

# HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in the CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER/STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 14 November 2023

PRESENT: Councillor T D Sanderson – Vice-Chair.

Councillors L Davenport-Ray, S W Ferguson,  
B A Mickelburgh, B M Pitt, T D Sanderson and S L Taylor.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S J Conboy M A Hassall and S Wakeford.

## 42 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17th October 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chair.

## 43 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

## 44 REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

With the aid of a report prepared by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet reviewed the Council's Risk Management Strategy that detailed how the Council manages risks associated with the organisation. The appended document provided details on the proposed Risk Strategy and how it fits within the Council's governance and risk reporting.

By way of background, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources introduced the report explaining that an effective Risk Management Strategy will ensure the Council maximises its opportunities and manages those threats that may hinder the delivery of its priorities so that the opportunities for continuous improvement are maximised. Risk therefore needs to be considered at all stages of the management process, from the setting of corporate priorities through to the delivery of the service to the customer. Risk management therefore becomes an integral element of the Council's corporate governance arrangements. This Risk Management Strategy aims to integrate risk management into the Council's culture and processes and raise awareness amongst all employees and Members of the benefits and opportunities that successful management of risk can bring.

Having had their attention drawn to the comments of Overview and Scrutiny, the Executive Councillor highlighted that the Panel whilst giving praise for an excellent report had expressed concern over the seniority of the ownership of risks. Cabinet noted that the Panel had assured that whilst some risks are more

appropriately managed at a strategic level, there is also accountability across all risk by senior managers.

The following matters were then raised and discussed and can be summarised as follows:

The Cabinet **decided** that the **(i)** aim of the Risk Strategy is to have a functional approach to risk; and **(ii)** Risk Strategy should be part of the Councils culture and that it needs to be a living document that is updated on a regular basis. Whereupon it was

## **RESOLVED**

that Council be recommended to approve the Risk Management Strategy.

## **45 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24, QUARTER 2**

The Cabinet received and noted details of the Council's projected financial performance for 2023/2024 (including the: (1) revenue outturn estimated underspend of £1.202m; and (2) capital outturn estimated underspend/rephasing of £13.617m.

With the aid of a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) prepared the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources advised the Cabinet that the budget and MTFs for 2023/24 approved in February 2023, had assumed a net expenditure budget of £24.113m in addition to this £231k of carry forwards have been added to make a current budget for 2023/24 of £24.344m. A gross capital budget of £29.392m had been approved, increased to £33.150m due to additional re-phasing of schemes at the year-end of £2.444m, and funding for housing grant, Ramsey Public Realm and One Leisure St Ives Pitch Replacement of £1.314m not included in the original budget. The detailed analysis of the Q2 forecast outturn as of 30 September 2023 was noted attached at Appendix 1 for revenue, and Appendix 2 for capital.

As a result of a thorough and wide-ranging discussion the Chair moved, and it was

## **RESOLVED**

- (a) that the revenue financial performance to the end of September 2023, as detailed in Appendix 1 and summarised in paragraph 3.2 of the report now submitted be noted; and
- (b) that the capital financial performance at the end of September 2023, as detailed in Appendix 2 and summarised in paragraph 3.3 of the report now submitted be noted.

## **46 TREASURY MANAGEMENT SIX MONTH PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

The Cabinet received a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) that provided an update on the Council's treasury management activity for the first six months of the year, including investment and borrowing activity and treasury performance.

With the aid of the report prepared by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) it was **noted** that **(i)** the Council had approved the 2023/24 Treasury Management Strategy at its meeting on 22nd February 2023; **(ii)** all treasury management activity undertaken during the first half of 2023/24 complied with the CIPFA Code of Practice, relevant legislative provisions, and the Treasury Management Strategy; **(iii)** the investment strategy is to invest any surplus funds in a manner that balances negligible risk of default by the borrower with a fair rate of interest; and **(iv)** the Council's borrowing strategy permits borrowing for cash flow purposes and funding current and future capital expenditure over whatever periods are in the Council's best interests.

