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 July 2026.

PRESENT: Councillor A Wood – Chair.

Councillors L Ascroft, A Blackwell, S Cawley, S Ferguson, I D Gardener, R Ioannides, R Martin, S Smith, W Smith, H Tobias and T Tomlinson.

9. MINUTES

The Work Programme of minute 26/04 was amended to read:

The Member requested that a short, written progress briefing on the Parking Strategy Refresh be provided between meetings, setting out what work has been completed, what evidence has been gathered, what remains outstanding, and when the draft strategy is expected to come to the Panel for pre-decision scrutiny.

Members also raised wider questions in relation to the Parking Strategy Refresh, including costs associated with the strategy and the wider impact on town centre vitality.

After which the minutes of the meeting held 3rd June 2026 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

10. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

11. 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.

Democratic Services reiterated the importance of the scoping process to the Panel and confirmed that the scoping documents had been circulated to the relevant Members. It was noted that the documents would be recirculated to the full Panel following the meeting.

Councillors Ascroft, Ferguson, Ioannides and Martin volunteered to serve on the working group established to review Key Performance

Indicators (KPIs).

The Panel requested that an update on Civil Parking Enforcement be included on the work programme rather than being provided solely as an All-Member briefing. Members were advised that the matter had not been overlooked, but that it would first be considered through an All-Member Briefing. It was further noted that, should the Panel consider additional scrutiny necessary thereafter, a scoping document would be prepared.

Councillor Tomlinson proposed that Civil Parking Enforcement be added to the Panel's work programme.

Councillor Martin seconded the proposal and suggested that the matter be brought before the Panel once the first year of operation had been completed. In support of the proposal, it was noted that procurement concerned the Council's compliance with its own rules and procedures, and that the Panel should maintain oversight of this area.

Councillor Ioannides proposed an amendment to the proffered motion. He proposed the addition of prioritising Places for People, Commercial Investment Portfolio and the Civil Parking Enforcement / parking strategy onto the Work Programme.

The Panel hears the new Recommendation proposed by Councillor Tomlinson and a vote is called. 6 Members are For, 0 Against and 5 Abstainers.

Following the discussion, it was agreed:

That this Panel confirms its previous agreement that the Annual review of Civil Parking Enforcement performance be brought as a formal agenda item to this Panel and requests the DSO to confirm a date for that item- noting that any All-Member briefings in advance are welcome but does not substitute for a formal Panel meeting on the subject.

Councillor Ioannides moved again for prioritising Places for People, Commercial Investment Portfolio and the Civil Parking Enforcement / parking strategy onto the Work Programme.

The Panel were reminded of the scrutiny training previously undertaken and, in particular, the importance of completing a scoping document for all topics proposed for scrutiny. It was advised that scoping documents help to clearly define the purpose, scope and desired outcomes of a review, ensuring that scrutiny resources are focused on matters within the Panel’s remit and that any subsequent work is evidence-based, proportionate and achievable.

The Panel were advised of the importance of engaging with Places for People as a key partner of the Council. Officers confirmed that discussions were underway to bring the matter to a future meeting agenda, with consideration being given to ensuring the focus and scope of the discussion were appropriate and constructive.

Councillor Tobias seconded the motion and a vote was called.

The Panel hears the new Recommendation and a vote is called. 6 Members are For, 0 Against and 5 Abstainers.

Following the discussion, it was agreed:

That Places for People, Commercial Investment Portfolio and the Civil Parking Enforcement / parking strategy be prioritised and added onto the Work Programme.

The Chair reminded Members to complete the scoping documents

The Panel requested that, although One Leisure falls within the remit of the other Overview and Scrutiny Panel, regular updates be provided from the Shadow Board on the use of funding and related expenditure to enable oversight of matters of wider Council interest.

12. TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT 2025/26

The Council's approach of utilising internal borrowing rather than external borrowing was welcomed by the Panel. They sought clarification on whether there was a threshold, such as a particular level of interest rates or other financial considerations, at which the Council would review its position and consider switching from internal to external borrowing.

The Panel heard that if such a decision was made, it would not likely come from interest rates, rather by the use of the Council's internal borrowings.

Attention was drawn to IFI S9, noting that its duration had been extended to March 2029. Clarification was sought on whether funds were currently being withdrawn from the associated shared investment pools and, if so, what impact this might have on the Council's financial position.

Officers confirmed that this matter had not yet been explored in detail. However, it was noted that there was an expectation that the March 2029 deadline would be extended further. Members were advised that, should it appear unlikely that a further extension would be granted, the Council would undertake a review of the position and consider the available options at that time.

