

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH) held in the Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Marys Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 2 June 2021

PRESENT: Councillor S J Corney – Chairman.

Councillors E R Butler, B S Chapman, D B Dew, Dr P L R Gaskin, M Haines, A Roberts, T D Sanderson and D J Wells.

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors R Fuller and J Neish

4 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 3rd March 2021 and 19th May 2021 were approved as a correct record by the Panel.

5 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

6 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 June 2021 to 30th September 2021.

Following a question from Councillor Wells, it was confirmed that a report on the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan Consultation had been deferred to a future meeting due to a delay from Cambridgeshire County Council.

7 EAST WEST RAIL MAKING MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS NON-STATUTORY CONSULTATION

By means of a report by the Strategic Growth Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the East West Rail Making Meaningful Connections Non-Statutory Consultation was presented to the Panel.

The Panel noted that the consultation was non-statutory and that both Councillors and residents are encouraged to submit their own responses to the consultation online.

Concerns were raised regarding the location of a viaduct in the vicinity of St Neots and the impact this may have on planned housing provision in the Local Plan. It was agreed that not enough information has been made available on this

proposal by East West Rail but that this will be investigated once it becomes available.

Further concerns were raised regarding the location of the proposed St Neots/Tempsford station, support for a station at St Neots South continues to be encouraged in order to provide maximum economic benefits for Huntingdonshire residents.

During the discussion, the biodiversity and consideration of the environmental impact of the scheme was welcomed and Councillor Dew also enquired about the use of hydrogen or electric trains as a greener option.

Although there was overall support for the proposal, Councillors expressed frustration that there is currently not enough detail provided by East West Rail on route alignments and location of stations. It was also felt that East West Rail had not made sufficient attempts to engage with the public during the consultation period.

The Strategic Growth Manager indicated that the expected timeline of the development shows finalised options in 2022 at which point a statutory consultation is anticipated.

The Panel,

RESOLVED

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

8 A428 DEVELOPMENT CONSENT ORDER UPDATE AND DELEGATED AUTHORITY

With the aid of a report by the Strategic Growth Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) The A428 Development Consent Order Update and Delegated Authority Report was presented to the Panel. The Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning apprised Members of the background to the report.

Councillor Chapman expressed concerns that the proposals would result in changes to the traffic flow within St Neots itself. Concern was expressed that agencies were not working collaboratively to ensure both local infrastructure and future developments were being considered.

It was thereupon,

RESOLVED

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

9 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

With the aid of a report by the Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the Treasury Management Annual Report 2020/21 was presented to the Panel by the Executive Leader.

The Managing Director stressed the difficulties that the past twelve months had presented to financial planning. There has been ongoing monitoring of the situation as income streams were not able to be predicted in the usual manner to the unprecedented global and national circumstances.

Following a comment from Councillor Wells regarding the depreciation in value of the Council's commercial estate, the Panel were advised that this was a national trend as a result of the global pandemic. Further, it was reassured that this will be monitored and assessed in the long term.

10 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020/21 (QUARTER 4)

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 4) was presented to the Panel.

The Panel welcomed the report and thanked officers for their hard work and diligence over the course of the challenging year. Members noted the transparency of the figures within the report and it was also observed that any red actions were due to unprecedented circumstances.

The Panel praised the work that has been undertaken to prevent homelessness over the past year. It was noted that although it was hoped that this would have a positive long term impact, the Council would continue to support all residents in homelessness prevention. Members were reassured that a recovery plan was in place for One Leisure and Active Lifestyles.

Following a question by Councillor Gaskin as to whether the new working practices implemented over the past 12 months had had a positive impact on the reduction in sickness absence, the Panel were advised that the figures were reflected across all departments, including those who were unable to work from home due to the nature of their role.

The reduction in staff sickness absence was noted, although it was advised that COVID related absences were not included within the figures. Following a question regarding long term plans for working practices, it was assured that working practices are being considered alongside the business needs of the Council.

11 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020/21 (QUARTER 4)

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 4) was presented to the Panel.

The Executive Leader advised the Panel that when the pandemic started, the Council did not have the benefit of hindsight of where we are now. The need to do the right thing for residents along with supporting local communities took precedence and that the financial support from the Government which followed was unprecedented.

Following a query by Councillor Sanderson, it was confirmed that a one off grant providing funding for the clinically and extremely vulnerable was part of a national support package giving an amount per head on residents identified by local GPs.

It was noted that to ensure recovery, financial strategies were put in place to monitor income streams throughout the pandemic. The significant achievements of the teams involved to not only support local communities but also remain under budget was noted.

The Panel welcomed the report and thanked officers for their hard work and diligence over the course of the challenging year.

12 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.

Following changes to the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny panels, Councillor Roberts was appointed to the Markets Task and Finish Group.

Chairman