

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH) held as a remote meeting via Zoom on Wednesday, 16th September 2020

PRESENT: Councillor E R Butler – Vice-Chairman, in the Chair.

Councillors B S Chapman, J C Cooper-Marsh, D B Dew, I D Gardener, M S Grice, A Roberts, S Wakeford and D J Wells.

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors R Fuller, J A Gray and J Neish.

19 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 8th July 2020 and 28th July 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

20 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

21 NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel received and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which had been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st September 2020 to 31st December 2020.

22 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020/21, QUARTER 1

With the aid of a report by the Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Council's financial performance for quarter 1 of 2020/21 was presented to the Panel.

In summarising the report, the Chief Finance Officer informed the Panel that the Council had experienced a loss of revenue as well as extra expenditure as a result of the pandemic and subsequent lockdown. There would be compensation from the Government but the details were yet to be finalised. The accuracy of the budget estimates were dependent on whether there would be a second wave of Covid-19 and reintroduction of restrictions.

Members were informed that the estimated £2.9m deficit was not as bad as originally feared. The Council had been able to assist many residents and had provided support packages for businesses. The Council had also received emergency funding to cover unexpected expenditure.

Councillor Cooper-Marsh asked what the impact of a second lockdown or local lockdown would be upon the finances of the Council. The Panel was informed that the impact would be dependent on the support the Council would offer to vulnerable residents and whether there were any further restrictions on leisure services, which would impact on One Leisure.

A concern was raised by Councillor Cooper-Marsh regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on next year's Council Tax and particularly whether it would be likely to rise to cover lost income. In response, the Panel was reassured that Council Tax could not rise any further than the statutory maximum.

In following on, Councillor Wells asked whether the budget forecast included any predicted future losses in relation to One Leisure income particularly as a result of any capacity limits that might have to be implemented. In response, Members were informed that the forecast included future losses and that estimates were made based on a slow recovery. However, there was a compensation scheme under which leisure facilities could claim 75p for every £1 of income lost.

Councillor Dew questioned whether the perceived lack of daytime bookings was accounted for in budget estimates. The Chief Finance Officer stated that estimates were as accurate as they could be and would therefore account for variances in attendance.

The discussion moved onto the Commercial Investment Strategy (CIS). Councillor Roberts asked what impact the pandemic would have on it and any future investments. The Panel was reassured that rental income was higher than the same period the previous year despite the fact that the council had not added to its acquisitions. In addition, the Executive Councillor confirmed that it was unlikely that there would be any CIS purchases in the current economic climate.

The Council's social obligations in its role as a landlord of CIS properties was raised by Councillor Wakeford. The Panel was informed that under the ICS the Council operated on a commercial basis but that it was aware of its social obligations. These were met through engagement with tenants and the Commercial Estates Team worked hard in establishing which of them required assistance.

Councillor Chapman enquired whether the capital value of the Council's CIS properties had fallen or was expected to fall. It was confirmed that some values had fallen but that the Council did not invest in the properties for their capital values but rather for the rental revenues.

Councillor Chapman then raised the issue of the reintroduction of car parking charges and asked whether there was scope to reduce the charges in order to assist retail in the District's market towns. In response, Members were informed that some retail areas were suffering before the pandemic and that the important aim was to diversify town centres as studies showed these fared better than those that offered a purely retail experience.

With the aid of a report by the Performance and Data Analyst (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Council's performance for quarter 1 of 2020/21 was presented to the Panel. The Chief Operating Officer informed the Panel that the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted many areas and that all the key actions and corporate indicators that were rated red were attributed to the pandemic and associated lockdown. Members were reminded that throughout the pandemic the Council had continued to provide services as well as assistance to vulnerable residents.

Councillor Chapman thanked the Council for the way it had worked with volunteer groups throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Councillor Wakeford enquired whether the Council could continue the additional homelessness support once the Covid-19 pandemic was over. In response, the Panel was informed that Huntingdonshire normally had low levels of homelessness and the challenge was to identify good temporary accommodation. The provision of additional support was something that could be considered.