As a result of discussions on the report the Cabinet

#### **RESOLVED**

- (a) that the treasury management performance for the first six months of 2023/24 be noted; and
- (b) that the report be recommended to Council for consideration.

#### **47 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**

The Cabinet received a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) that provided an updated version of the Performance Management Framework that had been approved in 2017. The main points of the discussions on the report may be summarised as follows:

The Cabinet:

- ❖ **Noted** that the framework is important because it sets out the principals of how Huntingdonshire District Council will manage, report, and scrutinise performance.
- ❖ **Noted** that this refresh of the Councils Performance Management Framework is needed following the adoption of a new Corporate Plan that has set out a fresh approach to monitoring, managing, and reporting the Councils performance, with greater focus on the delivery on outcomes.
- ❖ **Agreed** that there is a clear and understandable expectation that the Council is accountable for and transparent about the services and outcomes are delivered to local residents and service users. It is the Councils responsibility to manage performance of its services in a way that is open, accessible, suitable, complies with statutory duties and appropriate to local needs.
- ❖ **Noted** that the Framework also references recent changes to how Government will monitor performance and will help prepare for expected amendments to statutory guidance on the Best Value Duty, as set out in a recent consultation.
- ❖ **Agreed** that Performance management also informs how we can be as efficient and effective as possible while delivering good quality, high value for money services.

As a result of discussions on the report the Chair moved and it was

## **RESOLVED**

- (a) that the revised Performance Management Framework be approved; and
- (b) that the Chief Executive be authorised to set out a timetable for corporate or finance peer challenges and make arrangements for these to take place.

### **48 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24, QUARTER 2**

The Cabinet received a report by the Business Intelligence & Performance Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) that provided an update on delivery of the Corporate Plan and project delivery during Quarter 2 (July to September 2023).

A summary of the discussion on the report is set out below:

It was **noted** that:

- ❖ Members of Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) Panel have a significant role in the Council's Performance Management Framework and a process of regular review of performance data has been established. With the focus being on delivery against the Council's strategic outcomes and regular reporting should enable Overview and Scrutiny to maintain a strategic overview and their comments will be shared with Cabinet following the Overview and Scrutiny Panel's meeting on 1 November 2023.
- ❖ progress on Corporate Plan actions and operational performance measures is reported quarterly. The Corporate Performance Report summarised progress and performance by outcome. The report is focused on outcomes, with a single page summary from the accountable officer for each outcome (either a Corporate Director or Assistant Director) followed by tables and pie charts summarising the status of actions, performance measures and projects linked to the outcome.

As a result of discussions on the report the Chair moved, and it was.

## **RESOLVED**

that the progress and performance during Quarter 2, as summarised in the Corporate Performance Report and detailed in Appendices A, B and C of the report now submitted, be noted.

### **49 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT (CTS) SCHEME 2024/25**

The Cabinet received and noted a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) that set out the action taken to date to redesign the Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme to ensure that it is fit for the future, provides the rationale for change and leads to a recommendation that the Council approves the introduction of a new, income-banded scheme for working age applicants with effect from 1st April 2024, increasing levels of support available to the most vulnerable residents across Huntingdonshire. The main points of the discussions on the report may be summarised as follows:

The Cabinet:

- ❖ **Noted** that since the abolition of Council Tax Benefit in 2013, Local Authorities in England have been required to administer their own Council Tax Support (CTS) schemes. As whilst support for residents of pensionable age is determined by Central Government, schemes for working age residents are set locally. Local Authorities are required to review their CTS schemes annually and to decide to either maintain their existing scheme or replace it.
- ❖ **Agreed** that increasing the level of support for eligible residents directly supports the aims specified within the Corporate Plan, to keep people out of crisis and to help those in crisis.
- ❖ **Acknowledged** that simplifying the scheme to make it more accessible for residents, reduce the administrative burden and improving delivery times. This will directly support the aim specified within the Corporate Plan to deliver good quality, value-for-money services with good control and compliance with statutory obligations.
- ❖ **Recognised** that the reduction in caseload and therefore reduction of the impact of CTS on the taxbase provides an opportunity to consider increasing support to those most in need.
- ❖ **Noted** that a review of the CTS scheme provides an opportunity to ensure the scheme best meets the needs of our residents and contributes to the Corporate Plan commitment to both prevent crisis, and to support those in crisis.
- ❖ **Noted** that the recommended amendments to the scheme will also contribute to Priority 3 of the Corporate Plan – to deliver good quality, high value for money services with good control and compliance with statutory obligations.
- ❖ **Agreed** with rising food and energy costs the departments and teams within the Council should collaborate closely with each other and with partner organisations to develop an integrated approach to local council tax support council tax collection, identifying and supporting people who are struggling to pay including looking at the physical and mental wellbeing for those in greatest need.

