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, 2 September 2026.

PRESENT: Councillor A Wood – Chair.

Councillors L Ascroft, A Blackwell, S Cawley, P Gammons, I D Gardener, M A Hassall, D McIlwain, G Seeff, W Smith, H Tobias and R Tomlinson.

APOLOGY(IES): Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors R Ioannides and R Martin.

17. MINUTES

The minutes from 1st July 2026 and the 29th July 2026 were amended to read:

Councillor R Tomlinson.

After which the Minutes of the meetings held on 1st July 2026 and the 29th July 2026 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

18. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

19. 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 Tomlinson proposed the establishment of a working group to develop terms of reference for an investigation into matters relating to Capital & Centric. He explained that, following discussions with officers, it was considered more appropriate for a working group to define the scope of the investigation in collaboration with the Corporate Governance Committee, ensuring a coordinated approach. The working group would report back to the next Overview and Scrutiny meeting, with the intention of commencing the investigation in November. Councillor Tobias seconded the proposal, subject to members receiving the necessary information and responses.

Clarification was sought on how the proposed investigation would interact with any review undertaken by Internal Audit. It was expressed that an independent assessment of the issues was needed and queried whether Internal Audit would be commissioned by the

Corporate Governance Committee, and how Overview and Scrutiny would engage with that process.

The Panel were advised that the purpose of establishing a working group was to consider how any investigation would align with the work of the Corporate Governance Committee, including any Internal Audit involvement, before reporting back with proposed terms of reference. It was confirmed that the Overview and Scrutiny function was intended to examine the issues in detail, review relevant documentation, and question officers and Members where necessary. Unlike an Internal Audit review, the scrutiny process would take place in public. He added that commencing the process in November or December would allow the Council to begin its examination at an early stage in response to residents' concerns.

The Panel also heard that a number of proposals relating to investigations, reviews and audits of the Capital & Centric matter were currently under consideration, including correspondence circulating publicly and a motion submitted to Full Council. Councillor Tomlinson's proposal was welcomed as a formal mechanism to place the matter on the work programme and advised that Officers, including the Monitoring Officer, were considering the most appropriate route for any review, including whether it should be undertaken internally or externally. As the situation remained active and was evolving rapidly, he emphasised the importance of a coordinated approach. The establishment of a working group was supported to develop proposals in collaboration with other bodies and to avoid duplication of effort, while ensuring the matter was progressed in the most effective and efficient manner.

It was confirmed that Councillors Hassall, Seeff, Tobias and Tomlinson would form the proposed Working Group.

A Member noted that several items on the work programme, including Places for People, remained at the scoping stage. While there were some gaps in the programme, it was suggested that items should not be scheduled until the required scoping work had been completed to ensure effective preparation and scrutiny. Members were encouraged to complete outstanding scoping documents for items they had proposed if they wished them to be progressed onto the work programme. It was confirmed that requests for scoping documents had previously been issued.

20. OUTSTANDING RESPONSES FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

To note the responses outstanding from previous meetings.

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

21. PRE-SUBMISSION LOCAL PLAN TO 2046

By means of a report by Head of Planning, Infrastructure and Public Protection (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Pre-Submission Local Plan to 2046 Sustainability Appraisal and Supporting Documents was presented to the Panel.

The Chair queried why a Member's position on the Local Plan appeared to have changed compared to the adopted Local Plan, noting that they had previously voted against it. The Panel heard that the Member considered their opposition to the previous Local Plan to have been a mistake and urged Members not to make the same error. The importance of having development guided by a robust, infrastructure-led Local Plan rather than being driven by developers was emphasised. Reference was also made to the significant amount of work undertaken over the previous three and a half years to prepare the Plan.

In response to a question, the Panel was advised that the term home in the report referred to an individual unit of accommodation of any form capable of being occupied by a single person, a family or other household. It was also confirmed that infrastructure planning was based on projected population growth arising from the number of new homes expected to be delivered across the district.

