

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, 19 March 2024

PRESENT: Councillor S J Conboy – Chair.

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

71 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6th February 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

72 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

73 CORPORATE PLAN REFRESH

With the aid of a report prepared by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager the Cabinet received a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) that provided an update on the refresh of the Corporate Plan, which included revised lists of key actions and operational performance indicators for 2024/25. The Corporate Plan for 2023-2028 had been adopted in March 2023 and established three priorities for the District Council, with related outcomes set out through detailed outcome statements accompanied by a list of actions and operational performance indicators.

By way of background the Executive Leader, Councillor S J Conboy reported that the actions are reviewed annually and are removed, amended or added to where work has been completed or new approaches have been identified, for example through Community wealth building that as a new people-centred approach to local economic development provides an exciting opportunity for the District Council as it redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people.

Cabinet noted that performance reporting has continued to evolve with new or amended operational performance measures proposed where better indicators have been identified that means the District Council can more easily enable and influence partners and stakeholders. For example, to directly shape emissions and increase resilience within Huntingdonshire to deliver many local benefits including lower energy bills, economic regeneration and creation of local jobs, reductions in fuel poverty and improved health, avoidance of flood damage costs, enhanced green spaces and improved air quality.

Accordingly, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

to recommend to Council the endorsement of the refreshed Corporate Plan for 2023-2028 (as attached at Appendix 1 of the report now submitted).

74 FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24 QUARTER 3

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 received a report that provided details of the Council's projected financial performance for 2023/2024 in regard to the revenue outturn estimated underspend of £1.381m; and the capital outturn estimated underspend/potential rephasing of £15.483m.

By way of background the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources Councillor B A Mickelburgh reported that the budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2023/24 approved in February 2023, 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. Furthermore, 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 OLSI Pitch Replacements of £1.314m not included in the original budget. A detailed analysis was also noted of the Q3 forecast outturn as at 31 December 2023 and attached at Appendix 1 for revenue, and Appendix 2 for capital and prudential indicators and Treasury indicators for Q3 are attached as Appendix 3.

As a result of discussions on the report the Cabinet agreed on the crucial role now being played by green finance as a component in realising maintainable growth and that in Q2 green waste had been moved from Corporate Finance to Operations in Q3 as the costs are incurred in this area. Members noted that at the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) on 6 March 2024 following a question from Councillor Harvey about what actions were being taken to recover outstanding historical commercial rents owed to the Council, particularly in relation to commercial rents and that following the meeting, the Panel had been appraised that the most significant cause of these historic debts is tenant insolvencies although whilst the work has been complicated by CVAs/IVAs (Company/Individual Voluntary Arrangements) where tenants wished to, negotiations could be entered into to ensure practical rents were achieved whilst remaining commercially viable. The Cabinet noted that in the Q3 Forecast 2023/24 (appendix 2 refers) – Capital Programme currently showed the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) with a £409,000 overspend and requested an explanation for the current position and noted the Miscellaneous Debt Update in Section 3.5 and requested details on the debt in relation to CIL.

Accordingly, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) to consider and comment upon the revenue financial performance to the end of December 2023, as detailed in Appendix 1 and summarised in paragraph 3.2 of the report now submitted;

- (b) to consider and comment upon capital financial performance at the end of December 2023, as detailed in Appendix 2 and summarised in paragraph 3.3 of the report now submitted; and
- (c) to consider and comment upon the prudential and treasury management indicators at the end of December 2023, as detailed in Appendix 3.

75 PUBLIC ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STRATEGY

With the aid of a report prepared by the Assistant Director Strategic Insight and Delivery (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet noted that in recent years there has been a significant growth in the number of electric vehicles (EV) seen on the roads in the UK with over 3,500 now registered in the District. This growth is anticipated to increase in line with restrictions on the sale and manufacture of vehicles.

