had been included as future planning and to allow for a balanced view when contemplating the Quarter 1 report as the money had been earmarked for the upcoming fund.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made upon the report recommendations.

33. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024/25 QUARTER 1

By means of a report by the Assistant Director (Strategic Insights and Delivery) (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Corporate Performance Report 2024/25 Quarter 1 report was

presented to the Panel.

Following a question from Councillor Howell, the Panel heard that whilst it was still early days the change in National Government had impacted the process of some projects, it was noted that these had been marked as amber whilst awaiting further information to come through nationally but it was hoped that these would be recoverable by the end of the municipal year.

In response to a question from Councillor Jennings about the increase in missed bins, the Panel were assured that this had actually been a minimal increase over the district and was due to the major changes to the collection rounds, it was stated that this would be recoverable across the municipal year.

Following a question from Councillor Jennings requesting the number of areas sampled for litter in PI22, the Panel heard that further information would be sought on this and reported back to the Panel at a later date.

In response to a further question from Councillor Jennings on PI32 and the change to reporting staff turnover from an accumulative total, the Panel heard that further information on the reasons for this would be sought and reported back to the Panel at a later date.

The Panel heard, following a query from Councillor Gardener, that the forecast for PI23 was forecast as amber due to this being a new measure and that the team were being cautious due to the seasonality of the service.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Cawley regarding a potential increase in green waste within the grey bins, the Panel were assured that some green waste was needed within the grey waste to enable it's breakdown in landfill but that in addition to this further sorting was done at the processing plant to ensure recycling was maximised and end waste into landfill was minimised. The Panel heard that it may be too soon to have figures on changes in grey waste since the introduction of the green waste subscription service, however this would be investigated and brought back to the Panel once available.

In response to an observation by Councillor Catmur, the Panel heard that the accessibility of the graphs within the report's appendices would be reviewed and developed accordingly.

Further to a question from Councillor Martin on targets being set too low to create challenge, the Panel heard that measures would be reviewed if necessary and that the real measure of success would be improvement on last years figures. The Panel were given the specific example of call centre call answering times and it was agreed that this would be looked at offline with a view to adding more data surrounding this service.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be added to

the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made upon the report recommendations.

Chair