Clarification was sought on the number of homes referenced, noting that the figure stated at the meeting differed from that contained within the Local Plan. A request was also made for the proposal relating to Upwood to be referred to as Upwood rather than Ramsey in future references. The Panel was advised that the Local Plan provides for 32,200 homes between 2021 and 2046, of which approximately 4,200 had already been completed and 11,300 had existing planning permission. Regarding the naming of the proposal, Members were informed that, for consistency with the evidence base, it would preferably remain listed under Ramsey for the current consultation stage, with the potential for amendment at a later stage. The proposed approach was accepted.

In response to a question regarding infrastructure in rural areas, the Panel's attention was drawn to the Infrastructure Readiness Report set out in Appendix 7 to the report. It was confirmed that extensive consultation had been undertaken with infrastructure providers, enabling them to plan when infrastructure would be required and delivered. The Local Plan would provide certainty to support the phasing of development. A stepped trajectory had been included to allow infrastructure to be delivered alongside development throughout the Plan period.

Clarification was sought on whether development would take place only once infrastructure was in place. The Panel was advised that, in the absence of a Local Plan, planning applications could still be submitted by developers. However, an adopted Local Plan provides a clear vision for growth and a delivery trajectory, enabling Officers to work proactively with developers and infrastructure providers to ensure that necessary infrastructure is planned and delivered alongside development.

Concern was raised regarding the fallback position should the A141 scheme not be delivered, given its importance to infrastructure planning in North Huntingdonshire. The Panel heard that the Plan covers a 25-year period and that national planning guidance requires plans to remain flexible in response to changing economic circumstances. Members were informed that the Council had been working with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined

Authority since 2018 to progress the A141 scheme and that the growth potential of North Huntingdonshire had been recognised within regional plans. The A141 remained a priority project and was expected to be delivered. However, it was acknowledged that circumstances could change and that the Council would review its position if required. Deliverability would form a key component of the Local Plan examination process, and the Council would continue to adapt its plans and work in partnership to support delivery. Members were also advised that implementation of the Plan would be continuously monitored.

Questions were raised regarding infrastructure capacity, particularly wastewater provision. It was noted that constraints in water supply and treatment infrastructure could affect the type of economic development supported in the district, with some employment sectors having significant water requirements.

The Panel was advised that it was not unusual for the full funding package for infrastructure projects to be unavailable at the outset of the plan-making process. Officers acknowledged existing infrastructure challenges and emphasised the importance of a plan-led approach to growth to enable the Council to work with developers, government, service providers and transport authorities to secure infrastructure alongside development. Without a Local Plan, development would be considered on an individual application basis, making it more difficult to secure strategic infrastructure. Members also heard that the Local Plan supported a range of employment opportunities and that water supply pressures were being addressed through planned investment, including new pipelines and water storage infrastructure expected during the 2030s.

It was observed that some residents had expressed the view that it may be preferable not to proceed with a Local Plan if there was a risk that it would not be found sound by the Planning Inspector.

The Panel was advised that independent examination is an important part of the Local Plan process, with Planning Inspectors commonly recommending modifications. Members were informed that the process is conducted transparently and in public. The Panel was also reminded that councils are expected to maintain an up-to-date Local Plan and that, without one, it becomes more difficult to resist inappropriate development proposals.

From a rural perspective, clarification was sought on the evidence supporting assumptions of a significant shift away from private car use, given the limited availability of alternative transport options in many rural communities.

The Panel was advised that Officers had worked with Cambridgeshire County Council on the Strategic Transport Study, which used the Combined Authority's latest CaPCAM transport model. Members heard that the model reflects Huntingdonshire's predominantly rural character by dividing the district into more than 200 areas and assessing factors such as growth potential and access to public transport. It was explained that major developments would be expected to incorporate significant active travel and sustainable transport infrastructure. However, in many rural villages private cars

would remain the principal mode of transport.

Clarification was sought on whether developers would be expected to provide transport links to employment sites for workers.