By way of background the Executive Councillor for Climate and Environment Councillor L Davenport-Ray acknowledged this growth and informed Cabinet that the HDC Climate Action Plan that had been approved February 2023 had set out an action to 'Develop an EV Strategy for Huntingdonshire'. Subsequently the HDC Climate Working Group in collaboration with officers have developed a 'Public EV Charging' strategy that aims to identify and provide clarity on the role of Huntingdonshire District Council in public EV charging. It was noted that recognising EV growth funding opportunities have previously been made available to local authorities and to access to these funds, there is a requirement for the District Council to have an endorsed EV Strategy in place and failure to have an EV strategy in place may limit the ability of the District Council to apply for external funding.

Cabinet welcomed the intention for the District Council to seek partnerships and funding to enhance the District's electric vehicle charging infrastructure, to work with partners to expand the infrastructure for sustainable and low carbon travel; and to promote the health benefits of active travel and alternative travel choices.

Cabinet acknowledged that some residents and businesses will continue to require private transport and especially in those rural areas where there no access to public transport and private off-street parking suitable for charging. For many residents the cost of acquiring an electric vehicle represents a significant challenge and achieving a just transition for these residents, including a transition to the 'substitute' of electric vehicles, may require encouragement and support from local government.

The Cabinet were informed that the assessment of local EV charging provision highlighted that 70 additional charge points would be required in the District to reach the national average. It was highlighted that a significant lack of publicly accessible EV charge points existed outside of Huntingdon, St Neots and St Ives, the use of public charge points by EV Owners is primarily for top up or partial charging as opposed to fully charge a vehicle and both EV and Non-EV owners agreed it is fair for EV users to pay to use public charge points.

Members attention was drawn to the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel in particular Councillor Alban who had stated that he was pleased with the reassurance that rural villages would be supported with this strategy. The Cabinet acknowledged that outside of Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives there are different needs and expectations in regard to the installation at non-HDC locations. Also, should a Parish Council wish to operate EV Charge Points, they must have in place a General Power of Competence (GPC) (i.e., a Parish with GPC in place may operate and charge for EV charge points). However, if a Parish Council does not have GPC, the District Council are able to act as enabler and to assist them in accordance with the relevant legislation to help them explore the operation of EV Charge Points on their land.

Accordingly, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the proposed 'Public Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy' as outlined in the report now submitted be approved.

76 ONE LEISURE LONG TERM OPERATING MODEL

With the aid of a report prepared by the Head of Leisure and Health (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet received a report that provided a briefing and sought endorsement from Members on the work undertaken by independent advisors on the Long-Term Operating Model for One Leisure.

By way of background the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene Councillor S L Taylor reported that following a tender exercise, the District Council had commissioned the First Point Management and Consultancy Limited in September 2023 to undertake an independent review of the in-house leisure function, to consider initial transformation work undertaken, and to determine the most appropriate future operating model for One Leisure.

The Cabinet noted that since the COVID-19 pandemic there has been an acute rise in utility costs and cost of living crisis have resulted in a more cautious market and operators becoming risk adverse, changing, and suppressing the appetite of private operators to take commercial risks. Therefore, it could be argued that the required service specification, and performance framework for the Local Authority Trading Company (LATC) model would provide the Council with direct control and influence.

Members attention was then drawn to the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, in particular the question from Councillor Alban who had requested an update on the Sawtry Centre on behalf of Councillor Bywater, in response to which, the Cabinet understood that the Centre had been transferred to another owner in 2019 and whilst the Team have endeavoured to provide support and positive outcomes in the best interests of the local community, the onus to do so rested with the private operator.

Finally, Members noted that the review had highlighted the wider contribution that Active Health can make with partners across the wider health landscape, and it remains a key delivery component of the local service operating model

proposed and as part of this is a key opportunity for One Leisure. The Cabinet agreed that the service should seek to develop this function across a wider partnership landscape and exploit the opportunity that currently exists within the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care System. The leverage of additional funds to support longer term health conditions across communities covering the district will require close collaboration and work at a senior executive level. It was agreed that this could help One Leisure to develop into a more coherent community focused service by moving away from leisure centre facility management into a greater integrated leisure service delivering tangible outcomes across communities.

