

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, 5 February 2025.

PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chair.

Councillors A Blackwell, J R Catmur, I D Gardener, A R Jennings, R Martin, Dr M Pickering and N Wells.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors B S Chapman, S J Corney and D Terry.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor B A Mickelburgh.

53. VICE-CHAIR

The Chair noted the recent appointment of Councillor S A Howell to the Cabinet and thanked her for her role and contribution to the Panel, particularly in her role as Vice-Chair.

It was proposed to appoint a new Vice-Chair at the March meeting of the Committee once the vacancy on the Panel had been filled. Following a discussion, it was agreed to appoint a new Vice-Chair with immediate effect.

A proposal to appoint Councillor I D Gardener to the Vice-Chair of the Committee was moved and seconded. On being put to the vote the proposal was declared to be LOST.

A proposal to appoint Councillor N Wells to the Vice-Chair of the Committee was then moved and seconded, whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that Councillor N Wells be appointed to the Vice-Chair of the Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

54. MINUTES

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

55. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

56. 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 Notice of Key Decisions for the period 1st February 2025 to 31st May 2025 were presented to the Panel.

Following a discussion, it was noted that the Panel wished to see the Quarter 4 Performance Reports in June 2025 and that further consideration would be given over whether Neighbourhood Plans should be considered for pre-decision scrutiny.

57. QUESTIONS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Panel received and noted the responses received in relation to questions arising at previous meetings of the Panel.

58. 2025/26 REVENUE BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2026/27 TO 2029/30) INCLUDING THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME

By means of a report by the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the 2025/26 Revenue Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (2026/27 to 2029/30) including the Capital Programme was presented to the Panel.

The Panel heard that the provisional Local Government Settlement had been released in December, and that no significant changes were anticipated with the release of the final Local Government Settlement this week. It was noted that some additional monies would be made available to Councils who were experiencing significant increases to the charges made to them by Internal Drainage Boards, however it was not felt that this would make a material difference to Huntingdonshire District Council. It was also advised to the Panel that HDC's response to the provisional Settlement had been made by the Section 151 Officer as part of the response from the Society of District Councils Treasurers.

Following an enquiry on how the approach to budget setting by the Executive Councillor had changed over the past three years and how the budget setting was managed, the Panel heard that the budget process had evolved in recent years with more onus on services to work with their Executive Councillors to manage the process throughout the year. The Executive Councillor confirmed that he took more of a governance role in budget setting and oversaw the robustness overall whilst leaving the detail to portfolio holders and officers.

In response to an enquiry relating to the Stonehill property within the Commercial Investment Strategy, the Panel heard that the property was undergoing repairs and would be placed back onto the rental market, it was confirmed that this was being actively managed by the estates team.

Concern was expressed over the proposed increase in parking fees being after the expected implementation of Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) within the district. The Panel heard that the introduction of CPE was expected to affect the current car park income but that the approach detailed within the budget was an inflationary increase to

support a prudent approach. It was suggested, that this would be an opportune time to review the existing parking strategy to ensure consistency across the district before CPE comes into force.

It was noted that wage growth for the proposed budget had been budgeted at 4%. The Panel also heard that this was a prudent budget based on what was known at the moment, it was noted that there were differing predictions from economic forecasters and therefore a medium of these had been used within the proposals. It was further noted that as capital spend was to be expected over the coming year, the budget looked to balance all factors to provide a sensible way forward.

It was clarified to the Panel, that following a recent restructure of Heads of Service, the proposed budget followed the new structure.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that Cabinet be encouraged to consider the comments from Overview and Scrutiny when making a decision upon the recommendations within the report.

59. 2025/26 TREASURY MANAGEMENT, CAPITAL AND INVESTMENT STRATEGIES

By means of a report by the Corporate Director for Finance and Resources (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the 2025/26 Treasury Management, Capital and Investment Strategies report was presented to the Panel.

Following a question, which related to both the 2025/26 Revenue Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (2026/27 to 2029/30) Including the Capital Programme and the 2025/26 Treasury Management, Capital and Investment Strategies agenda items, the Panel heard that the rates forecast by the treasury advisors were the Bank of England (BOE) lending rates and that investing rates were unlikely to reach as high as this. It was also noted that there was a risk that investing rates may fall faster than the BOE lending rate, since it was some years since rates had fallen from the current level, there is uncertainty about the relationship between fall in BOE rate and the fall in investing rates, which may be steeper.

In response to a question relating to the development of the Commercial Investment Strategy, it was confirmed to the Panel that work by CIPFA was underway and that this would also include work to support Local Government Reform within this. The Panel heard that workshops would follow the completion of this work, with an update on progress being anticipated by quarter one of the coming financial year.

Following this, it was

RESOLVED

that the Panel had no further comments or discussion to add and that

this would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.

Chair