The Panel was advised that it was not uncommon for developers to subsidise public transport services during the early phases of development, particularly where passenger numbers were not yet sufficient to support a viable service. Such arrangements would depend on the nature of the development, the type of transport provided and operational considerations.

Issues were raised on behalf of residents of Ellington regarding the impact of development at Brampton Cross on the A14, particularly the diversion of HGV traffic through the village and the resulting damage. A request was made that developers should fund any necessary improvements to the A14 and A1 junctions arising from future proposals.

The Panel was reminded that the purpose of the agenda item was to consider the Local Plan and that Brampton Cross is not proposed as an allocation. However, the strength of local feeling regarding the site was acknowledged, and Members were advised that any future planning application would include opportunities for stakeholder engagement.

A question was raised concerning the consequences of failing to meet the 31 December deadline, including whether a risk assessment had been undertaken and the impact any delay would have on the Local Plan timetable.

The Panel was advised that failing to meet the 31 December deadline would have significant implications, as it would be difficult to carry the Local Plan forward under the new legislative arrangements. Members heard that there would be fewer consultation opportunities and that much of the work undertaken to date could not simply be transferred. Missing the deadline would require the Council to issue a notice of intent and restart the Local Plan process, resulting in an estimated delay of around 30 months. Officers also confirmed that a risk review would be considered.

The issue of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) was raised, with a query as to whether wider implications had been considered despite advice that it should not delay progress on the Local Plan.

The Panel heard that the Council would be in a stronger position with an up-to-date Local Plan in place, particularly one focused on delivering infrastructure across the district. Reference was made to other authorities that had already undergone local government reorganisation. Members were informed that Shadow Authorities could not formally commence the Local Plan process and were directed to Section 10 of the report, which outlined the implications of local government reorganisation for the Plan.

Concerns were raised regarding the financial implications of delaying the Local Plan and whether associated costs would need to be justified to both Members and the public. The Panel was advised that

Officers had a clear understanding of expenditure incurred to date and anticipated future costs. It was confirmed that approximately £780,000 had been spent on preparing the Local Plan so far.

It was confirmed that further costs were likely to arise during the examination process. Members were assured that a prudent approach had been taken throughout, including undertaking joint evidence studies with internal colleagues where possible.

The importance of infrastructure planning was emphasised, while recognising the significant dependencies and uncertainties involved in delivery. It was noted that much of the required social infrastructure would be secured through Section 106 Agreements, with reference made to an example where healthcare provision had not yet been fully delivered. Clarification was also sought regarding proposed healthcare expansion at Loves Farm and whether a risk assessment should form part of the Local Plan process.

The Panel was informed that the development included a district centre with provision for a healthcare facility. Officers advised that work had been undertaken with NHS England and the developer to determine the appropriate timing for bringing the facility into operation. It was noted that a sufficient population threshold was required to make a health centre viable and that challenges had arisen in securing infrastructure delivery through Section 106 Agreements.

The Chair noted that the provision of primary healthcare infrastructure was estimated to require between £19 million and £25 million. While acknowledging that interim facilities could be funded through Section 106 Agreements, clarification was sought on how the remaining funding for permanent healthcare provision would be secured.

The Panel was advised that developments are expected to mitigate the impacts arising from their own schemes. As such, a proportion of funding is sought through Section 106 Agreements, which typically provide capital contributions rather than revenue funding. Additional funding requirements would be pursued in partnership with the Integrated Care Board and the NHS through other funding mechanisms.

In response to a question, the Panel was advised that the delivery of water recycling centres would be phased in line with future investment periods and associated infrastructure delivery programmes. Members heard that funding intentions were set out within the Statement of Common Ground with Anglian Water. It was also confirmed that other sites were available within the Council’s five-year housing land supply.

It was advised that an easy-to-read version of the Local Plan had been requested to assist councillors in understanding the document and to improve transparency and accessibility for residents wishing to engage with the Plan.

