

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, 1 April 2026.

PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chair.

Councillors A Blackwell, J R Catmur,
B S Chapman, S J Corney, I D Gardener,
A R Jennings, P Kadewere, R Martin,
Dr M Pickering and S L Taylor.

APOLOGY(IES): Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors C H Tevlin.

65. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4th March 2026 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

66. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The Deputy Chief Executive addressed the Panel in relation to an email circulated in advance of the meeting concerning the Great Ouse Valley Trust item on the Agenda.

By a show of hands, it was confirmed that all Members of the Panel had received the correspondence. Members were reminded that receipt of the email did not preclude their participation in the discussion; however, any Member who felt unable to consider the matter with an open mind was required to declare this at that time.

67. 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.

Councillor Jennings expressed disappointment that the Parking Strategy Review was not yet available, noting that the Panel had previously been advised that the report would be presented to the Committee in Spring 2026.

68. HOUSING STRATEGY REFRESH

By means of a report by the Head of Economy, Regeneration & Housing Delivery. (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), The Economic Growth Strategy Report was presented to the Panel.

Concerns were expressed regarding the implications for rural areas. While acknowledging and supporting the points set out in paragraph 7.215 of the report, attention was drawn to the limited availability of local services and transport links in such communities. It was noted that access to essential services, such as GP appointments, often requires the use of a private vehicle, which can be costly to maintain. The rationale for granting planning permission for affordable housing in rural locations was questioned and it was requested that these considerations be fully reflected and addressed within the development of the new Strategy.

The Panel agreed with the points raised and it was emphasised the importance of ensuring that, when developing a housing strategy, proposed sites are appropriate, accessible, and well-served by local amenities. She stressed that such considerations should be approached at a strategic level. Councillor Tevlin further highlighted the need to prioritise locations with adequate infrastructure and to ensure that community engagement forms a key part of the decision-making process.

The Panel was advised that the question raised related to planning decisions, which do not form part of the Council's strategic approach to housing. It was acknowledged that a wide range of factors are considered when determining planning applications. The Panel was reminded that the purpose of the policy is to outline the identified needs and challenges which will be incorporated in the Local Plan review.

It was noted that a significant number of housing schemes delivered within rural communities are brought forward under the Rural Exception Policy, as set out in the current Local Plan. Members were advised that such schemes are typically supported by Parish Councils, informed by the housing needs assessments undertaken through the Council's partnership work with Cambridgeshire ACRE. It was emphasised that the Policy requires clear evidence of local housing need before any Rural Exception Site can be granted permission.

Support for the report was expressed by the Panel. They asked whether the proposed actions could be further developed to provide greater clarity and requested a more detailed explanation of the strategy and its implementation.

It was noted that Officers would be happy to provide Members with further detail on how the Team operates and how specific actions are delivered, should Members require it. Officers also advised that they anticipate the Strategy may be reviewed and refreshed by a future Administration. The structure of the current document was designed intentionally to allow for future development and expansion.

It was noted that several recent legislative changes will inform a number of key service-specific actions that the Council intends to deliver over the next year.

Concerns were raised regarding the projected increase in residents with mobility issues and dementia, noting that the report did not indicate a corresponding rise in the provision of M4(3) housing. He

suggested that the Council consider alternative models, such as building homes that can be more easily adapted for wheelchair use in the future, as this may reduce long-term costs. It was queried how developers could be encouraged or required to incorporate such adaptability from the outset.

It was confirmed that LPAG has held discussions regarding disability and accessibility requirements within housing provision. Members were advised that significant work has been undertaken to establish the Council's expectations in this area, which will form part of the emerging New Local Plan. It was noted that the Housing Strategy Team is currently working alongside the Local Plan Team to consider the viability aspects of delivering new accessible housing. Members acknowledged that incorporating M4(3) standards at the outset is considerably more cost-effective than adapting properties retrospectively. An option under consideration is to adopt a graded approach using M4(3), given the range of accessibility levels it offers. The aim is to ensure that new homes are accessible, provide a suitable living environment for residents, and support individuals to remain in their homes for as long as possible without requiring additional facilities or care.

After further comments from the Panel, it was confirmed that this Housing Strategy identifies an overall need and direction of travel which will help to inform the policy. The Council will then be able to use other guidance notes which could then help in discussions with developers as earlier suggested.

In response to a question regarding risks, the Panel was advised that the Housing Strategy enables the Team to work collaboratively across the organisation. Teams including Communities, Private Sector Housing, and Housing Needs and Homelessness have contributed to the development of the Strategy, which helps to mitigate risk.

In response to a query regarding the Council's progress in implementing the Housing Strategy, the Panel's attention was drawn to the case studies set out within the report. These examples highlighted the challenges faced, while demonstrating the significant progress made in delivering much-needed affordable housing across the District.