Clarification was sought on the specific mitigation measures in place to manage the financial risks associated with the Council's debt levels, particularly given that the outstanding debt exceeds the value of the Council's property assets. An update was requested on the timescale and strategy for reducing vacancies within the Council's property portfolio, noting the impact that vacant units were having on interest coverage ratios. In addition, it was queried asked how confident the relevant Executive Councillor was that the budgeted income target of £3.75 million for 2026/27 could be achieved.

The Panel was advised that it had previously been recognised that, from a financial and resource perspective, the Commercial Investment Strategy was the only area that could not readily be progressed further. The Portfolio Holder highlighted that the decision not to dispose of assets at this time had been a prudent one. While it was acknowledged that certain aspects of the Strategy's risk management and governance framework had not been as robust as intended, Members were informed that the Strategy nevertheless represented a valuable exercise in long-term financial planning.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on commercial property values was also noted. The Panel heard that a number of properties within the Council's portfolio had performed strongly and generated significant income, while extensive work was continuing to address vacant units. Members were advised that, if assets were to be sold at the present time, the resulting capital receipts could only be used for capital purposes. It was reiterated that, although such receipts could be used to reduce borrowing, all but a small number of the Council's loans were currently costing less in interest than was being generated through investments. The Portfolio Holder emphasised that the Commercial Investment Strategy should be viewed as a long-term strategy.

In response to a question from Councillor Ioannides regarding the stress testing of the Council's property portfolio, the Panel was advised that commercial property values and performance do not typically fluctuate significantly unless affected by exceptional circumstances, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. It was further noted that undertaking stress testing in excessive detail could be counterproductive and may not provide meaningful additional insight into the portfolio's long-term performance.

A Member wondered whether the £2.5 million figure referenced within the Commercial Investment Strategy included both loan interest costs and the business loan, and requested further detail on how this figure had been calculated.

The Panel expressed disappointment regarding the manner in which the Commercial Investment Strategy had originally been developed, particularly in relation to the acquisition of properties and the financial arrangements put in place at the time. Members were advised by the Portfolio Holder that it had not been possible to retrospectively restructure these arrangements. It was confirmed that aspects of the work had previously been undertaken by agency staff; however, responsibility had since been brought in-house, resulting in a reduction in associated costs.

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.

13. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2025-26 (QUARTER 4)

Queries were raised about the variances in the reported figures, referencing table 4.2 in the report.

The Chair confirmed that this was showing correct in the report on page 82 and Officers advised they would provide clarification outside of the meeting.

In response to a question regarding the accuracy of financial forecasts, the Panel was advised that officers sought to produce forecasts as accurately as possible based on the information available. However, Members were informed that a significant proportion of the Council's income had been received later in the financial year, and that unexpected additional grant funding had been received in the last quarter of the financial year.. As a result, forecasting can be challenging and projections may need to be updated as further information becomes available.

Concerns were raised regarding the reported £1.9 million capital overspend associated with One Leisure and sought clarification on the factors that had contributed to the overspend. It was further noted that the report indicated a reduction in income across certain areas and queried the reasons why a capital budget overspend had occurred in the context of declining income levels.

In response, the Panel were advised that further information about this could be circulated after the meeting.

The Panel heard that the £1.9 million was revenue that would be capitalised under financial reporting regulations in the next financial year.

It was further commented that the £1.9 million capital overspend represented a significant sum of public money and expressed the view that his constituents would share those concerns. He also drew attention to the increasing level of the Council's debtors and sought clarification on the proportion of outstanding debt that was considered recoverable, together with the level of confidence officers had in recovering those amounts.

The Panel was advised that some of the outstanding debts had arisen over the previous four years, including cases involving individuals who had defrauded the Council. Members were informed that any debts deemed irrecoverable had been subject to appropriate due diligence and recovery efforts before being written off. Officers noted that the Council continues to maintain a high rate of debt collection overall.

The Panel heard that challenges in debt recovery can arise from a range of factors, including errors by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), businesses entering administration, and individuals entering Individual Voluntary Arrangements (IVAs). Members were also advised that a review of commercial debt was currently underway and that the findings could be shared with the Panel outside of the meeting.

The Panel asked if Cambridge City Council had repaid the debt owed to the Council. The Panel were advised this would be investigated and a response sought outside of the meeting.

It was noted that collection rates had declined and observed that the current target had been based on the previous year's recovery performance. He sought clarification on whether this indicated that the reduction in collection rates was expected to be a long-term trend or whether recovery levels were anticipated to improve in future years.