In response to a question regarding affordable military housing, the Panel was advised that the definition of affordable housing has evolved over time and now includes provisions relating to military

housing. Members were informed that the Local Plan supports this policy approach. It was further explained that the policy is specifically worded to ensure that any such provision is supported by evidence of need demonstrated by the Ministry of Defence.
Clarification was sought on the evidence supporting the proposed level of growth in Little Paxton, noting that the proposal had increased from 220 homes to 410 homes. Concern was expressed that residents had previously been consulted on much smaller-scale developments and questions were raised regarding the basis for the scale of growth proposed.

The Panel was advised that the evidence supporting the proposed growth had been informed by additional work undertaken since earlier stages of the Local Plan process. This included the Stage 2 Water Cycle Study, the Infrastructure Delivery Study (Stage 2), and updated Strategic Transport Assessments, which had been used to assess the site's suitability and infrastructure requirements.

The Chair raised a query regarding sustainable drainage systems and whether their status remained non-statutory.

The Panel heard that their inclusion within the policy would lend greater weight in decision-making.

Clarification was sought on the weighting that would be given to the sustainability and environmental elements of the Local Plan. Concern was expressed that some objectives appeared highly ambitious and that reliance on biodiversity net gain could be difficult to quantify and measure in practice.

The Panel was advised that an Inspector would not assign weight to the Plan but would test the Plan and its policies against the supporting evidence provided.

Councillors D McIlwain and H Tobias left the meeting at 20:42

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.

22. CAR PARKING STRATEGY

Meeting adjourned at 20:47

Meeting resumed at 20:57

Councillors D McIlwain and H Tobias rejoined the meeting at 20:57.

By means of a report by the Head of Economy, Regeneration & Housing Delivery and the Operations Manager, Parking & Markets Services (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), The Parking Strategy Report was presented to the Panel.

Clarification was sought regarding parking provision in Godmanchester, specifically why Bridge Place had been included within the Godmanchester section of the report rather than being referenced under Huntingdon. The Panel was advised that all car parks had been included within the survey to provide a comprehensive evidence base. Members were informed that Bridge Place had been identified as an underutilised car park and that development work commenced in March 2026. It was also confirmed that Bridge Place had been included within the Godmanchester section because it falls within the relevant town boundary.

A query was raised regarding EV charging stations and the metric used to determine when a standard public parking bay should be converted into a dedicated EV bay. The Panel heard that the Council has a separate Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy which sets out its approach to investing in EV infrastructure across Council-owned car parks. Members heard that the Strategy is based on maximising grant funding opportunities, with deployment decisions informed by usage data, site locations and electricity grid capacity.

Questions were raised regarding the threshold at which a car park would be considered persistently underutilised and the criteria that would trigger a feasibility assessment for partial or full disposal. It was explained to the Panel that it was difficult to define a fixed threshold, as circumstances may change over time. Members were informed that underutilised car parks may still retain strategic value and that each site would therefore need to be considered on its individual merits.

Concern was raised that the Strategy did not appear to fully account for wider external developments that could influence parking demand, including emerging transport initiatives and major development proposals. A query was also raised regarding how the Council would respond to any associated increase in traffic and parking pressures. The Panel were informed that the previous strategy had been considered overly prescriptive. The new strategy was intentionally designed to provide greater flexibility, enabling individual car parks to be assessed on a case-by-case basis and allowing the Council to respond more effectively to changing circumstances and emerging evidence.

Confirmation was sought that any assessment relating to the repurposing or redevelopment of a car park would be undertaken before the Council made a formal commitment to proceed. The Panel was advised that none of the car parks identified within the data were currently considered suitable for repurposing, as all were experiencing high levels of usage, with some operating beyond capacity. Members heard that consideration should instead be given to expanding capacity where supported by evidence and capital funding.

Whilst acknowledging current usage levels, clarification was sought regarding how the Strategy would apply in future circumstances and at what stage elected Members would be involved in considering proposals to repurpose or redevelop car parks.

