

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, 5th November 2019

PRESENT: Councillor D B Dew – Chairman.

Councillors B S Chapman, J C Cooper-Marsh, J W Davies, Dr P L R Gaskin, M S Grice, K P Gulson, S Wakeford and D J Wells.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S J Corney and J P Morris.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor J A Gray.

37 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1st October 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

(At 7.05pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor S Wakeford entered the meeting.)

38 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

39 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 November 2019 to 29th February 2020.

Following a query, it was confirmed that the Establishment of Employment Company report will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny before being presented to Cabinet.

40 INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT 2019/20 - QUARTER 2

With the aid of a report by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager and the Finance Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Integrated Performance of the Council for Quarter 2 of 2019/20 was presented to the Panel.

Before introducing the report, the Chief Operating Officer introduced himself and explained the role and what services he will be responsible for. The Panel was

given an overview of how well the Council are doing against the Key Actions and Performance Indicators. In addition to this the Panel was given further details of the projects that were delayed. These include the server room migration which is almost complete, Council Anywhere which is a time based slippage previously reported to Members and the IT Business System for Operations which the Council are making progress.

Councillor Gaskin asked if there could be a link between getting Council Anywhere up and running and reducing the heating costs. In reply it was explained that as more Officers are willing to work from home, it could be possible reduce heating costs.

A question was asked if Key Action 25 includes the backdated rental income from a tenant in Riverside Park. The Chief Operating Officer has stated he would find out whether it did or not. In relation to the same Key Action, Councillor Chapman asked what the process for the removal of restricted covenants was and are Parish and Town Councils notified. The Chief Operating Officer stated that he would clarify the process and respond.

Councillor Gulson asked why £285k was pulled out of reserves for Transformation but that no explanation was given in the report. In response, the Chief Operating Officer confirmed that the £285k was related to planned investment and that Transformation works on projects around the Council.

It was noted that there were some Performance Indicators where no update had been received but Members were informed that the reason for this was because a team had recently lost a key member of staff. Members were assured these indicators were forecast to be Green.

A question was asked about why had there been a higher than expected number of avoidable contacts, in response it was explained that there had been slippage in the delivery of a project which would allow customers to log a street scene request and track it themselves. This in turn has resulted a higher than forecast number of calls to log requests and more calls to track those requests. Once the project is complete it is hoped that avoidable contact will be reduced.

There was some confusion over the status of the One Leisure St Ives Changing Rooms project but it was clarified that the project is currently pending approval and this is down to the fact that there are other projects outstanding which require completing first. It was noted that the project has not been update since July and the Chief Operating Officer stated that he will seek a further update.

Concern was expressed that no update had been received on Key Action 22. After confirming it was not linked to the previous missing data, the Chief Operating Officer stated that he is seeking a response.

Councillor Wakeford asked about Key Action 15 and why options have been developed for St Ives Bus Quarter but there has been no such action on Huntingdon Bus Quarter. The Panel was informed that the Council's land ownership in the area is relatively small and that engagement has been taking place with other land owners in order to see if, through collaboration, something with greater potential could emerge.

When questioned about the fall in the number of benefit claims, the Chief Operating Officer explained that some residents have moved onto universal credit, which in turn has reduced the number of claims. In addition, the way residents make claims has altered as part of continuous improvement of the service. Document uploads allows the Council to process forms more quickly and access has been made easier for residents.

Councillor Chapman asked why project dates are not reviewed constantly, however it was explained that historically the Project Governance Board wanted a fixed date and then see how close the project was at the end of the year.

The Finance Manager introduced the financial aspect of the Integrated Performance Report.

A query was raised as to why £210k was drawn from reserves for Operations. It was explained that the funds was for projects and that it was always the intention to draw it from reserves. The Finance Manager added that this would have been agreed when setting the 2019/20 budget. The Panel requested if the commentary for this could be made clear.

Following a question on the income from replacement bins, it was clarified that the budget had overestimated the income. It was anticipated that developments would happen faster than they have been.