Following on from a Member's earlier request, further confirmation was sought that the breakdown to be provided would identify which outstanding debts were considered recoverable. He further queried whether the information would also include details of the Council's provision for bad and doubtful debts.

A query was raised regarding the Capital Programme, specifically in relation to the Chipper replacement project. She noted that the accompanying commentary referred to an underspend, while elsewhere referencing an overspend, and sought clarification on the apparent inconsistency in the reported financial position.

After a further question relating to the future high streets fund budget and a request for a project breakdown, the Panel were advised this would be taken away and an answer sought.

The Panel also heard that there had been issues with the monitoring of the Capital Programme and this has been raised already with new processes being introduced to improve accuracy.

In response to a question from a Member regarding debtor analysis, the Panel was advised that the relevant officers were currently focusing their efforts on securing tenants for vacant properties within the Council's portfolio. Members were informed that a significant amount of work had also been undertaken in relation to rent reviews. Officers further reiterated that, while debt recovery activity may be undertaken through external agencies where appropriate, the Council does not sell outstanding debts to third parties.

The Chair referred to the minimum revenue provision and wondered why this had been reduced.

The Panel were advised that this was reduced because the Capital expenditure within the financial year had been lower that forecast and therefore the provision for repayment had been adjusted to reflect the actual spend.

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.

14. CORPORATE PLAN REFRESH 2026/27

Attention was drawn to page 125 of the report and anticipation was expressed of working with Members regarding Parish Council issues.

Clarification was sought as to whether the 80% Business as usual (BAU) was for statutory services or non-statutory services. It was confirmed this was for the statutory services that the Council must provide, such as Revenues, Benefits, Waste collections, etc.

It was requested if a breakdown of the Capital costs for every new 2026/2027 Corporate Plan Action was available, It was asked that this be split between statutory and non-statutory and any external funding. On hearing that this would need to be taken away, Councillor Ioannides advised he could not endorse the Plan without knowing the costs.

In response the Panel were advised they were being asked to look at the principles of the Plan, not the budget

A Member advised that, while they was able to support the overall strategic vision, she had reservations regarding the proposed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which she considered to contain significant blind spots. She expressed concern that, if the most appropriate metrics were not in place, organisational focus could become concentrated on achieving the measured KPIs rather than on the wider activities and outcomes necessary to deliver the Strategy effectively. She reiterated that the Working Group being set up for KPI's should be convened and concluded before December 2026 to ensure the next Plan includes sophisticated outcome based metrics.

The Panel was advised that such feedback would be welcomed. However, Members were reminded that any revisions or additions would need to be considered in the context of the capacity and resources available within the team. Officers also noted that certain performance measures and reporting requirements are prescribed by Central Government and must therefore be included as part of the Council's monitoring and reporting arrangements.

It was queried whether the introduction of the new food waste collection service was reflected within the proposed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). It was noted the importance of monitoring the service's performance, particularly in light of concerns and complaints from residents regarding missed collections, and sought assurance that appropriate measures were in place to track and report on this area. The Panel were advised that whilst it is not included in the current target intolerances, it is now part of the commentary until a baseline can be established.

Support was expressed for the previous comments and it was noted that 30 of the 57 actions contained within the report were identified as new and questioned whether the Council's focus should instead be directed towards preparations for and delivery of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). He sought clarification on the rationale for introducing a significant number of new actions at this stage and how these aligned with the Council's wider priorities. He wondered if it would have been better to wait until after LGR.
The Panel heard that the Plan will be kept under review and that it allows for reflection as the Council goes through and that a lot of work has gone into ensuring the Council is properly sourced going into LGR.

Concerns were raised regarding a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that had yet to be confirmed, citing homelessness prevention and temporary accommodation as examples. He suggested that the absence of complete performance information limited the Panel's ability to undertake effective scrutiny. Councillor Ioannides also referred to the ongoing affordability challenges facing the Council, particularly in the context of expenditure on One Leisure. He sought greater clarity regarding the resource implications of the proposed actions, including the anticipated cost of each action, ownership and accountability arrangements, and the distinction between statutory and discretionary activities. In addition, he requested information on which actions could potentially be scaled back or discontinued should Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) alter the Council's future responsibilities and priorities.

In response, the Panel was advised that officers would review the request and consider what information could be provided in relation to opportunity costs. Members were informed that the Executive Councillor wished to confirm the extent of the information that the relevant team would be able to compile and present. The Panel was also reminded that reports relating to the One Leisure affordability challenge were available for Members to review. In addition, officers confirmed that the development of Housing-related KPIs was ongoing and that these could not be finalised until later in the year.