During discussions regarding potential recommendations to Cabinet,

the Panel indicated that any future site-specific proposals should be brought before the Panel prior to any commitment being made. Members emphasised the importance of wider Member involvement and scrutiny at an early stage.

The Panel was reminded of the distinction between the roles of Members and Officers, with Members responsible for setting strategic direction and Officers responsible for delivery. It was emphasised that Member involvement should be proportionate to the significance of proposals and occur at the appropriate stage.

Further information was requested on regarding the projected increase in parking demand over the Local Plan period. The Panel heard that the appendix to the report contained forward planning assumptions based on modest population growth.

A query was raised regarding whether regular reports would be provided to the Panel on car park performance and how any emerging issues would be addressed. The Panel was told that the aim is to direct demand towards underutilised car parks and maximise existing capacity before considering further investment.

The view was expressed that the report constituted a policy document rather than a strategy and should include clearer actions and timescales. It was explained to the Panel that the Strategy establishes the framework and criteria for decision-making, with specific actions and delivery measures to be developed subsequently.

The flexibility within the Strategy was welcomed and clarification was sought on how potential conflicts would be managed, such as balancing town centre regeneration objectives with higher parking charges in heavily used locations.

The Panel was advised that work was underway to ensure parking charges were applied more fairly. It was noted that town centres generally seek to discourage long-stay parking and that the Strategy provides flexibility in determining the use and duration of individual car parks.

Assurance was sought that the existence of two Park and Ride facilities would not result in the loss of existing town centre parking spaces. The Panel heard that such assurance could not be provided, although the matter could be considered further through the appropriate Combined Authority forum. The Panel also heard that the Action Plan includes occupancy studies to assess parking capacity. Members heard that initiatives to improve utilisation could include measures such as installing Amazon lockers. Once evidence on capacity and demand has been gathered, proposals could be developed and presented alongside associated budget bids.

The view was expressed that car parking appeared to be treated as a service rather than a commercial operation, and a query was raised as to why pricing had been considered separately. The Panel was advised that pricing had been separated from the Strategy to maintain focus on broader objectives rather than financial considerations. It was also noted that dynamic pricing had been considered but was not supported due to concerns regarding fairness.

In response to a question, the Panel was advised that matters relating to free parking fall within the remit of the Combined Authority. However, the Strategy includes consideration of concessions and opportunities to encourage greater use of underutilised car parks.

The Panel heard that matters relating to the Combined Authority fall within its remit. It was suggested that concessions and other measures could be considered to encourage use of underutilised car parks and help redistribute demand. Members heard that the Combined Authority would review the Council's data and assess outcomes and may amend grant arrangements as appropriate.

Reference was made to the distinction between the Strategy and the implementation plan, and clarification was sought on whether the findings of the implementation plan review, scheduled approximately 24 months after approval, would be reported back to the Committee. The Panel was advised that local government reorganisation creates uncertainty regarding longer-term implementation. Whilst some short-term improvements should be considered, responsibility for reviewing longer-term measures is likely to rest with a successor authority.

Concerns were raised regarding parking provision in Ramsey, including the impact of existing covenants, significant parking pressures and any proposals which could result in the loss of parking spaces. The importance of protecting parking capacity and taking local views into account was emphasised. The Panel were informed that available data showed the Ramsey car park to be the busiest in the district, confirming the scale of demand. Ongoing consultation and discussions with local representatives were noted, and it was acknowledged that any solution would need to carefully consider both covenant restrictions and local concerns.

The Panel was advised that several issues raised extended beyond the scope of the Parking Strategy and related more broadly to market town regeneration. Members were informed that further information on related projects could be obtained through the appropriate programme, and it was emphasised that such matters should be considered separately from the Parking Strategy.

It was noted that discussions had sought to ensure key car parks previously considered as part of redevelopment proposals were appropriately safeguarded. Members heard that the wording had been carefully drafted to balance flexibility with the protection of important parking assets and that suggestions for strengthening the wording would be welcomed.

