

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERSHIPS) held in Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Thursday, 4 January 2024.

PRESENT: Councillor J E Kerr – Chair.

Councillors T Alban, M J Burke, S Bywater, S J Criswell, N J Hunt, M Kadewere, D J Shaw and G J Welton.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J E Harvey, C Lowe and S R McAdam.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors L Davenport-Ray, M A Hassall and S L Taylor.

38. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7th December 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

39. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

40. 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 and the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions which had been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st January 2024 to 30th April 2024 was noted.

Following a discussion, the Panel agreed to alter the order of the agenda to allow for better flow of discussion.

41. CIVIL PARKING ENFORCEMENT UPDATE

By means of a report by the Operations Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Civil Parking Enforcement Update report was presented to the Panel.

Following a question from Councillor Alban, the Panel heard that due to the geographic nature, there is an increase in costs to enforce parking in rural areas, however a balance would be found to maintain compliance and enforcement. The Panel also heard that an ongoing relationship with members flagging areas of concern would be critical to the maintenance of this balance. In response to a further question from Councillor Alban, the Panel heard that due to the geographical

reach of Cambridgeshire it is not viable for teams from Cambridge to travel into the rural areas to enforce parking, therefore HDC were supporting their rural neighbours, in particular Fenland.

The Panel heard that a communications plan would be implemented as part of the project to ensure awareness in both members and residents. Councillor Bywater commented that the timing of these communications would be key and observed that seasonal timings, such as school holidays, be taken into consideration as part of the plan.

The Panel were advised, in response to questions from Councillors Burke and Shaw, that modelling had been informed by professional associates and that HDC had benchmarked against similar rural districts for anticipated costs incurred and anticipated compliance. The Panel were further advised that by law, Civil Parking Enforcement could not make a surplus and that any surplus achieved must be ringfenced to transport projects. A balance would be struck between enforcement and compliance, and also that no targets would be set as ideally there should not be a need to issue enforcements. The Panel were also assured that the limit on generating a surplus income would not limit the quantity of notices issued.

Councillor Hunt enquired whether the anticipated General Election posed a threat to the timeline of the project, the Panel were assured that the risk had been noted however, the application would be classed as regular business therefore not anticipated to be an issue.

Further to a question from Councillor Alban regarding information on other authorities and what surplus others encountered, the Panel were assured that this was not a money generating exercise and that the model was comparable to similar rural authorities. The Panel were further advised that this was publicly available information and would be shared with the Panel following the meeting.

The Panel praised an excellent report and were advised that an annual report on progress would be fed through the democratic cycle in due course.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be passed to Cabinet for their consideration when making a decision upon the recommendations contained within the report.

42. BIODIVERSITY FOR ALL - STRATEGIC OPEN SPACES

By means of a report by the Open Spaces Project Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Biodiversity for All – Strategic Open Spaces Report was presented to the Panel.

Following questions from Councillor Alban, it was confirmed to the Panel that MKA was the name of the ecology consultancy who undertook the audit in the report. It was also confirmed that Units were defined by Natural England and were broken down by habitats.

The Panel heard that this was a complex field and that different habitat types had different units attached. It was suggested that a separate briefing be arranged to discuss this in more detail.

Following a question from Councillor Hunt on community involvement, the Panel heard that the team envisaged community engagement to allow for conversations regarding this.

Councillor Bywater enquired about the anticipated budget for the planned work and expressed concerns on clarity of costings, following which, the Panel were assured that external funding had been secured via the Combined Authority and would form the budget for the planned works. It was further highlighted that Appendix E illustrated the potential uplift in biodiversity to be achieved by this. It was further assured that the team want to achieve as much as possible with the funding available but also that national funding was expected, the works done to date would allow the team to be in a good position once this became available to further develop projects.

Councillor Burke enquired about community engagement with groups who are known users of the districts Open Spaces, the Panel were assured that a communications plan would be implemented to ensure this.

It was clarified to the Panel, following a question from Councillor Shaw, that Appendix A demonstrated the breakdown of all aspects of the project and its costs. It was further clarified, further to a question from Councillor Hunt, that the audits would be published on the HDC website in due course.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be passed to Cabinet for their consideration when making a decision upon the recommendations contained within the report.

43. OPEN SPACES UPDATE

By means of a presentation by the Operations Manager – Parks and Open Spaces (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) an Update on Open Spaces was presented to the Panel.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Bywater, the Panel heard that the team had developed strategic connections with local partnerships and agencies thus connecting community groups with their local spaces. The Panel were further advised that the One Leisure Active Lifestyles team were involved in connecting partnerships with communities and the distribution of the associated funding.

In response to a question from Councillor Burke, the Panel heard that the Council were an early adopter of accessible recreational equipment, however research had been undertaken to see how this equipment had evolved and to understand how community groups are using the equipment to ensure that it continues to fulfil the needs of residents.

The Panel heard, in response to a question from Councillor Alban, that the team were aware that access in the form of carparking could be an issue at some open spaces but that there was open discourse with local residents to ensure this was managed to the benefit of all.

Councillor Hunt praised the team for the excellent service that they provide and the value for money they give, this sentiment was echoed by the Panel.

44. UPDATE ON REDUCING THE CARBON IMPACT OF COUNCIL FACILITIES

By means of a presentation by the Facilities Manager – Hard Services (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), an update on reducing the carbon impact of Council facilities was presented to the Panel.

The Panel heard in response to a query from Councillor Alban that work to improve the lighting at Pathfinder House had been ongoing over the Christmas period but was on course for completion early in the New Year.

The Panel praised the hard work of the teams involved and the leadership of the Council in this work, through the setting of expectations which the Council had achieved itself. The Council had inspired partners and communities with their enthusiasm and set the example to the District.

Chair