It was queried why a number of the actions contained within the report did not have defined completion dates and sought clarification on when these actions were expected to be delivered. He also requested further information on the measures that would be used to assess progress and success. In addition, Councillor Tomlinson sought clarification on the specific purpose of the item and what the Panel was being asked to consider or recommend at the meeting.

Councillor Ioannides made a motion for additional Recommendations to the Cabinet of additional measurable outcomes.

The Panel was reminded that, whilst the proposed actions and objectives were recognised as worthwhile, expectations regarding delivery would need to be managed realistically. Members were advised that officer capacity remained under significant pressure, with additional demands arising from major programmes of work, including preparations for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). It was therefore noted that the Council would need to balance its ambitions against the resources available to deliver them.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Tobias.

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

3 Members are For, 0 Against and 8 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;

The recommendation be amended so that the Panel does not simply endorse the refreshed Corporate Plan as presented, but instead recommends endorsement only subject to the following amendments being made before Cabinet and Council:

1) That every Corporate Plan action must include:
    - a named responsible officer or service;
    - a clear delivery date;
    - a measurable output or outcome;
    - the budget or resource implication;
- and a defined red, amber and green performance threshold.

2) That actions listed as "Influence" or "Enable" must not be reported as delivered unless there is evidence of a measurable outcome, a formal partner commitment, or a clear resident benefit.

3) That the Key Performance Indicators must include baseline data, annual targets, direction of travel, RAG thresholds, and where relevant, cost-per-unit or value-for-money measures, so Members can see not only activity, but whether services are improving for residents.

4) That the Plan must include specific measures on:

- homelessness prevention and repeat presentations;
- the impact of Places for People stock disposals;
    - commercial investment portfolio performance, including voids and rental income loss;
    - Civil Parking Enforcement and car-parking income performance;
    - customer satisfaction and avoidable contact;
    - staff sickness levels and cost;
    - planning enforcement performance;
    - fly-tipping, waste and recycling outcomes;
    - and Local Government Reorganisation risk, including service continuity, reserves and staffing capacity.

5) That any climate, energy or environmental action must include the estimated cost, expected saving, payback period, statutory basis, and impact on residents and businesses before being treated as a Corporate Plan commitment.

6) That the Panel's comments to Cabinet and Council record that Overview and Scrutiny expects the Corporate Plan to be a measurable delivery document, not a list of aspirations, and that quarterly performance reports must show progress against these amended measures.

The Panel therefore recommends that Cabinet and Council endorse the Corporate Plan only once these amendments have been incorporated.

Councillor Martin moves that he is in favour of Councillor Ioannides request but would like to add the amendment of this work being covered by the KPI Working Group.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Gardener.

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

11 Members are For.

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;

1) That the information requested by Councillor Ioannides be covered by the KPI Working Group.

15. COMBINED AUTHORITY MAYORAL CAR PARKING SUBSIDY

Clarification was sought on whether any assessment had been undertaken to determine both the beneficiaries of the proposal and those who would bear its cost. He expressed concern that the Organisation could be perceived as endorsing, or partially funding, a campaign commitment, with the associated costs ultimately being met through council tax contributions, including by residents who may derive no direct benefit from the proposal.

The Panel was reminded that the decision to allocate funding in this manner was a matter for the Mayor, who had chosen to utilise his budget accordingly. It was noted that the budget from which the funding was drawn was funded by contributions from across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Further information was requested regarding the financial implications of the proposal. She sought clarification on whether any additional or indirect costs would be incurred, including costs associated with updating parking payment infrastructure. She also enquired about any costs that might arise upon the conclusion or withdrawal of the Scheme and requested confirmation of the duration for which the funding would be available.

In addition, sight of the supporting business case was requested, including evidence relating to anticipated impacts on town centre footfall. The importance of establishing baseline data and projected outcomes was emphasised, noting that it would otherwise be difficult to assess the economic success of the Scheme or determine the impact of any additional funding provided.

The Panel was advised that, as this was a Mayoral Scheme, responsibility for undertaking the associated research and developing the supporting evidence base rested with the Mayor. It was noted that the Council's role was limited to its inclusion within the Scheme as a provider of car parking facilities and that undertaking such research did not fall within the Council's remit.

Their attention was drawn to section 8:2:5 of the report which included a breakdown of the costs requested by the Member.

The Panel noted that the Mayor's manifesto had indicated that funding would be made available to support the implementation of a free car parking scheme. He sought clarification on the process by which the various options had been considered and evaluated, and how the proposal had developed from the Mayor's initial approach to the recommended Scheme now before the Panel.

