

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 February 2026.

PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chair.

Councillors A Blackwell, J R Catmur, S J Corney, I D Gardener, A R Jennings, R Martin, S R McAdam, Dr M Pickering and C H Tevlin.

APOLOGY(IES): Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors B S Chapman and S L Taylor.

53. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21st January 2026 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

54. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

55. 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 was presented to the Panel.

56. OUTSTANDING RESPONSES FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

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

Councillor Jennings requested further insight into the question regarding missed bin collection. A response was circulated via email after the meeting.

57. 2026/27 REVENUE BUDGET & MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2027/28 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 2026/27 Revenue Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (2026/27 to 2029/30) including the Capital Programme was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Tevlin entered the meeting at 19:07.

Clarification was sought on the proposed 5% salary increase, noting that this appeared high compared with private sector trends and inflation forecasts. It was further queried the overall 12.3% increase in salary costs and requested additional information on employee numbers, seeking to understand the factors contributing to the increase across Council departments. The Panel's attention was drawn to Section 9 of the report and were assured that clarity would be given and ready for Full Council if requested.

After a question from the Panel, it was confirmed that the RGS grant included that of the Food Waste and that provisions have been made internally to cover those costs.

It was asked whether the internal audit budget bid proposed continuing with an external provider, or moving the service in-house, noting that an in-house model might offer greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness. It was confirmed that it would continue to be an external provider.

Clarity was sought regarding Appendix 7 on Reserves, querying the absence of the £3 million allocated for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). It was suggested that a single consolidated table of all Reserves would be helpful. Further insight was requested into what contributions were being made by other Local Authorities with whom the Council may be aligned following LGR, and how fairness in those contributions would be ensured. The Panel heard that the absence was due to the funds not having been released yet but this could be added for full transparency. It was advised there is a Working Group drafting terms of reference and understanding based on the experience of other Authorities who have already been through LGR and looking at how the costs were shared.

The Panel enquired about the assessments undertaken to determine the financial impact of the current planning fees on the Council. It was advised this is being undertaken in the Improvement Plan and that the Council's fees and charges are in line with inflation.

A discrepancy was highlighted in Table 6 of the Commercial Investment Reserve and it was confirmed that it was an error and would be corrected before the report goes onto Cabinet.

The view was expressed that the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) should cover the standard timeframe rather than a reduced period, noting that Local Government Reorganisation may not proceed and that it would be more prudent to await a confirmed Government timetable.

The fee increase for the Pests was questioned and it was confirmed that this is a discretionary service that the Council provides residents and that all Services have been driven to reviewing their fees and charges against statutory guidance and increasing where they need to.

The Panel wondered whether the earmarked reserves were being

reviewed by Cabinet or the Section 151 Officer, suggesting reserves showing no movement over the MTFS period could be released and redirected to more productive use. It was advised this is being reviewed by the new Officer in the role for the reason raised and that this will potentially fall under the decision of the new Administration.

The Section 151 Officer was asked what the biggest risk was to achieving the budget as set out. The Panel heard that the only concerns would be the Final Settlement but has confidence in the financial sustainability.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be passed to Cabinet for their consideration when making a decision upon the recommendations within the report.

58. CIL GOVERNANCE - PHASE 2 - STRATEGIC ALLOCATION

By means of a report by the Head of Planning, Infrastructure & Public Protection (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the CIL Governance - Phase 2 - Strategic Allocation was presented to the Panel.

The Panel sought further information regarding what the decision-making process for the proposal would entail. The purpose of the new plan was questioned in comparison with existing arrangements and why the current approach could not continue. Concern was expressed regarding the potential creation of a two-tier system between external applicants and the Council's own applications. The Panel were advised that Council applications have to go through the same process and meet the same requirements as external applicants. It was confirmed that this Phase 2 of the Governance allows for faster paced decisions so projects can be completed if the costs rise.

After a question regarding Parish Councils, the Panel heard that Parish Councils are still able to apply for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

The Panel wondered whether any remaining Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds at the point of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) could be ring-fenced to ensure that CIL raised within the District is spent on projects benefiting the local area. It was confirmed that there are considerations other than LGR which must be taken into account, such as the Spatial Development Plan. It was advised that more guidance around CIL was being released but at the present, the idea of ring-fencing remains unclear. The Section 151 Officer reiterated that they are looking at how to fund strategic projects within the District that provide a District-wide benefit in a prudent way. The Panel's attention was drawn to Point 3.18 of the report regarding LGR.

It was confirmed that CIL application criteria has evolved through comments from Parishes and the Team remain open to feedback.

It was queried if the criteria for awarding CIL funding were set too high and whether the scheme was being sufficiently publicised. It was asked, at the point of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), if the option of passing CIL funds to Town Councils had been considered. The Panel heard that the process has improved, such as earlier engagement from the Team with applicants. It was also noted that the Team are available to work with Parishes.

After further comments from the Panel, it was confirmed that the Neighbourhood Plans are developed by the Parishes. It was advised that the Team can assist Parishes with their ideas but they are unable to do the work for CIL applications for them.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be passed to Cabinet for their consideration when making a decision upon the recommendations within the report.

Chair