

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH) held in Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 6 July 2022.

- PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chairman.
- Councillors A M Blackwell, S Cawley,
S J Corney, I D Gardener, J A Gray,
S A Howell, R Martin, Dr M Pickering and
R A Slade.
- APOLOGY(IES): Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J E Harvey and N Wells.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors S J Conboy, B Mickleburgh and S Wakeford.

14. MINUTES

Councillor Gleadow's apologies were added to the minutes of the meeting held on 8th June 2022, after which the minutes were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

16. 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 July 2022 to 31st October 2022.

17. CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY - LOCAL TRANSPORT AND CONNECTIVITY PLAN

By means of a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) – Local Transport and Connectivity Plan was presented to the Panel.

Disappointment was expressed by Councillor Gardener that the document did not go into enough detail on the subject of public transport. It was stated that rural communities are not served by public transport, and that rural roads are often perceived to be unsafe for cyclists, therefore these communities are unable to make any alternative decisions for transport other than by

private car. Councillor Gardner further observed that if the Council's climate aspirations are to be met, alternative transports needed to be developed and made available across the whole district not just the four towns within the district. The Panel heard that whilst this observation was well put, the CPCA must be commended for acknowledging the challenges faced within Huntingdonshire, in particular the aspirations for an improved bus service. It was noted that greater detail will follow in due course.

The Panel heard that the report specifically highlighted demand responsive travel in Ramsey, however Councillor Gardener argued that this issue is district wide and not restricted to the towns which are better served than rural areas.

Councillor Howell queried whether there were any reassurances on public transport provision in the North of the district. It was specifically noted that as Yaxley borders another authority, there are no direct bus links with the Serpentine Green Shopping Centre which is a main hub for shopping for Yaxley residents. The Panel heard that whilst concerns are recognised, the report provides high level strategy, more detail will come forward in specific projects as this is progressed.

Having expressed appreciation that Ramsey had been highlighted for improvement within the report, Councillor Corney stated that he felt the Council's response should be more strongly worded. It was particularly noted that whilst the demand based transport model currently works, it is not felt to be sustainable should demand increase. Councillor Cawley seconded the call for a punchier response and especially highlighted the disappointing lack of detail within the report. The Panel heard that the comments of the Panel would be noted and the response reviewed prior to submission.

It was observed by Councillor Gray, that the CPCA needed to make some decisions and provide further detail whilst allowing local authorities scope to provide a more detailed response. The Panel were advised that the Cabinet report would be submitted alongside the response to compensate for the restrictive nature of the response form.

Councillor Pickering enquired whether any secure cycle storage facilities were planned for the district, as he felt the lack of these was another major obstacle in encouraging cycling within the district. The Panel heard that this level of detail was anticipated within the Active Travel document, which the Council would expect to have input into.

Councillor Gardener again highlighted that the report focused on the market towns within the district with no alternatives to private cars being mentioned for rural areas which make up the

bulk of the district. The Panel were assured that the recognition of challenges faced by our rural district were included within the Council's response.

The Panel praised the hard work of the officers and commented on the limited scope within which they were able to comment. It was thereupon

RESOLVED

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

18. CORPORATE PLAN 2022/23

By means of a report by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager, (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Corporate Plan 2022/23 was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Gray observed that the Corporate Plan was for the whole Council to adopt, not just the joint administration and that it would be useful to refer to it as such. This point was noted and the messaging would be amended to reflect this. Councillor Gray further observed that the new administration had inherited a very strong financial position from the previous administration, and whilst pragmatism is welcomed, the plan looked very similar to previous years with the exception of the climate emergency declaration. It was further stated that residents of Huntingdonshire had voted for change in the recent elections but that none was visible within the plan. The Panel heard that whilst there were current similarities to previous plans, change is coming. Once this has been properly investigated and developed then it will be taken forward, and it was further noted that these continued developments were expected to be in the updated plan from April 2023.