It was advised that no initial budget envelope had been proposed for the Council. Following early discussions, the Organisation considered the comments received and subsequently provided indicative costings to the Combined Authority to support the further development and refinement of the proposal. Officers have highlighted the associated financial implications to ensure that the Combined Authority is fully aware of the potential budgetary impact of the option under consideration.

Confirmation was requested that the Mayor was the one who asked for the 4pm to 6pm scheme as set out in the main report which was confirmed to the Panel that yes this was correct.

Concern was expressed regarding the latest letter from the Mayor, which had been circulated to the Panel as a supplementary document. He commented that the correspondence appeared to follow a decision that had already been made, leading to some uncertainty as to its purpose and timing.

The Panel was advised that the proposal before them represented the original option for consideration. It was noted that the Mayor had subsequently requested that the Council consider the provision of free parking; however, any decision on this matter would be for the Council to determine. The Panel was further informed that the Chief Executive had been asked to consider the inclusion of an additional hour within the proposal.

Officers confirmed that the principal report before the Panel was the proposal currently open for consideration. It was also highlighted that the alternative option would have financial implications, unlike the main proposal, and would therefore require a budget amendment to be approved by Full Council.

It was noted that the scheme would remain cost neutral only if residents' parking behaviours remained unchanged. Further clarification was sought on the measures and performance indicators that would be used to assess the success of the scheme and monitor any changes in parking patterns.

The Panel was advised that the scheme would be monitored through the Council's budget management processes. Members were informed that the recommendations included a safeguard which would delegate authority to reverse the scheme if necessary. It was further noted that a contingency provision had been incorporated within the budget. Officers confirmed that both income levels and any changes in user behaviour would be monitored to assess the ongoing impact of the scheme.

Councillors Ferguson and Ioannides stated that they did not support the proposed additional hours, citing concerns regarding the financial risks and potential budgetary implications associated with the extension.

Attention was drawn to the criteria previously submitted by the Council to the Mayor for consideration and highlighted the emphasis placed on supporting the evening economy, which aligns with the Council's Economic Strategy. It was noted that this objective is not explicitly referenced within the current Corporate Plan. It was further observed that Council car parks were already free of charge after 6.00 pm and suggested that this existing arrangement more closely supports the evening economy.

The Chair queried whether, if Council car parks were already operating at or near capacity until 6.00 pm, would the Scheme provide be significant benefit.

The Panel heard that the available data indicated that car park utilisation falls after 4.00 pm.

It was queried whether the proposed scheme could be terminated early should it become apparent that residents were using the car parks primarily because of the free parking offer. Confirmation was sought ion on whether any costs or financial penalties would be associated with ending the arrangement before its intended completion date.

Officers advised that any such obligations would be carefully considered and taken into account as part of the Council's decision-making process.

The importance was reiterated of ensuring that the Council was clear regarding the precise nature of the proposal being adopted, including where responsibility and ownership for the scheme would ultimately rest. Attention was drawn to point 2.3 of the report by the Panel.

Officers confirmed that the proposal under consideration formed part of a scheme led by the Mayor. It was further clarified that, should the option to introduce an additional free parking hour be pursued, this would require approval by Full Council due to the associated financial implications. It was noted that this is the Mayor's scheme, not Officers of this Council.

In response to a question from the Panel, it was confirmed that Members had previously indicated that any such scheme should be applied across multiple areas within the district, rather than being limited to St Neots as originally proposed by the Mayor.

Councillor Martin put forward a motion for an additional Recommendation for Cabinet to not go ahead as planned. This motion was seconded by Councillor Tomlinson.

It was commented that evidence had not been seen demonstrating that the scheme would deliver tangible benefits for residents. Clarification on the research undertaken and the evidence base used to support the proposal was requested.

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

6 Members are For, 0 Against and 5 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;

1) That we do not go ahead as currently planned

2) That we write to the Mayor, explaining that we will wait for the Parking Strategy and determine what the best option is from this.

3) Any future recommendation that comes forward to the Panel does not include a delegation to vary or cease the Scheme to Officers. Any variation or cessation of the Scheme should come through the Democratic cycle and be a decision for elected Councillors not Officers.

Councillor Tobias put forward a motion for an additional Recommendation for further details around costing from the Mayor. This motion was seconded by Councillor Ioannides.

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

3 Members are For, 0 Against and 8 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;

1) That further details of full costings and the business case be shared as to who the parking proposal funding will actually benefit and how.

Chair