

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, 3rd February 2021

PRESENT: Councillor S J Corney – Chairman.

Councillors E R Butler, 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.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors B S Chapman and D J Wells.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors J A Gray and J Neish.

55 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 6th January 2021 and 25th January 2021 were approved as a correct record by the Panel.

56 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

57 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 February 2021 to 31st May 2021.

58 FINAL 2021/22 REVENUE BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2022/23 TO 2025/26) INCLUDING THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME

By means of a report by the Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Final 2021/22 Revenue Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) (2022/23 to 2025/26) including the Capital Programme was presented to the Panel. During the introduction, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources formally thanked all Officers for their work during the Municipal Year 2020/21, especially when faced by new challenges as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was noted that in previous years the Panel would have received a draft budget, however it had been agreed with Group Leaders that this would not be appropriate this year because it would have contained a number of significant unknown variances. Members were then acquainted with the headline elements of the budget including no increase in the District Council's proportion of Council Tax for 2021/22 and an amendment to the level of reserves required to be held by the Council.

A discussion ensued on Council Tax with a question from Councillor Grice who asked whether no increase in 2021/22 would lead to a substantially higher increase in subsequent years. Councillor Wakeford questioned how the proposed freeze compared with political commitments. In response, the Executive Councillor commented that Council Tax rises were restricted by statute and that Council Tax would increase by 2.6% in the subsequent years of the MTFS. The Executive Councillor confirmed that the Council Tax freeze was consistent with political commitments.

Following a query from Councillor Roberts, it was confirmed that no alternative budget proposals were received.

Councillor Cooper-Marsh commented on the unpredictable nature of some aspects of the budget and about the reliance of the budget on revenue which might not materialise. In response, Members were informed that revenue from One Leisure, the Car Parks and the commercial estate had been lower than expected in 2020/21, and Officers had, as a result, been prudent in their revenue predictions when setting the budget for 2021/22. Consequently, it was possible that revenue receipts might exceed expectations. Councillor Dew commented that, despite the challenges that had faced the Council's finances in the last year, he thought it was a sound budget.

Members discussed the proposal to lower the minimum level of reserves that the Council was required to hold. The basis of the previous limit was outlined. The new limit was based on an assessment of risks and the likelihood that they would occur. The proposal was supported by the Panel, as was the premise of using reserves this year due to the challenges that faced the Council's finances as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Following a question from Councillor Wakeford on the likelihood that the use of reserves would be required in the coming year, Members were informed that the Council did not intend to be reliant on reserves. Councillor Wakeford then sought assurance that the level of provision within the budget was sufficient for the Council to continue the good work done in many areas such as homelessness. It was confirmed that the Council would continue to provide services for residents who were struggling. Whereupon, the Panel,

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to support the Final Budget 2021/22, the MTFS 2022/23 to 2025/25 and the Capital Programme.

59 2021/22 TREASURY MANAGEMENT, CAPITAL AND INVESTMENT STRATEGIES

With the aid of a report by the Chief Finance Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the 2021/22 Treasury Management, Capital and Investment Strategies was presented to the Panel. It was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to endorse the Treasury Management, Capital and Investment Strategies.

60 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020/21, QUARTER 3

By means of a report by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Corporate Performance Report 2020/21, Quarter 3 was presented to the Panel. Following the introduction, Councillor Wakeford commented that it was surprising that Performance Indicator 27 was rate red, particularly because some suppliers would be relying upon invoices being paid. It was explained that the situation had arisen as a result of Officers being on furlough or sick leave and would be addressed.

After a further query from Councillor Wakeford regarding Performance Indicator 14, the Panel was informed that owing to the low numbers involved an individual appeal decision could affect the figures, which was what had happened on this occasion.

Councillor Morris requested information on Key Action 27 under the Place Strategic Theme. It was reported that the project with the County Council aimed to reduce car dominance in the two towns via a fund to promote cycling and walking schemes. The Panel was informed that the Town Councils had a significant influence over which schemes were carried forward.

After a question by Councillor Roberts on Key Action 3, it was confirmed that Officers had developed plans to ensure customers could safely use One Leisure facilities when permitted to do so.

In response to a question by Councillor Morris on Key Action 23, the Panel was informed that schemes had been submitted to the Combined Authority seeking funding from the £1.5m Prospectuses for Growth fund.

61 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020/21, QUARTER 3

With the aid of a report by the Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Financial Performance Report 2020/21, Quarter 3 was presented to the Panel. Members were apprised of the headline statistics including the projected revenue overspend of £800k. Following a query from Councillor Wakeford on the £100k worth of savings in relation to unspent salaries, it was confirmed that the posts the salaries related to, especially those deemed necessary to priority areas of work, had not been left vacant solely for financial reasons.

62 COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY SPEND ALLOCATION

By means of a report by the Service Manager Growth (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Spend Allocation was presented to the Panel. In relation to the Buckden to Huntingdon Safe Cycling and Walking Route, Councillor Roberts commented that it was a beneficial scheme, however the percentage of funding to be obtained from CIL was higher than desirable. Councillor Gardener expressed the view that the proportion of funds obtained from CIL should not exceed 50% of the project cost. Members suggested that the County Council should be requested to make a greater contribution to the

scheme. In response, the Panel was informed that such a restriction might not be beneficial and that the project was subjected to match funding.

Councillor Roberts questioned why the Cricket Pavilion, King George V Playing Field scheme had been recommended for approval and raised a general point on what was deemed desirable or essential. In response, Members were informed that the scheme had met the criteria, which was why it was recommended for approval. It was understood that the critical, essential and desirable definitions were linked to those used for the Local Plan and that the scheme would enable the facility to meet Sport England requirements.

Councillor Cooper-Marsh sought further information on the Splash Park and Learner Swimming Pool in St Neots. It was confirmed that the scheme was recommended to be declined because the application lacked sufficient information and that what information was provided did not meet the criteria.

Councillor Dew questioned whether the Special School would provide places for pupils from Huntingdonshire only or if pupils from other Local Authority areas would attend as well. If it was the latter, Councillor Dew questioned whether the other Local Authorities should contribute towards the costs of the project. The Panel was informed that pupils from outside of the Huntingdonshire would attend the school but that funding arrangements, particularly from other Local Authorities, had yet to be confirmed.

The Chairman welcomed the report and projects being presented. Having commented on the transparency the governance arrangements had given to the CIL application process, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be encouraged to endorse the recommendations contained within the report.

63 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.

Chairman