

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH) held in the Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 3rd September 2019

PRESENT: Councillor D B Dew – Chairman.

Councillors B S Chapman, S J Corney, J W Davies, Mrs A Dickinson, Dr P L R Gaskin, M S Grice, J P Morris, S Wakeford and D J Wells.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J C Cooper-Marsh and J E White.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors R Fuller, J A Gray, T D Sanderson and Mrs S R Wilson.

21 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9th July 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

22 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

23 NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel received and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) which has been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st September 2019 to 31st December 2019.

24 INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT 2019/20, QUARTER 1

With the aid of a report by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager and the Finance Manager (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the performance of the Council for quarter one of 2019/20 was presented to the Panel.

Clarification was given that all vacant posts are encompassed by the phrase 'staff savings due to delays in recruitment'. Any vacant posts being used to fund other posts will appear as a separate line of expenditure.

Councillor B S Chapman raised a concern on the number of projects experiencing delays and the potential consequence that income would be reduced. In response, the Member was informed that all capital projects are for the benefit of residents and that it is anticipated there will still be payback.

Clarification was given on a £54k increase due to a historical cost. It was confirmed that it was an anticipated restructure saving that wasn't made.

Councillor D J Wells raised a concern in respect to the Alms Close development and that spending has increased from £700k to £1.6m. In response, the Member was informed that the Council are confident that the increase in spend will be matched by an increase in benefits received.

A question was raised by Councillor B S Chapman on why there had been an underspend of £216k on Disabled Facilities Grants. It was explained that as more funding had been received from Better Care Fund than anticipated, the Council would therefore not have to provide as much funding as budget for.

A discussion ensued on the number of staff savings due to a lack of recruitment. It was explained that many of the vacant posts in planning reflects the local and national difficulties of recruiting to those posts. In addition to this other vacant posts are down to the delays in restructure of the staff structure.

Following a question from Councillor S Wakeford on agency spend, it was confirmed that sickness is down and therefore agency spend is also down. It was clarified that the Operations service uses agencies to fill staffing gaps as a result of sickness but as their sickness rates are reduced the need for agency staff is also reduced.

The Panel discussed various aspects of the Commercial Investment Strategy. In particular, Councillor B S Chapman asked for clarification as to why the Council preferred longer leases over shorter leases. In response, Members were informed that CIS properties are an investment for the future, which will underpin the Council's future spending on services. Longer leases are preferable as they give the Council more certainty over revenue it expects to receive over a longer period.

(At 7.11pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor J A Gray entered the meeting.)

(At 7.54pm, on the conclusion of this item, Councillor M S Grice left the meeting.)

25 APPROVAL OF UPDATED NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY PLANNING GUIDE

With the aid of a report by the Planning Service Manager (Growth) (a copy of which has been appended to the Minute Book) the updated Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide was presented to the Panel.

Clarification was given that the guidance is designed to assist Town and Parish Councils develop their neighbourhood plans.

The Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Economic Development informed the Panel that where there is a conflict the most recent plan supercedes the older plans, which in this instance is the Local Plan. However, Neighbourhood Plans are still a consideration when determining planning applications.

Councillor J P Morris asked if it was necessary for Overview and Scrutiny to receive this guide. In response, it was stated that the reason the guide has been presented to the Panel is because Members' input is desired.

(At 7.54pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor T D Sanderson left the meeting.)

(At 7.55pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor M S Grice entered the meeting.)

(At 7.56pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor T D Sanderson entered the meeting.)

(At 8.00pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor Dr P L R Gaskin left the meeting and did not return.)

26 CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY DRAFT LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN

With the aid of a report by the Planning Service Manager (Growth) (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the Council's consultation response to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Draft Local Transport Plan was presented to the Panel.

Following a query by Councillor B S Chapman, the Panel was informed that the Combined Authority's Local Transport Plan will be an overarching document. Cambridgeshire County Council's Local District Transport Strategy will sit beneath the plan.

Councillor J P Morris proposed that the Council should not support a river crossing over the nature reserve. In response, it was stated that the Council could not support or oppose specific river crossing routes as none had been proposed.

Members supported the position the Council is taking in respect that growth should not come at the expense of green space or affordable housing.

The Panel was reassured that the Council will reiterate to the Combined Authority that Members supported a north/south east-west rail interchange with the east coast main line near St Neots.

It was recognised that the objectives prioritisation in the consultation response is artificial as they complimentary of each other.

(At 8.18pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor T D Sanderson left the meeting and did not return.)

(At 8.30pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillors J A Gray and S Wilson left the meeting and did not return.)

27 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 J P Morris requested that the decision to re-designate car parks from short stay to long stay as part of the Car Park Strategy is scrutinised by the Panel at the next meeting in October. In response, the advice was to address concerns to the Executive Councillor for Operations and Regulation in the first instance.

Chairman