Further to the discussion of previous quarterly reports of the Council's Integrated Performance, it was confirmed that Development has a number of staff vacancies and the Chief Operating Officer is looking at ways to retain staff and minimise vacancies. It was also noted that this is not just an issue for the Council but for most Local Authorities in the South and East of England.

A comment was made by Councillor Chapman that it appears that the expectation is that the standard of street cleansing is expected to be the same standard, despite reducing the number of litter bins.

Councillor Chapman questioned why the Alms Close Development is proceeding despite the cost. In response the Executive Councillor for Resources stated that the project has been reviewed and the decision to proceed is due to the positive revenue impact and the gains in employment opportunities.

Traveller Security Improvements were mentioned and Members were informed that the Council are installing security measures as a prevention but that the number of illegal incursions can't be managed. In addition, Members were informed that there isn't any measure of savings for installing security measures but that a thorough review of all options had taken place before investing in the additional measures.

A concern was raised by Councillor Chapman that the capital budget for the One Leisure St Ives Outdoor Fitness Offering had doubled from the original £250k estimate and the questioned was raised as whether it was worth going ahead. The Executive Councillor for Resources stated that it is disappointing that the estimate has doubled, however despite this the outturn is projected to be greater than if the Council decided to refurbish the squash courts. It was confirmed that the project will be reassessed by Officer in December 2019.

The Disabled Facilities Grants underspend was queried but it was confirmed that the flow of funds ebbs and flows depending on what point it is in the cycle. Currently the Council has just received the grant and will now look to spend it on approved adaptations.

(At 7.18pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor J A Gray entered the meeting.)

41 TREASURY MANAGEMENT SIX MONTH PERFORMANCE REVIEW

With the aid of a report by the Finance Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Treasury Management Six Month Performance Review was presented to the Panel. For clarification, the Finance Manager confirmed that the total in table six is incorrect and informed Members of the correct total.

In response to a question on long term borrowing, the Executive Councillor for Resources stated that the borrow was predominantly for property purchases under the Commercial Investment Strategy (CIS). In addition, the Panel was informed that phase one of the CIS has drawn to a closed. Further discussion on the CIS continued and the Executive Councillor stated that the CIS has achieved what the Council set out to achieve in phase one and that the next phase is looking at what the Council can do beyond earning revenue for Council services. The Panel was interested to hear this and decided that this is an area of potential future investigation.

Members were informed that the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) interest rate has increased which will have an impact upon other projects the Council are considering.

When asked about loans to other organisations, it was confirmed to the Panel that loans have been made to Luminus and Huntingdon Town Council, as well as smaller loans to other organisations.

A discussion ensued on the current CIS property values. It was recognised that this is a technical accounting exercise and what is shown is the current property values before new leases are negotiated and in place.

The Executive Councillor for Resources thanked the Finance Manager and her team in the preparation of the Treasury Management Review.

42 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book), the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was presented to the Panel. In addition to this, the Cabinet Feedback on the Accelerating the Delivery of Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) was presented to the Panel.

The Panel discussed the Cabinet Feedback on the Task and Finish Group study. Members queried the entry that stated that the Executive Councillor believed he should have been invited. The Chairman responded that the Executive Councillor

should only be invited as an expert witness and not as a participant as it would compromise Overview and Scrutiny's independence.

Councillor Wakeford stated that he believed that whilst Rural Exception sites have their place, they do not deserve the fanfare they have been given in the Local Plan.

Confusion was expressed by Members on the point of Housing Associations, as the report stated that the Council should collaborate with Housing Associations whereas the feedback suggested that Housing Associations should do more by themselves.

Community Land Trusts were discussed and although they had been dismissed by the Task and Finish Group in this study, the Panel agreed that they could revisit the issue at a future point.

A question was raised as to whether the Council should look at using unoccupied properties for affordable housing, however Members were informed that this is already be reviewed.

(At 8.41pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor J A Gray left the meeting and did not return.)

Chairman