Following the completion of the independent review it has concluded that One Leisure should pursue a “Transformed In-House” operating model over the short-medium term.

Accordingly, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- a) that the Independent Review and its key recommendations be approved;
- b) that the continuation of One Leisure with the recommended “Transformed In-House” operating model be approved;
- c) that commencement of the development of Outline Business Case’s (OBC’s) and feasibility studies on capital investment, subject to final Cabinet approval on any investment proposals that the feasibility studies recommend, be approved;
- d) that the proposed medium to long term operating model for One Leisure and agreed it will be reviewed in 3 years in line with recommendations by the independent consultant within this report be approved;
- e) that an annual update be scheduled on actions against all the recommendations made by the independent consultant be approved;
- f) that the Interim Head of Leisure Service has discharged his original remit by proposing and seeking endorsement for a proposed long-term operating model for One Leisure; and
- g) that the current leadership arrangements for One Leisure be formalised to ensure continuity and consistency.

77 ONE LEISURE MEMBERSHIP ARCHITECTURE REVIEW

With the aid of a report prepared by the Head of Leisure and Health (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet received a report that set out the One Leisure proposal to re-brand, re-align and modernise the membership architecture and pricing across all its sites. It was noted that this will carry the One Leisure brand through and into the existing membership suite of options available to residents. The associated benefits attached to this proposal are set out within the wider body of this report.

By way of background the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene Councillor S L Taylor reported that this change is important because it will allow One Leisure to be more competitive in the local health and wellbeing marketplace. It will support the recent change to an improved online joining platform that is aimed at increasing the membership base but most importantly improving the customer journey and experience versus the competition. For example, three new memberships being “One Diamond,” “One Diamond Plus” and “Junior Membership” that will feature additional benefits, and be priced accordingly offering alternatives for customers, and reinforcing the long-term commercial sustainability of One Leisure. In addition, Members noted that any existing pre-paid or annual members will have their terms and conditions protected so that they can continue to enjoy their existing benefits from 1st April 2024.

Members attention was then drawn to the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, in particular the question from Councillor Harvey, it was clarified that the new Junior membership would address a gap in the current memberships by providing a membership for young people aged 11-15, as a membership for 15–18-year-olds was already in place. Whereas a number of One Leisure direct competitors did not particularly cater for young people other than a standard gym membership. Cabinet agreed that by launching the new Junior membership it will potentially allow more young people to use One Leisure facilities and partake in physical activity which helps to support the corporate plan by creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations.

The Cabinet observed that introduction of new membership architecture will also provide One Leisure an opportunity to re-align its brand identity and extend its existing membership offer providing greater value for money aimed at increasing annual admissions, improving membership yield, and increasing overall revenue for One Leisure.

Cabinet agreed by re-defining the brand and introducing new membership packages and additional price points with added value, responding to customer feedback will allow One Leisure to respond to commercial and market trends and thus support the wider long term operating model of the leisure services and its move away from a financial subsidy.

Accordingly, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the re-brand of One Leisure’s existing membership architecture to support compatibility with its new online joining platform and to support wider improvements to customer service delivery be approved;
- (b) that One Leisure re-align and modernise the membership architecture and pricing across all One Leisure sites be approved;
- (c) that One Leisure can implement three new membership options to support the sustainable operation of facilities, maximising access and supporting the wider commercial sustainability of One Leisure be approved; and
- (d) that this proposal forms a significant part of the process and journey of returning One Leisure back to its pre-pandemic membership base and

thus strengthening its financial resilience as a non-statutory service, whilst contributing significantly to the council's corporate plan objectives around resident outcomes be noted.

78 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

79 REVOCATION OF THE RISK BASED VERIFICATION POLICY

The Cabinet gave consideration to an exempt report by the Revenue and Benefits Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Annex to the Minute Book) which provided a review of the Risk Based Verification Policy.

Having received an update from the Executive Councillor for Customer Services and in noting the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships), the Cabinet

RESOLVED

to endorse the recommendations contained within the exempt report now submitted.

Chair