24 CORPORATE PLAN REFRESH 2020/21

With the aid of a report by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Corporate Plan Refresh 2020/21 was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Roberts asked how important partnership working would be going forward. In response, the Panel was informed that partnership working was crucial for the Council in order to fulfil the aims of the Corporate Plan. There were significant problems which required the Council to work with partners to resolve them for the benefit of Huntingdonshire residents.

RESOLVED

- a) that the Corporate Plan Refresh be endorsed, and
- b) that the Cabinet be recommended to endorse the proposed list of key actions and performance indicators for 2020/21.

25 A141 AND ST IVES STUDY

Consideration was given to a report by the Service Manager Growth (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which were appended the findings of the A141 Huntingdon Capacity Study and the St Ives Transport Study.

The Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning informed Members that the studies started in April 2018 and that the aim was to look at ways to increase capacity and unlock areas for growth. In addition, it was noted that where the report mentioned 'Quick-Wins' they only related to St Ives. The Service Manager Growth added that the study had identified that there would be problems in unlocking Wyton for growth and therefore the area was not included within the Local Plan.

Councillor Gardener raised a concern over the possibility of a lack of capacity on the B-roads around the A141 once the upgrade had been completed. In response, Members were reassured that phase two of the study would involve more in-depth analysis to ensure the local road network had sufficient capacity to cope. It was noted that this would also include changing prioritisation of some routes to ensure the majority of the traffic was directed where it was intended.

Councillor Dew asked whether the study had considered rerouting Harrison Way in order to make access to St Ives easier. In response, Members were informed that any such suggestions would be considered during a more in-depth St Ives study. The current study only reviewed the current situation and did not look at future capacity.

The Panel supported the contents of the report and

RESOLVED

To recommend that the Cabinet

- a) endorses the results of the A141 Study
- b) endorses the results of the St Ives Transport Study
- c) approves the list of proposals identified in the St Ives study and supports CCC in their submission to the Combined Authority for funding, and for consultation and delivery should funding be secured, and
- d) approves the CPCA recommendation of a new dedicated strategic study for St Ives.

26 ENGLAND'S ECONOMIC HEARTLANDS CONSULTATION RESPONSE

With the aid of a report by the Service Manager Growth (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Council's response to the England's Economic Heartlands Consultation was presented to the Panel.

In introducing the item, the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and the Service Manager Growth explained to the Panel that what was presented was a response to a consultation and that the Council was a consultee.

Councillor Cooper-Marsh asked about the East West Rail project. Members were reminded that that whilst England's Economic Heartlands would like oversight of East West Rail, it was not the lead authority and, instead, was a consultee. It was confirmed that the East West Rail consortium would lead on that project.

Councillor Wells suggested that the response should emphasise that the Huntingdonshire section of the Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro (CAM) should be given priority. In response, the Panel was informed that the Combined Authority were currently reviewing CAM as a whole project and that the Executive Councillor continued to emphasise the need to prioritise the Huntingdonshire section.

Councillor Gardener raised a concern regarding HGVs using minor routes as short cuts and sought assurance that the response would emphasise there was a need for official routes for HGVs. In response, it was noted that the consultation as a whole took a strategic approach across the Cam-Ox corridor and that

particular incidents of HGVs using minor routes, particularly through villages, should be taken up with the relevant Highway Authority.

Following on, Councillor Chapman raised a concern that additional traffic coming into Huntingdonshire as a result of the decisions made in the Bedford Borough Council Local Plan had not been taken into consideration. The Panel was informed that the District Council was consulted as a neighbourhood consultee but that Bedford Borough Council would also have to consult with Cambridgeshire County Council as well, particularly if there were highway implications within the Local Plan.

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 Panel reviewed the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme.

Chairman