

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, 5 June 2024.

- PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chair.
- Councillors A Blackwell, S Cawley, S J Corney, I D Gardener, S A Howell, A R Jennings, R Martin, Dr M Pickering and D Terry.
- APOLOGIES: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor N Wells.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors S W Ferguson, B A Mickelburgh, T Sanderson and S L Taylor.

4. MINUTES

It was observed by Councillor Blackwell, that the abbreviations contained within the previous Minutes may be difficult to follow if read out of context with the agenda, it was clarified that this would be amended for future Minutes. Following which, the Minutes of the meetings held on 3rd April 2024, 7th May 2024 and 22nd May 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

None declared.

6. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel received and noted the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme and the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) which had been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st June 2024 to 30th September 2024.

Following agreement with the Panel, the order of the Agenda was amended to accommodate a travel commitment from Councillor Ferguson.

7. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24 QUARTER 4

By means of a report by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Corporate Performance 2023/24 Quarter 4 Report was presented to the Panel.

In response to a question from Councillor Pickering, the Panel heard that the community wealth building approach contributed to outcomes identified in the Corporate Plan and that local employment and success would pay back into the local area.

Councillor Pickering enquired about the amber status on the Market towns project, and Councillor Jennings enquired how Performance Indicator 18 was measured in particular detail was sought on the size and quality of the sample, following which the Panel were assured that full detail would be sought on both enquiries and reported back to the Panel following the meeting.

Following a question from Councillor Jennings about the green status attributed to the Civil Parking Enforcement strategy, the Panel heard that as this was a multi-agency project there were multiple stands to be considered however this was on track and that a further update would follow in the next quarterly update.

In response to questions from Councillor Blackwell, the Panel heard that due to the nature of calls received into the Council's call centre, there would inevitably be some lengthy calls which were within acceptable bounds but that did affect the call length figures. The Panel heard that there had been no increase in complaints relating to that service and that there were no concerns surrounding this.

Following a further question from Councillor Blackwell relating to staff sickness, the Panel heard that the Workforce Strategy was ongoing and was a multi-faceted approach.

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 within the report.

8. CORPORATE PLAN TARGETS 2024/25

By means of a report by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Corporate Plan Targets 2024/25 Report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Martin expressed concern that the targets for Performance Indicators (PI) 11 and 12 were not ambitious enough, following which the Panel were advised that targets needed to be realistic and achievable and that the Council hoped to be an influencer and enabler in this field. The Panel was further advised that more ambitious targets would be applied if deemed appropriate after further investigation.

Councillors Cawley and Martin queried the detail behind PIs 18 and 19 following the introduction of both the Green Bin Subscription Service and the Climate Strategy along with the Council's journey to net zero. The Panel were advised that the data from the changes to green waste disposal was still in its infancy but that an update on the scheme would be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) in the near future.

Councillor Cawley enquired what the work with the County Council to align work on weeds identified in PI22 looked like, following which the Panel were informed that a detailed answer would be sought and reported back to the Panel.

Following a question from Councillor Jennings, relating to PIs 13 through 15 which had all over achieved in the previous year, the Panel heard that these had been set with local variabilities in mind and that following the reduction in application backlogs, the funding to clear this had been reduced however work was still ongoing to maintain the standards set. Following a further question on the reasons for the continued backlog from Councillor Gleadow, the Panel heard that this was due to multiple factors including resources and the complexities of some applications. Councillor Martin stated that it would be useful to understand these reasons better to ensure that targets tackled this, after which the Panel were assured that the team were continuing to review this but that a stretch target would result in a continuous red status which the team would be keen to avoid. It was agreed that some further detail and clarification would be worked up and brought back to the Panel at a future meeting.

9. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

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

10. CCTV SHARED SERVICE AGREEMENT

The Panel gave consideration to an exempt report by the CCTV Manager, (a copy of which was appended in the annex to the Minute Book), on the CCTV Shared Service Agreement which was presented to the Panel.

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 within the report.

11. RE-ADMITTANCE OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be readmitted to the meeting.

12. COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

By means of a report and presentation by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Community Infrastructure Levy Governance Review was presented to the Panel.

