

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, 6 February 2025.

PRESENT: Councillor J E Kerr – Chair.

Councillors T Alban, S Bywater, S J Criswell, M A Hassall, N J Hunt, M Kadewere, C Lowe, S R McAdam, S Mokbul, D J Shaw and C H Tevlin.

APOLOGIES: No apologies.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors S W Ferguson and S L Taylor.

40. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 5th December 2024 were approved as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

41. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor S McAdam declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/43 by virtue of being involved in the creation of a new Charity Shop.

Councillor S Mokbul declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/43 by virtue of being a business owner with a business property.

Councillor S Bywater declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/44 by virtue of being a Cambridgeshire County Councillor representative for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority.

Councillor D Shaw declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/45 by virtue of being an employee of the Environment Agency.

42. 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 and Notice of Key Decisions for the period 1st February 2025 to 31st May 2025 were presented to the Panel.

Following a discussion an increase to the membership of the Climate Working Group from 4 to 6 members was proposed and Councillors were asked to express their interest via email to the Democratic Services Officer.

43. BUSINESS RATES - DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY

By means of a report by the Council Tax and Business Rate Manager, (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Business Rates – Discretionary Rate Relief Policy was presented to the Panel.

It was clarified to the Panel, that the policy ran up to 31st March 2025 and that the new policy ran from 1st April 2025, it was further clarified that this also applied to the newspaper relief.

Additionally, the Panel were advised that 40% reduction was the maximum amount able to be reclaimed from the Government and that there was not further funding for anything over this.

Following further discussion, the Panel heard that these changes would be affecting small businesses in hospitality, retail and leisure, and that the team were proactively working to identify and contact affected businesses. It was also confirmed that paperwork detailing available support would additionally be included with the 2025/26 bills and it was anticipated that businesses would be in contact with the team to move forward. More detail on the number of businesses affected would be shared with the Panel once the work to identify them had been completed.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that Cabinet be encouraged to consider the comments from Overview and Scrutiny when making a decision upon the recommendations within the report.

44. HYDROTREATED VEGETABLE OIL TRIAL

By means of a report by the Head of Operational Services, (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil Trial Report was presented to the Panel.

Concern was expressed that the fuel was being sourced from Denmark and Holland and enquired whether it was possible to source this from the UK. It was confirmed that the fuel was not currently produced within the UK and that these countries were the nearest suppliers. It was noted that opportunities produce this locally would be monitored and further detail would be brought back to the Panel should viable possibilities arise.

It was confirmed that the fuel is produced solely from used cooking oil. Councillor Lowe observed that used cooking oil is collected nationwide and questioned whether partnerships could be developed to allow for a fuel supply within the UK. It was also suggested that kerbside collections of domestic cooking oil be investigated, with Councillor Alban observing that Bromley Borough had previously done such kerbside collections. It was noted that this was a complicated and developing market and that the district council's influence within this market would be limited. It was also noted that the fuel as supplied was a treated product originating from used

cooking oil and that this was not something which was currently available within the UK. It was proposed by Councillor Lowe to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this was seconded by Councillor Hunt and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

6) that the leader contact the Energy secretary to request a reduction in the import tax on this product.

Councillor Hunt stated that he was impressed by the carbon savings through the change in fuel which were achieved by the trial, a sentiment which was shared by the Panel. The Panel heard, that the collaboration with Fire and Police on the trial had been extremely positive. It was confirmed that the police had joined the trial late and that their participation had been a smaller vehicle than the HGVs used by HDC and the Fire Service. The Panel heard that the site at Eastfield was under 24 hour operation due to the services on site and therefore the emergency services had been able to access the fuel as it was required. It was noted that opportunities with East of England Ambulance Trust, CPCA, MOD, local town and parish councils would be investigated as the project moved forward and the Panel wished to encourage the Cabinet and leader to contact relevant organisations to share the benefits of the fuel and collaborative working. The Panel felt that this would give a benefit both financially and environmentally in the significant carbon savings which could be made through developing further partnerships. It was proposed by Councillor Hunt to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this was seconded by Councillor Tevlin and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

7) to encourage the Cabinet to reach out to other organisations to develop further partnerships with the scheme.

The Panel heard that the cost of the fuel versus diesel has varied over the course of the trial but that it was currently much lower than it had been. It was noted that there would be opportunities to fix the price of the fuel for a period of time but should the cost become prohibitive, it would be possible to switch back to standard road diesel. Following further discussion, the Panel heard that a set price at which point the HVO fuel would become prohibitive had not yet been identified but was expected to be as the project moved forward. It was suggested that it would be prudent to secure a cut off price where HVO becomes unsustainable and the switch back to diesel, it was felt that a monetary amount may be unsuitable due to the fluctuations of the diesel market therefore a price which was a percentage above the cost of diesel may be preferred. It was proposed by Councillor Hassall to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this was seconded by Councillor Kerr and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

8) to establish a price where the fuel would become prohibitive and to switch back to road diesel.

Following a further question relating to the cost of electric vehicles, the Panel heard that the HVO fuel would be a stepping stone towards future technologies. It was also clarified that the costs of vehicles

identified within the report were the list price comparison for the vehicles and capital costs rather than the lifetime costs of the vehicles. Concern was expressed that should the use of HVO increase worldwide, this would affect supply and cost of the product. The Panel heard that this was not anticipated to be a fuel of the future but a stepping stone to future technologies. The Panel also heard that the fuel was created from used cooking oil and therefore was making use of a waste product which would have to be disposed of in other manners were it not used for fuel. Further concern was expressed over the odours caused by the storage of used cooking oil. The Panel discussed whether there would be merit in developing and investigating opportunities to produce the fuel locally, during which concern was expressed that there was a concern about food security nationwide and that growing crops for fuel would exacerbate this. It was proposed by Councillor Tevlin to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this was seconded by Councillor Hassall and the Panel voted in favour, with 10 Councillors voting for and 2 abstentions, of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

9) to create a cross partner steering group of relevant organisations and local producers within Cambridgeshire to develop the production of the fuel within the district.

