

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH) held in THE CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER/STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 21 January 2026.

PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chair.

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

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

45. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5th November 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

46. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

47. 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.

48. OUTSTANDING RESPONSES FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

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

49. USE OF URGENCY PROVISION

By means of a report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Use of Urgency Provision Report was presented to the Panel.

Following, it was

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Report be noted.

50. CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE UPDATE 2025/2026 Q3

By means of a report by the Head of Policy, Performance & Emergency Planning (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), The Corporate Peer Challenge Update 2025/26 Q3 Report was presented to the Panel.

The Communications Team were congratulated by the Panel for Strategy, though it was commented that they would have appreciated it to reach the Panel sooner. Further insight was requested regarding outputs in order to better understand the impact and improvements made from the changes implemented.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be noted.

51. CORPORATE PLAN REFRESH 2026/2027

By means of a report by the Head of Policy, Performance & Emergency Planning (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), The Corporate Plan Refresh 2026/2027 Report was presented to the Panel.

Attention was drawn to Key Performance Indicators (KPI) 1, the number of attendances at Active Lifestyles events, particularly around the change of circumstances regarding contracts which will affect the targets for next year. It was advised that funding, which was granted this year, would not be granted for next year.

KPI's 12, 13 and 14, relating to Planning were raised and it was commented that the targets had been exceeded this year. The Panel wondered why they had not been raised for the coming year. The Panel heard that the current target was 5-10% higher compared to the National Target and that whilst progress is being made, there are still challenges faced regarding retention and recruitment in the Team and the Planning system is a complicated process and want to set realistic and achievable expectations.

In response to a question concerning KPI 16, the number of Business Engagements made by the Economic Development Team, the Panel heard that growth is important to the Organisation but the Team is sourced and working at capacity. It means putting on less events but this could result in better quality of what's on offer and the activity itself.

KPI 22, The Sample Of Clean Areas, was praised for having a more challenging target moving forward.

The Panel wondered why the implementation of the Hybrid Working Policy would affect short term staff sickness. It was explained that Hybrid can result in challenges due to things being structured differently. It was heard that changing an Officer's work pattern can be difficult for some people and exacerbate their ability to attend. The HR team manage this to ensure consistency and fairness across the

Organisation.

After questions regarding missed bin collections, Members were advised that these would be taken away and an answer sought before the next meeting.

KPI 18, The North Huntingdon Growth Cluster was raised around the report mentioning working with Developers but not including anything about working with communities and felt this was a missed opportunity, urging the Officers to review to see how this could be included. The Panel heard that this was a welcome suggestion and they saw no reason this could not be added moving forward.

After a question relating to the Quality of life KPI, the Panel heard that the priority was around enabling and not the Council carrying it out. Examples were mentioned, such as the What Happens in Hunts project which highlights events in the District for residents to get involved in.

Members asked if there was anything in the Business Plan that could not be amended with a new administration, referencing the upcoming elections. They were advised that everything in the Plan could be adjusted according to changes in priorities though it was mentioned that certain projects would be difficult to retract from.

It was asked of KPI's would be created for the Empty Homes Strategy and the Food Waste Collection Service. The Panel heard that this could be considered but expectations had to be managed as baselines needed to be established first.

In response to a question relating to Carbon Emissions, The Panel heard that the KPI was for specific projects, not reaching the target of net zero which is why it was marked as completed and this would be referenced clearer in the future.

The Panel wondered if rough sleepers were part of the Homelessness KPI and heard that this would be taken away and an answer sought.

It was confirmed that the KPI's draw on data from across the year and are constantly being updated.

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.

52. EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

By means of a report by the Private Sector Housing Officer (Empty Homes) (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), The Empty Homes Strategy Report was presented to the Panel.

The Panel asked how much thought had gone into measuring the

success of the new Strategy. It was advised that this would rely on an Empty Homes Database which would hold all the information as to why a property is empty and would be reviewed monthly. This would allow them to focus on the problematic properties that would need more attention.

Concern was expressed regarding homes that would be empty due to a death of the owner and the Panel urged caution around these sensitive cases. This was acknowledged as an important point and the Panel heard that the Council wish to take a preventative approach and support people where they can in the process. It was confirmed that enforcement would only occur further down the line as a final option and only in a proportionate way.

It was requested that a table of definitions be included in the Strategy for clarification. This was acknowledged as a valid point and The Panel were advised this could be added.

It was suggested that the Strategy not name the other Authorities their examples had been drawn from and instead, tailor it for Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC). It was confirmed that as HDC have not done anything like this before, the examples had been used to assist with framing the strategy.

Further clarity was sought regarding consultation with homeowners on Point 8 of the Strategy. It was advised that the Common Place Platform was being used as a consultation tool which includes homeowners but has been expanded to include people who know of empty properties.

In response to a question regarding the Empty Property Premium, The Panel heard that in point 5.2 of the Strategy, The Council had chosen to set the maximum Council Tax Premium on empty properties and second homes which will be in effect from April 2026.

Concern was raised around the use of enforcement action and it was suggested that the Council hold off on this until they see the impact of the Premiums. The Panel heard that there must be an enforcement stage to the Strategy otherwise the Council would not know the number of long-term empty properties and would be unable to charge the Premium Council Tax. This stage is also about intelligence gathering and understanding the communities these homes may be negatively impacting.

The Panel's attention was drawn to Appendix B of the report which shows the statutory enforcement options, reinforcing that the statutory powers are established and long standing. It was advised that this Strategy works on supporting homeowners and using a softer approach but there must be an enforcement stage which will allow the Council to use action against homes that have been empty for a long period of time that are a detriment to the neighbours. It will not be a quick progress and will be a graduated response.

Examples were laid out to the Panel, such as vandalism and environmental health issues and that without this stage, the Council would be unable to step in or recoup costs for upkeep from a sale.

After a question relating to Appendix D, Resource Implications, The Panel were informed that the recent appointment of a dedicated Officer meant that she would undertake managing the database, engaging with residents and would complete the home visits. They would also be supported by other Officers, Team and the Legal Team.

Further information regarding the target for empty homes was sought from the Panel, referencing Huntingdonshire as already having the second lowest amount of empty properties over 6 months in the County. The Council were urged to be empathetic in their dealings with homeowners. The Panel were advised that the intelligence which would come from these interactions would be extremely beneficial, referencing the work of the Resident Advice Team and the positive impact their work has had on residents to date, It was heard that this strategy could help support residents with other underlying issues they wouldn't have been aware of without this information.

After a further question, The Panel were advised that the database would be built up from intelligence gathering and would show the reasons why the properties remain empty.

Councillor Martin agreed that he did not want to see neighbourhoods become derelict but was still uncomfortable with an enforcement stage and moved for a recommendation that this part of the strategy be removed and see how the Premium Charge goes first.

Councillor Gardener seconded the motion proffered by Councillor Martin.

The Panel hears the new Recommendation and a vote is called.

5 Members are For, 5 Against and the Chair casts her deciding vote Against the Recommendation so the Strategy will go forward without the new Recommendation.

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