In response to a question from Councillor Gardener relating to rural areas, the Panel heard that CIL funding was strategic and that the revised approach to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) would allow for the meaningful portion of CIL to go further. It was clarified that the funding was available for those looking to unlock growth with a strategic intent or benefit, and that the team would look to engage with parishes to establish how CIL could be generated to meet their aspirations. It was noted that this was only one type of many funding opportunities available to parishes.

Councillor Pickering observed that the new approach may be considered as the Council taking control rather than the parishes, following which, the Panel heard that the team had taken learnings from recent work in other districts and that although parish relationships had been identified as a risk for the project, the team would be confident that this approach was consistent with high quality and best practice.

Councillor Corney enquired whether a study had been undertaken to reassess unsuccessful applications from the last round of funding to ascertain whether the new scheme would have provided them with a different outcome. The Panel heard

that whilst such a study hadn't been undertaken, but that the flowchart in the report demonstrated that in the context of previous applications some had no link to growth and therefore were not successful.

Councillor Catmur observed that better engagement with parishes would be welcomed and would be helpful to develop parishes understanding of CIL. The Panel heard that a communications plan was being developed and that the team would attend a parish conference in October to further assist and advise interested parishes.

In response to a question from Councillor Cawley, the Panel were assured that whilst there would undoubtedly be an impact on resources, the team would have access to an administrative pot of funding to assist with this. It was further observed that whilst there may be some time investment required in the early stages of applications but that this may prove more beneficial in the long term.

Following a question from Councillor Pickering regarding CIL being spent in the communities where it had been generated, the Panel heard that the new scheme allowed for a more positive spread of the funding and utilising it to unlock growth across the district. This would include a benefit to more rural areas whose contribution to the CIL fund may be minor in terms of the district but significant in the growth of that community.

Councillor Martin observed that the proposed change in threshold for officer approved applications rising from £50,000 to £100,000 seemed a significant increase and expressed concern that as a result very few applications would be discussed in the democratic process. The Panel heard that due to rising costs, this threshold was deemed to be a reasonable increase and that officer time and resource also needed to be considered as well as the ability to make quicker and more efficient decisions. Councillor Martin suggested that this increase in threshold be reviewed in 12 months to assess its effectiveness and suitability for the long term. Following which it was proposed by Councillor Cawley to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report; that the increase in officer approved applications from £50,000 to £100,000 be reviewed in 12 months and a report be brought back through the democratic cycle to assess the effectiveness of this change. The Panel were in favour of proposing this recommendation for consideration by Cabinet.

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 within the report; and;

that Cabinet be encouraged to add the proposed recommendation 7 to the report;

7) that the increase in officer approved applications from £50,000 to £100,000 be reviewed in 12 months and a report be brought back through the democratic cycle to assess the effectiveness of this change.

13. FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24 QUARTER 4

By means of a report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Finance Performance 2023/24 Quarter 4 Report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Jennings observed that whilst he was aware, following the Corporate Governance Committee, the reasons for the large variance on the audit fees, it would be helpful if the auditors could highlight this in advance in future. Councillor Jennings further requested detail surrounding the noted variance of higher than expected utilities costs at One Leisure, following which the Panel heard that full detail would be sought and communicated back to the Panel.

Following an enquiry by Councillor Martin, the Panel heard that the underspend for the previous financial year had been £1.7 million and that some of the figures within the reserve account were in relation to future activities.

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 within the report.

14. TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT 2023/24

By means of a report by the Director of Finance and Resources (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Treasury Management Outturn Report 2023/24 was presented to the Panel.

In response to questions from Councillor Blackwell, the Panel heard that the Council did hold loans against the Fareham site and that although the unit had a current book value less than the cost of loan, it was anticipated to rise in line with the market.

The Panel were further assured that the property portfolio had proved to be a sound long-term investment over the years and the book value of the Fareham site was affected by its current empty state but that there had been significant interest which gave the team every confidence that this would improve once re-let.

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 within the report.

Chair

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