As a result of discussions on the report the Chair moved, and it was.

## **RESOLVED**

that Council be recommended to approve the introduction of a new income-banded Council Tax Support scheme for working age applications with effect from 1st April 2024.

## **50 TRANSFER OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACES POLICY**

The Cabinet received a report by the Assistant Director Strategic Insight and Delivery (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) that establishes a Policy for the transfer of public open spaces of more than 0.25 acres owned by the District Council. Play areas contained within public open spaces exceeding 0.25 are included under the Policy. The main points of the discussions on the report may be summarised as follows:

The Cabinet **noted** that:

- ❖ The policy and process proposed are intended to ensure requests are managed in a consistent, effective, and efficient manner so any opportunities to work collaboratively for better community outcomes are explored. This supports the underlying principles of the Council's Corporate Plan 2023-2028 based on what the Council and its services can do, enable, or influence to achieve better outcomes.
- ❖ There is no universal definition of public open space, for the purpose of this report and policy the Council refers to Public Open Space as defined in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as land laid out as a public garden, or used for the purposes of public recreation, or land which is a disused burial ground.
- ❖ Public open spaces are highly valued by the residents of Huntingdonshire and contribute directly to the achievement of priority outcomes in our Corporate Plan. Access to play, recreation and nature within public open spaces are proven to improve the quality of life for local people, improving their happiness and wellbeing. The Council's Healthy Open Spaces Strategy 2020 recognised and prioritised community driven priorities to maintain and enhance our public open spaces. 95% of those surveyed had visited an open space in the last 12 months, 64% rated open spaces as essential to quality of life and 98% stated open spaces make themselves and other people happy. Public open spaces are also a key part of creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations and contributing to the Council's priorities within the Climate Strategy adopted February 2023, lowering carbon emissions, and enhancing nature.
- ❖ The Council's public open spaces also provide an opportunity to secure Biodiversity Net Gain Units, especially smaller units, which would ensure small developments contribute to local biodiversity net gain, supporting future management costs. The importance of retaining such land and how it is managed is therefore significant.
- ❖ Given the unique nature and complexity of individual sites, their potential future uses, land values and benefits to local communities and nature; transfers of open spaces can be complex. Issues and costs often unique to the site in question. The benefits and outcomes delivered must therefore be satisfied through consideration of a business case and public committee as required.

As a result of discussions on the Chair moved, and it was.

## **RESOLVED**

- (a) that the Transfer of Public Open Spaces Policy as set out in Appendix A of the report now submitted be adopted. The key elements of this are:
  - I. Not to ordinarily seek or pursue the transfer of public open spaces that the Council is responsible for, to ensure the appropriate use of Council resources and that Council remains custodian of public open spaces to be maintained for the benefit of communities and the

natural environment, with due regard to the powers under which the land is held; and

- II. Only pursue any lease or public open space transfer proposal if the costs of doing so are fully met through the requestor as set out in a business case.
- (b) that the Public Open Space Transfer Process as set out in Appendix B of the report now submitted be adopted:
- I. To enable swift determination of any proposals; and
  - II. To ensure any proposal is screened consistently against the Transfer of Public Open Spaces Policy to ensure it has merit before investing resources in the detailed work required to achieve a transfer.

Chair