

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, 7th October 2020

PRESENT: Councillor S J Corney – Chairman.

Councillors J C Cooper-Marsh, D B Dew, I D Gardener, Dr P L R Gaskin, M S Grice, J P Morris, A Roberts and S Wakeford.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor D J Wells.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors R Fuller and J Neish.

28 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16th September 2020 was approved as a correct record by the Panel.

29 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor S J Corney declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in relation to Minute Number 35 by virtue of being a Member on the Development Management Committee.

Councillor D B Dew declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in relation to Minute Number 35 by virtue of being a Member on the Development Management Committee.

Councillor I D Gardener declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in relation to Minute Number 35 by virtue of being a Member on the Development Management Committee.

Councillor A Roberts declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in relation to Minute Number 35 by virtue of being a Member on the Development Management Committee.

30 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 October 2020 to 31st January 2021.

31 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.

32 COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY GOVERNANCE

Consideration was given to a report by the Service Manager – Growth (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) to which the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Governance was presented to the Panel.

The Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning introduced the report and informed Members that CIL funding is divided into three pots: ‘meaningful proportion’ for Town and Parish Councils, ‘Strategic’ for infrastructure projects which can unlock growth and a final pot to cover administration costs. It was confirmed that the report covered the ‘strategic’ pot. It was explained that it is proposed all applications seeking funding of £50k or less are to be decided by the Corporate Director (Place) and the Service Manager – Growth in consultation with the Executive Leader and the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning.

Councillor Wakeford asked how equitable the process will be and how are Parishes encouraged to bid. However, in response the Panel was reminded that the process is not entirely equitable as some areas would have greater growth than others and would therefore require additional levy funding.

A comment was made, by Councillor Dew, that the proposed governance arrangements appeared more transparent and that he welcomed them. Councillor Dew added that he was content that some areas would receive more funding than other areas due to receiving more growth and that he agreed with the ethos that the levy funding should be for projects that provide an overall growth benefit for the District.

Councillor Roberts supported the comments made by Councillor Dew and added that he thought it is a well thought out proposal. In addition, after clarification was given, Councillor Roberts was reassured about what projects would classify as an urgent and unforeseen infrastructure requirement.

The Panel raised a concern over monitoring of the governance arrangements but Members were reassured that there will be a full monitoring report presented to Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet twice a year.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet be recommended to support the introduction of a new process for the allocation of CIL funding.

33 "PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE" WHITE PAPER CONSULTATION RESPONSE

With the aid of a report by the Service Manager – Growth (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the Council’s consultation response to the “Planning for the future” white paper was presented to the Panel.

The Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning introduced the report and informed the Panel that the paper reflected the District Council's response to the consultation and that other bodies and individuals had the opportunity to submit their own responses.

Councillor Roberts raised a concern regarding the proposal for an infrastructure levy set nationally and asked whether the response could strongly emphasise that a locally set infrastructure levy is the preferred option for the Council. The Executive Councillor explained that the proposal for a nationally set levy lacked detail and agreed that a locally set levy would be preferable. Councillor Roberts raised a further concern regarding the proposal to allow borrowing against the infrastructure levy. He argued that this carries a very significant level of risk for the Council and this should be highlighted in the response.

A query was raised, by Councillor Gardener, on how the Council are able to manage change going forward if the proposals are adopted, particularly with larger developments. In response, it was noted that the Government would prefer planning permission granted at an earlier stage but that the response will emphasise that phasing should remain.

Councillor Dew stated that the proposed changes and subsequent response does not cover the significant planning issue of land banking, although he recognised that the response form does not give the opportunity to mention the issue.

Councillor Wakeford asked about the impact the Council's response would have upon the proposals. Members were reassured that the proposals are not confirmed and that there is scope, through the consultation, to persuade the Government that there should be alterations to the proposals.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet be recommended to consider Overview and Scrutiny's comments on the consultation and delegate authority to finalise and submit the Council's consultation response to the Service Manager – Growth and the Planning Policy Team Leader in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning.

34 HOUSING STRATEGY 2020-2025

The Panel considered a report by the Interim Corporate Director (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) on the Housing Strategy 2020-2025.

The Executive Leader introduced the report and in doing so he stated that he appreciated the input Overview and Scrutiny had during the development of the Housing Strategy and added that he is pleased to see Overview and Scrutiny taking an active role in policy development. He reminded the Panel that the Council was not a stock-owning authority but that the District has significant housing challenges which the Council hopes to address through the Strategy.

Housing Consultant, Liz Bisset, thanked everyone who participated in the consultation and informed Members that generally there has been a positive response to the Strategy.

Reference was made to Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs review, however it was explained to the Panel that Cambridgeshire County Council are responsible for the delivery of the review and a completion date has yet to be finalised.

The ambition of the Housing Strategy 2020-2025 was praised by Councillor Roberts and in addition he stated he supported the aims and objectives of the Action Plan, although he did raise a concern with regards to the proposed reduction in Disabled Facility Grant spending. In response, the Panel was reassured that the reduction in spend would focus on how to best make use of the funding available and achieve better value for money.

Councillor Cooper-Marsh was concerned how residents who are not eligible for a Housing Association property and who do not meet the eligibility criteria for private rented accommodation would be covered by the Strategy. The Panel was reassured that if the Council was to become a landlord of private properties then it could act in a more socially responsible way and could provide accommodation for such residents.

Councillor Dew stated that he thought the Strategy would be useful and will look forward to the Cabinet approving the Strategy and the accompanying one-year action plan. Councillor Corney added that he thought the Strategy is a credit to the Council and that it demonstrated a willingness to act and tackle the significant housing challenges facing the District.

In seeking reassurance that the Council would not rule out working with local authority partners, Councillor Wakeford and the rest of the Panel was informed that the Strategy does not set out rules but allows the Council to take a more pragmatic approach on who it will work with, depending on the circumstances at the time.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet be recommended to agree the Housing Strategy for 2020-25 and the accompanying one-year action plan.

35 HOUSING DEVELOPMENT ON COUNCIL OWNED SITES

Consideration was given to a report by the Interim Corporate Director (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) which proposes the sale of Council owned sites for housing development.

In introducing the report, the Executive Leader explained that the Council had undertaken a process and found a partner who is willing to work on all the sites identified as being suitable for development. He added that the report covers 13 sites and that another 30 sites owned by the Council were deemed as inappropriate for development. Consultant, Adrian Davey, added that the option of the Council self-developing the sites was reviewed, however it was deemed unpractical.

Councillor Corney stated that the approach of selecting appropriate sites to sell for development made sense and supported the recommendations as outlined within the report.

Councillor Wakeford wanted reassurance that a consultation would occur with the relevant communities to ensure that the impact of the decision to dispose of land for development would not adversely affect the community by removing its current use of the land. The Panel was reassured that a consultation would occur with the relevant Ward Members and Parish Councils in order to establish what community use, if any, the land currently has.

Councillor Dew commented that the potential for an additional 91 homes for affordable rent and affordable purchase within the District is positive and stated that he thought that Option 2, as highlighted by the report, is the correct option to select.

RESOLVED

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) recommended that Cabinet endorse the recommendations as outlined within the report at Appendix A.

Chairman