It was suggested that the wording of the Strategy be strengthened in relation to the significant reduction, repurposing or redevelopment of car parks by requiring an assessment to be completed and published before any decision is taken.

Members discussed whether additional safeguards should be included within the Strategy. Officers advice highlighted that the Strategy forms only one part of the wider decision-making framework and that additional requirements could duplicate existing governance arrangements.

It was suggested that matters relating to the disposal or redevelopment of car parks may be more appropriately addressed through the Council's Disposal and Acquisition of Land and Buildings Policy. The importance of ensuring an appropriate evidence base is available prior to decision-making was emphasised.

The Panel was reminded that recommendations may be made to Cabinet, although Cabinet is not bound by them, and that existing constitutional processes are available to scrutinise future decisions.

It was proposed that regular parking performance reports be presented to the Committee and that town-specific action plans be developed to support implementation of the Strategy. In response, the Panel was advised that town-wide considerations would form part of future work on individual car parks and that performance monitoring could be considered through the Committee's KPI review arrangements.

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.

23. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT (QUARTER 1)

By means of a report by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Corporate Performance 2025/26 Quarter 4 Report was presented to the Panel.

Further clarification was sought regarding the new targets which were showing as Green, with particular reference to the Empty Homes target. The Panel was advised that the update related to the strategy adopted in March 2026. It was reported that eight properties had been brought back into use and that progress was rated Green, reflecting positive progress against the objectives of the newly adopted strategy.

A query was raised regarding why a number of performance measures were rated Red. It was suggested that including details of actual performance achieved alongside targets would assist members in understanding the extent of any variance and how close the Council was to meeting its performance targets. The Panel heard that this was primarily due to quarter one data being based on a smaller sample size and ongoing service pressures. It was noted that the missed bin collection measure was below target; however, the target was a locally set and ambitious measure rather than an industry benchmark. Long-term staff sickness during the first quarter had also contributed to the number of missed collections. Members' attention was drawn to Appendix C, which included breakdowns of the data.

Positive feedback was provided regarding the resolution of a missed

bin collection once reported. Concerns were also raised regarding call waiting times, and clarification was sought as to whether these were the result of staffing pressures. It was explained that the service had experienced three vacancies within the team; however, these posts had now been filled. Members were informed that service improvements had already been observed since the appointments were made.

The Chair suggested that introducing a system which advises callers of their position in the telephone queue may help reduce frustration whilst waiting to speak to an adviser.

Officers were thanked for their work in delivering the Open Day at Eastfield House, with positive feedback provided on the event. A query was raised regarding wider staffing resource issues across the organisation, noting that several performance measures rated Red appeared to be linked to staffing pressures. It was suggested that this may be a matter for consideration by the Employment Committee, and clarification was sought regarding the role and purpose of the Sickness Review Group.

The Panel was advised that the Sickness Review Group was responsible for reviewing the Council's sickness management policies and procedures, including whether appropriate support and early intervention measures were in place for employees. Members were informed that the Group currently operated as an internal officer-led control mechanism.

A query was raised as to whether high levels of efficiency within the Contact Centre Team had resulted in reduced staffing levels and whether a smaller team may be contributing to current service pressures. It was confirmed that the vacancies referred to were longstanding vacant posts and that the associated budget savings did not represent a reduction in existing staffing levels. Officers confirmed they were satisfied that staffing levels within the Contact Centre were appropriate. It was also noted that call volumes had increased during the quarter, but officers remained confident that the service had sufficient resources to meet demand.

A query was raised regarding Action 31 relating to the Capital & Centric programme and why the action had been given a Green status. The Panel heard that the quarterly report did not reflect the most recent developments relating to Capital & Centric and that these would be reported in Quarter 2. Members were also informed that the performance measure related to regeneration activity more broadly, including the Market Towns Programme, and was not limited to the Capital & Centric project.

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