It was requested that the report be made clearer and more relevant for residents, ensuring it sets out what the Council plans to do to increase the delivery of affordable housing.

The Panel was advised that the Team would use the Council's website to clearly communicate to residents the actions being taken as part of the Housing Strategy.

Concerns were expressed regarding the Housing Providers, suggesting that new providers should be sought due to the volume of complaints she has received from residents.

It was noted that the District currently has housing stock that does not meet the quality standards the Council expects, due in part to long-term underinvestment in previous years. The Administration acknowledged that it cannot simply issue directives to improve

conditions and is instead working collaboratively with Housing Association partners to support residents more effectively. Members were advised that the Council maintains regular engagement with Places for People, including quarterly meetings. A recent meeting with Members has also enabled direct contact between them and the organisation. It was confirmed that this improved engagement has strengthened the Council's relationship with Places for People over the past year, and the organisation is now implementing significant improvements to its housing stock within the District.

In response to a question from relating to Key Worker eligibility and local connection criteria, the Panel was advised that a local connection is ideally defined as both living and working within the area; however, applicants who solely work in the area may also meet the requirement. Officers emphasised the importance of Key Worker provision and confirmed that work is underway to expand this offer. The Edison Bell Way scheme was highlighted as a current example, as it is being specifically targeted towards Key Workers due to its location.

It was recognised that the Strategy would be subject to change due to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and that there were gaps regarding risk management, referencing no account for developer behaviour.

The Panel heard that this would be taken into account and added to the Strategy.

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.

69. GREAT OUSE VALLEY TRUST

By means of a report by the Place and Climate Lead (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), The Great Ouse Valley Trust Report was presented to the Panel.

Confusion was expressed regarding the Council's position in not supporting the proposal. It was questioned why Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) had been cited as a reason, noting that the Panel had previously been advised LGR should not prevent the Council from committing to future projects.

The Panel was advised that the Council's position is not negative but appropriately cautious. The report has highlighted several new risks that must be fully considered. It was further noted that the external environment is evolving rapidly, which presents an additional challenge. The Council expressed a desire to undertake further work on potential partnerships, as there are other organisations interested in collaborating who may be better placed to deliver elements of the work. Attempting to deliver the project solely in-house would expose the Council to significant risk. The Council emphasised that it is not giving a definitive "no"; rather, it is considering the available options,

including what can be delivered internally and where partnership working may be appropriate. It was also noted that this proposal emerged after the budget-setting process and would therefore currently represent an unfunded pressure.

The Panel agreed with a partnership approach and urged the Council to remain part of the conversation.

Councillor Martin expressed his support for the outcome and agreed that, yes he wants to support the Great Ouse Valley Trust but feels there are alternative ways to do that, especially with elections and LGR coming up. He put forward 3 recommendations for Cabinet to consider; these were:

- To recommend to Cabinet recommendations 5 A and B as per the published report and;
- To recommend to Cabinet an additional recommendation that the item and future working with the Great Ouse Valley Trust noted as a potential item for the future Administration of the Council to consider, post the May elections.

It was originally suggested that the above could be by way of a Task & Finish Group; but following advice from the Deputy Chief Executive, it was agreed that the route for consideration was best left for the new Administration to determine.

The Committee expressed further support for the points raised and advised that, should the Council become involved in the future, appropriate budget provision should be made and residents should be consulted

Councillor Gleadow asked for confirmation relating to the specific wording for the new recommendations to Cabinet.

Councillor Gardener seconded the recommendations raised by Councillor Martin.

The Panel re-heard the Recommendations including the additional Recommendation and a vote is called. 7 Members are For, 0 Against and 2 Abstainers.

Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for Cabinet to make a decision upon the recommendations within the report, and additionally, the Panel request that the Cabinet consider adding the following recommendation to their report;

A. It is recommended that HDC should not proceed with further, detailed work with the GOVT in respect of self-designation at this time for the reasons set out in this report. As such, it is recommended that HDC limits its involvement to limited activities relating to partnership and collaboration with the GOVT based on the principles of Influence and Enable within the Corporate Plan; and

B. Delegate to the Place and Climate Lead in consultation with the Executive Leader, to formally write to the GOVT, to outline the

position and thank them for their partnership and engagement to date; to provide confirmation that HDC recognises the value of the GOV within Huntingdonshire as a result of the various contributory formal designations (e.g. ecological and heritage) and its relationship with our Place ambitions; and to advise that HDC will continue to collaborate with them on the basis of the “Enable” and “Influence” principles from the Corporate Plan.

AND

To recommend to Cabinet that the item and future working with the Great Ouse Valley Trust be noted as a potential item for discussion by the future Administration of the Council to consider, post the May elections; to determine appropriate next steps forward.

Chair