Councillor Cawley echoed Councillor Gray's concerns and queried the expected outcome of the environmental crisis declaration addition. The Panel heard that the administration were taking the crisis seriously and planned to add substance to the actions currently being developed with further detail to be provided in due course.

Councillor Howell enquired whether an indicator could be added under the objective strengthening communities to show timescales for payments to community groups. The Panel were advised that this would be investigated with context being developed into the commentary.

It was observed by Councillor Corney, that a Task and Finish Group had previously looked at the topic of affordable housing

and enquired what further work was expected on this. The Panel heard that this is being revisited due to the shifting nature of the district and the housing market. Further cross party working and involvement from Scrutiny would be welcomed as this gathers pace.

The reasoning behind the Invest and Made in Huntingdonshire project was questioned by Councillor Pickering who felt that residents identified more with their local community than with the district. The Panel heard that the administration were mindful of this and that a blend of these identities would be developed going forward allowing scope to attract large investors to the district as a whole.

Councillor Martin queried the indicator for super-fast broadband, he observed that as a fluctuating technology with constant improvements it is therefore hard to measure. The Panel heard that Ofcom data would be used for this indicator and would be adjusted according to the available data.

Having largely welcomed the report, the Panel thereupon

RESOLVED

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

19. FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2021/22 QUARTER 4

By means of a report by the Chief Finance Officer, (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Finance Performance Report 2021/22 Quarter 4 was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Gray observed that the 2021/22 budget had been authorised during the remote covid Council sessions with no objections and only two abstentions, and that the reported surplus had left the new administration in a favourable position financially. It was also observed that Government grants previously available may not be available in the future.

The Panel heard that some income streams had been underestimated in the budget setting for 2021/22 but that all the available information would be used to ensure a robust position moving forward.

Having welcomed the report, it was thereupon

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to endorse the recommendations within the report.

20. TREASURY MANAGEMENT 6 MONTH PERFORMANCE REVIEW

By means of a report by the Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Treasury Management 6 Month Performance Review was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Gray observed the strong financial position with plenty of reserves that the previous administration had left the Council in, therefore nothing of concern could be observed within the report.

Having welcomed the report, the Panel therefore

RESOLVED

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

21. 3C LEGAL, ICT AND BUILDING CONTROL SHARED SERVICES ANNUAL REPORTS 2021/22

By means of a report by the Corporate Director (People) (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the 3C Legal, ICT and Building Control Shared Services Annual Reports 2021/22 were presented to the Panel.

Having praised the position that ICT were in, Councillor Corney enquired on the progress of the Building Control Service to be in a similar position. The Panel heard that the Building Control Service had a good reputation and furthermore that their performance and profitability had remained strong despite the recent fluctuations of the industry. The officer noted the specific issue raised and would investigate outside of the meeting.

Councillor Gray questioned the speed of response and customer satisfaction levels attained by the Legal Service. The Panel heard that indicators were reflective of the feedback received and it was noted that this may not be a fair reflection over time. The Panel were assured that regular meetings were held to identify and resolve any issues arising within the service. Councillor Gray's concerns that by continuing with these indicators the Council were not being honest with themselves or the public were noted along with his suggestion that these be revised with a more critical eye.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Martin on the work processes within ICT, the Panel were reassured that all processes and server security were robustly tested and that the Council were confident that there was an extremely low risk of any issue arising in this area. Councillor Martin further enquired on the timeline of moving to be completely remote, the Panel

heard that whilst there were some expected challenges, emergency contingency planning was already in place. The officer noted the query and would advise the Panel of more detail in due course.

Councillor Pickering enquired on the timescales involved in the employment of a Cyber Security team and whether security measures were in place in the absence of this. The Panel were assured that this was something which the Council takes very seriously and that the Cyber Security roles, which were currently in the advertisement stage, would enhance the current robust security measures.

Having welcomed the reports, the Panel thereupon

RESOLVED

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

22. 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