

Public
Key Decision - No

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Review of Representatives on Outside Bodies and Internal Drainage Boards

Meeting/Date: Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth – 1st February 2023
Cabinet – 7th February 2023

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Place

Report by: Democratic Services Officer

Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

Cabinet makes annual appointments to a variety of Outside Bodies and Internal Drainage Boards. Overview and Scrutiny were asked by Cabinet under the previous administration to review this scheme of appointments.

This report summarises these appointments, the discussions that took place with a selection of representatives from these Boards and Organisations and the recommended actions to ensure clarity and consistency.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet/Committee is

RECOMMENDED

- a) to implement a proper reporting process;
- b) to identify the relevant Officers to take ownership of the relationship between the Council, Councillor and Organisation or Board;
- c) to establish regular communication between Officers and nominated Councillors to ensure consistency and clarity;
- d) to develop a job description to establish clarity and consistency for appointed Councillors;
- e) to set clear expectations for Members and ensure they are able to fulfil the duties of the role when appointed,

- f) to review the list of organisations and boards appointed to, and
- g) to ensure that appointments are non-political and are made taking ward and specialist expertise into account.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report contains the background, justification, process, conclusions and recommendations arising from a task and finish study on the Council's scheme of appointments to outside bodies and Internal Drainage Boards.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Overview and Scrutiny Members were asked to consider the scheme of appointments to outside bodies and Internal Drainage Boards. This report looks at that study.
- 2.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) appointed a Task and Finish Group (The Group) comprising Councillors S Cawley, S Corney, I Gardener and S Howell. The Group appointed Councillor I Gardener as its Rapporteur.

3. ANALYSIS

- 3.1 The Group's first task was to complete a study plan. In doing so, the purpose of the study was confirmed to be to examine:

- The process of appointments to outside bodies
- The process of appointments to Internal Drainage Boards
- The process of reporting between appointed Councillors, Officers and Bodies/Boards.
- The process of reporting to the Council with an annual summary.

- 3.2 The initial step was to review the current process of appointments. It was established that many discrepancies existed. It was therefore decided that the study would aim to clarify and streamline the process to ensure best practice and best value for the Council, the organisations involved and residents. Bodies and officers were identified to investigate detail.

- 3.3 The case studies were:

- Alconbury and Ellington Drainage Board
- Kimbolton School Board of Governors

The Group were fortunate to be able to interview:

- The Chairman of the Governors of Kimbolton School
- H Raby of Internal Drainage Board – Alconbury & Ellington
- P Camamile and D McMurdo of Bedford Group of Drainage Boards
- Councillor J Clarke who is currently the appointed Member for the Internal Drainage Board – Holmewood & District
- The Operations Manager for Environmental Services
- The Executive Leader of the Council

This allowed for a broad understanding of what is expected of Councillors by boards, organisations and Officers alike.

- 3.4 The following sections contain the Group's findings and conclusions.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 4.1 The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be included in this section prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

5. UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

- 5.1 During early discussions, it became clear that whilst a reporting process had previously existed, this was no longer the case. It was felt that such a reporting process would add value to the appointments along with clear lines of communications.
- 5.2 During discussions with the Officer who is the named contact for Internal Drainage Boards, it became apparent that not all Officers were fully aware of the appointment scheme or the purpose that representatives served. This may in part be due to the restructuring of some services over recent years.
- 5.3 It was also established that many new Councillors had been appointed into these roles and that it was unclear what was expected of them to be able to fulfil the roles.
- 5.4 In the process of discussing the organisations and Boards with appointed representatives, some discrepancies were observed. Notably the question of whether appointments to windfarms were a statutory requirement as some of the district's windfarms had appointed Councillors and some had not.
- 5.5 It was suggested that a mechanism should be put in place to allow for additional organisations and boards who would benefit from the scheme of nominations to be identified. This would enable the Council to establish more formal links with other groups and organisations to achieve the Council's strategic aims.

Case studies

Officer involvement

- The Officer named as the contact for Internal Drainage Boards advised that he did not have contact with Internal Drainage Boards aside from for operational reasons. He also confirmed that he did not have contact with Councillors who had been appointed to Internal Drainage Boards.
- It was thought that regular meetings with the named Contact Officers would ensure that Councillors were fully briefed prior to attending meetings of Boards or Organisations, this may include identifying known issues, briefing on desired outcomes, clear communication - allowing representative Councillors to be in a position to question and challenge. It might also mean they provide leadership to organisations.

- It was also felt that post meeting follow up sessions between named Contact Officers and Councillors would ensure a cycle of communication.
- Finally, it was considered that there should be a mechanism for feeding knowledge into the Council's intelligence gathering and strategic assessment activities.

Board of Governors for Kimbolton School

- The Group heard from the Chair of the Board of Governors at Kimbolton School. The contribution that the appointed HDC Councillor made was valued by the board and felt to be a useful link of communication between the school and the Council.

Internal Drainage Boards

- Whilst the main focus of the group looked at Internal Drainage Boards, the principles of information gathering, pre meeting briefings with Officers and reporting back could be applied to all Boards and Bodies where HDC appoints a representative.
- Levies are set by the Internal Drainage Boards but the Council does not have control over what this is then spent on. That is decided by the Board and any Councillors who are appointed to that Board may take part in these decisions.
- The Group heard that the Bedford Group of Drainage Boards were intending to merge several smaller boards including the Alconbury and Ellington Board to address the number of Councillor vacancies on the boards.
- The Group heard that the planned amalgamation would provide one vacancy for a HDC Councillor to the main Board and then smaller advisory and working groups would operate at a local level with the potential for more Councillors or relevant professionals to be nominated.

6. FINDINGS

- 6.1 That a proper reporting process be implemented and a record of attendance at meetings be recorded.
- 6.2 Lines of communication be established to ensure clarity and consistency between Officer and Members to ensure best practice, establish a briefing mechanism and feedback loop.
- 6.3 A job description to be established to set out what is expected of Members.
- 6.4 Ensure appointees are clear on expectations and able to fulfil the requirements of the role, appointments to be amended if necessary.
- 6.5 Recommended to identify Officers within the Council to establish ownership of relationship between organisations and Councillors.

- 6.6 It was established that putting these processes into place, would add value for both the appointed Councillor and the Council.
- 6.7 Review the appointments to ensure none are made where they are not required whilst also recognising there is value in establishing dialogue to promote understanding in both directions and to establish rationale to support this. The review should also consider whether there are any organisations that the council wants to be represented on taking into account its strategic priorities.
- 6.8 That appointments be non-political.
- 6.9 To regularly review the appointment process and reporting.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There may be legal implications depending on the Organisation or Board involved as they are often set up under different legislation and have different legal structures, however these will be dealt with on an ad-hoc basis as they occur.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 N/A

9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 9.1 The recommended actions will provide a consistent and robust approach to managing these appointments and will improve communication between all involved.

10. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – Representatives on Organisations 2022/23 (until May 2026)
Appendix 2 – Extract from Signpost – Members' Representation on Outside Bodies

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

CONTACT OFFICER

Name/Job Title: Beccy Buddle – Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny)
Tel No: 01480 388008
Email: Beccy.buddle@huntingdonshire.gov.uk