

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (CUSTOMERS AND PARTNERSHIPS) held in the Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 12th September 2019

PRESENT: Councillor T D Alban – Chairman.

Councillors B S Banks, R E Bellamy, S Bywater, Mrs A Dickinson, D A Giles, K I Prentice, Mrs S Smith and Mrs J Tavener.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs S Conboy, S J Criswell and Ms A Diaz.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor J M Palmer.

23 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4th July 2019 was approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

24 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

25 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.

26 CIRCULAR ECONOMY PLASTICS

Marisa Brennan of Charpak Ltd gave a presentation to Members on the circular economy for plastics. The Panel was informed what a circular economy was and how the local plastic circular economy was working in Huntingdonshire. Charpak is based in Huntingdon and employs 120 people.

Members were informed of Charpak's objectives of: reduce waste, recycle more, reuse existing resource and remanufacture new products.

The Panel was informed that the biggest challenge in operating a successful circular economy is tying all the relationships together. It was explained that as HDC operates a mixed recycling system, which is convenient for the resident, this means that the recycling requires sorting in order to extract the plastic

required by Charpak. It was confirmed that the process incurs no extra cost for the Council and that the costs are incurred by the waste contractor and Charpak.

When manufacturing containers, Charpak sources 90% of the plastic from recycled material. The other 10% is virgin plastic, which is plastic which hasn't been used before. It was explained that as Charpak's containers are used in food production, food standards require that 10% of the plastic is virgin plastic. Another reason why Charpak uses a mix of recycled and virgin plastics is that 100% recycled plastic becomes brittle over time, however a mixed plastic means that it can be recycled infinitely.

It was noted that for the circular economy to function effectively, residents require education as to the importance of recycling as it was noted that there is a level of scepticism with the public. The Panel was informed that as recycling in Huntingdonshire is co-mingled, which is a disadvantage for the circular economy as it has to be sorted before cleaned. Contamination is also an issue and it was noted that if the contamination rate is above 7% it incurs a financial penalty. Although Members were informed that contamination rates are better this year when compared to last year.

When asked about the effect that the push on reducing plastic would have upon the plastic supply for the circular economy, Members were informed that it is anticipated there won't be a reduction of plastic in the short term.

It was suggested that Charpak adds 'made in Huntingdonshire' to its containers, however the Panel was informed that this is not possible. Charpak will soon be allowed to put 'made in the UK' and are currently working on a QR code which, when accessed, will explain where the plastic is from.

Deposit schemes as a way of encouraging recycling was raised but whilst it was recognised that a scheme could incentivise some people, the Panel was informed that deposit schemes are not viable. It was noted that virgin plastic is cheaper but that ethically and environmentally it is better to use recycled plastic.

When asked how Members could assist, the Panel was informed that Members can be active on social media by raising awareness. A Member stated that there needs to be a traditional awareness campaign as some residents do not have access, or choose not to access, social media. It was noted that the message should be going into schools and educating the next generation, however the Panel noted that the Waste Minimisation Team do go into schools although it was recognised that more could be done.

In concluding the Panel: recognised the work that Charpak has done; recognised the efforts of the Waste Minimisation Team and Refuse Officers; encouraged all Members of the District Council to be recycling champions and welcomed the offer of a site visit to Charpak.

(At 8.13pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor J M Palmer left the meeting.)

(At 8.14pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor J M Palmer entered the meeting.)

27 GROUND MAINTENANCE REVIEW

The Head of Operations presented the Grounds Maintenance Review to the Panel. Members were informed that the internal performance inspections are showing that high standards are being achieved, the number of additional requests has fallen, service call responsiveness is within five days and currently the service is eight staff short. In addition, the service has been delivered this year with a reduced budget.

Discussion ensued over the potential risk that staff shortages could affect standards if the grass had grown more quickly. Fortunately, this year has been dry and therefore the grass has not grown as quick, so the staff shortage has been manageable. When asked about the reason for the shortage, the Panel was informed that the market rate for Grounds Maintenance Staff is around £2-£3k more than what the Council pay and although the Council offer a pension, newer members of staff do not opt to enrol as they prefer to get as much money as possible. Members were reassured that the Council are reviewing a number of options in order to attract and retain staff.

It was noted that the pictorial meadows has attracted positive feedback from park users and have become a welcome addition to the parks.

In summary the Panel: recognised the bio-diversity benefits of the pictorial meadows and noted the number of staff vacancies but recognised that Officers are continually reviewing the package offered. In addition, the Panel requested that an update on the staff shortage is presented before the end of the Municipal Year.

(At 8.34pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor D A Giles left the meeting and did not return.)

28 LIFELONG HEALTH TASK AND FINISH GROUP - PART ONE FINAL REPORT

With the aid of a report by the Lifelong Health Task and Finish Group (a copy of which is appended to the Minute Book) part one of the Lifelong Health Task and Finish Group's study was presented to the Panel. In introducing the report, the Chairman gave Members an overview of the study and informed them that the perception was that Parish Councils are being done to by the Council as opposed to done with.

The Executive Councillor for Partnerships and Well-Being informed the Panel that the report was welcome, although some elements are already being worked on. The Executive Councillor stated that currently consultation is being undertaken in preparation for a Healthy Open Spaces and Play Strategy. Members were reminded that there is a parks survey and all were encouraged to participate.

The Panel agreed with the recommendations contained within the report and, in addition, it was confirmed that Councillor Mrs A Dickinson will lead part two of the study.

(At 9.12pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor K I Prentice left the meeting and did not return.)

29 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 Mrs J Tavener updated the Panel on the work of the Tree Strategy Working Group. It was confirmed that Councillor Mrs J Tavener and Councillor J W Davies will present a final report in October.

Chairman