It was confirmed to the Panel, that the team would investigate the purchase of a larger tank should it be required for more collaborative work in the future. The Panel requested that further details on the progress of the fuel scheme be communicated back to Councillors as it progressed.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that Cabinet be encouraged to consider the comments from Overview and Scrutiny when making a decision upon the recommendations within the report; and; that Cabinet be encouraged to add the proposed recommendations 6, 7, 8 and 9 to the report;

6) that the leader contact the Energy secretary to request a reduction in the import tax on this product;

7) to encourage the Cabinet to reach out to other organisations to develop further partnerships with the scheme;

8) to establish a price where the fuel would become prohibitive and to switch back to road diesel; and

9) to create a cross partner steering group of relevant organisations and local producers within Cambridgeshire to develop the production of the fuel within the district.

45. PROCUREMENT OF VEHICLES AND CONTAINERS FOR WEEKLY FOOD WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE

By means of a report by the Head of Operations, (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Procurement of Vehicles and

Containers for Weekly Food Waste Collection Service was presented to the Panel.

Concern was expressed that the procurement costs of the vehicles and caddies may increase as the demand would be likely to increase due to demand. The Panel heard that the costs within the report were current but that it was anticipated that they would fluctuate with demand as the implementation date drew nearer. The Panel were assured that the Council's procurement team were already briefed and involved to ensure that the project could proceed as soon as practicable.

A shortfall in the funding of the capital investment was identified and the Panel heard that these were indicative costs and that there would be an aim to keep the project within the funding parameters. It was also confirmed that it was hoped that any shortfall would be covered by further funding opportunities.

Further concern was expressed that it appeared that operational costs for the service had not yet been established and in turn would thereby impact the Council's finances. Following a debate by the Panel, it was established that there would be a desire to see further details on the financial aspects of the project to be brought back to the Panel. It was proposed by Councillor Alban to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this was seconded by Councillor Criswell and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

2) to produce a report detailing the revenue and capital costs of the project and submit this to the democratic cycle of meetings.

Concern was expressed over the anticipated funding from DEFRA which had not yet been confirmed. The Panel heard that the collection project was still in its infancy with the capital costs having been identified, the Panel were assured that communications were ongoing with DEFRA to establish long term funding for the scheme. The Panel were further assured that the Council were a member of the RECAP partnership and as such were working with neighbouring authorities to move forward. It was proposed by Councillor Hunt to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this was seconded by Councillor Kerr and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

3) to encourage Cabinet to write to the DEFRA Secretary to confirm the revenue funding as soon as practicable.

The Panel heard, that the anaerobic digestion of the waste created energy generation and also created an end product which could be used as a fertiliser. The Panel also heard that the food waste collection should be as organic as possible, and that no plastics should be placed within the caddies. It was hoped that the weekly food waste collection would result in a reduction of waste within the grey bins but that existing collection arrangements would not be affected. Following an observation that the waste from the grey bins required a certain amount of organic matter to aid its disposal process. The Panel heard that this was expected to change but that

this was an issue faced nationwide and the disposal methods would be adjusted accordingly.

The Panel heard that a preferred supplier had been identified to ensure that the caddies would be British made, 100% recyclable and also supporting a local workforce.

It was confirmed to the Panel, that additional refuse drivers would be recruited to fulfil the collections and that these drivers would include HGV as well giving current staff the opportunity to train as an HGV driver. The Panel heard that further detail would be sought relating to the retention of drivers who had received HGV training and brought back to the Panel.

The Panel heard that the Waste Minimisation Team were already in communication with property management companies and residents associations in properties with communal bins to ensure minimal cross contamination and that this would continue with the additional collections.

The Panel heard, that the initial purchase of the caddies included sufficient additional caddies for new properties within the district still currently under construction.

It was confirmed that contract negotiations with Cambridgeshire County Council as the disposal authority, were ongoing to ensure that collections would remain unaffected after 2027 when the current contract was due to end.

In response to a question regarding the disposal of food waste in the existing green bins should that service not be chargeable, the Panel heard that it would be mandatory to have a separate food waste disposal from 2026, and that the decomposition of the food waste through anaerobic digestion was better for the environment than within the green waste.

It was suggested that opportunities to collect used vegetable oil from the kerbside in line with the food waste collections should be investigated in line with investigating opportunities with the Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil Fuel Trial.

The Panel were assured that a robust communications plan would be developed to ensure resident awareness and compliance. It was also confirmed, that residents who are already registered for an assisted collection would have an assisted collection for the food waste caddies. It was suggested by the Executive Councillor that a working group comprised of members of the Panel be created to look at the implementation and creation of a communications Plan. It was proposed by Councillor Hunt to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this was seconded by Councillor Kerr and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

4) to create a Food Waste Collection Service Working Group to help inform the development of the communications plan to support the scheme.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that Cabinet be encouraged to consider the comments from Overview and Scrutiny when making a decision upon the recommendations within the report; and; that Cabinet be encouraged to add the proposed recommendations 2, 3 and 4 to the report;

2) to produce a report detailing the revenue and capital costs of the project and submit this to the democratic cycle of meetings;

3) to encourage Cabinet to write to the DEFRA Secretary to confirm the revenue funding as soon as practicable; and

4) to create a Food Waste Collection Service Working Group to help inform the development of the communications plan to support the scheme.

Chair

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