

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, 2 April 2025.

PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chair.

Councillors A Blackwell, Catmur,
B S Chapman, S J Corney, I D Gardener,
A R Jennings, R Martin, Dr M Pickering,
B M Pitt and N Wells.

APOLOGIES: No apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors .

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors S J Conboy, S W Ferguson and Councillor T Sanderson.

67. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5th March 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

68. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor R Martin declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/71 by virtue of being a Ward Member for Sawtry.

Councillor B Pitt declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/71 by virtue of being a Ward Member for St Neots.

Councillor I Gardener declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/71 by virtue of being the Cambridgeshire County Councillor for Kimbolton.

Councillor I Gardener declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/71 by virtue of being a member of the Fire Authority.

Councillor S Corney declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/71 by virtue of being a Ward Member for Bury.

Councillor J Catmur declared an other registerable interest in minute 24/71 by virtue of being a Ward Member for Great Gransden.

69. 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.

Councillor Martin suggested some additional topics to be included in

the future work programme and agreed to submit the relevant forms for these to be considered.

70. OUTSTANDING RESPONSES FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Panel heard, following an observation from Councillor Martin, the reasons why some of the responses were still outstanding.

Councillor Chapman disputed the answer previously received against minute 24/63, however as this response had been given under a Part 2 item this would be further discussed outside of the meeting.

Following which, the Panel noted the outstanding response from previous meetings.

71. COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY SPEND ALLOCATION

By means of a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Community Infrastructure Levy Spend Allocation report was presented to the Panel.

Following a question relating to the funding of the project in St Neots to improve walkways within Regatta Meadows and cycleways in the Riverside Park, the Panel heard that the project had been deemed complete in regards of the CIL funding as this part of the project had been fulfilled. It was noted that there may be other park improvements ongoing outside of the CIL funded project using other funding streams and that the team would feedback an update on this following the meeting.

Councillor Martin was pleased to see that the Bury Guardroom project had been recommended for approval during the round and noted that the resulting economic development for the area would be good news. He also noted the good quality report and the application for the Sawtry swimming pool which provided a great opportunity to buck the national trend on closures of pools.

It was observed that none of the applications under £100,000 had been recommended for approval. The Panel heard that the team works closely with parishes to assist in their application process and does this through a variety of channels to maximise engagement. It was referenced the team work closely with the parishes and there is Town and Parish Forum coming up which will provide further opportunity for discussions. It was noted that the team were building on past successes and would be introducing an enquiry form for parishes to get initial feedback prior to application submission, this would be made live prior to the next funding round to provide further support and a second surgery would be held.

Appreciation was expressed for the development of the reports over the past years, including the lessons learned from the past round, and the Panel were advised, following a question, that unsuccessful applicants did receive feedback on their applications directly from the team. The Panel heard that the report included part of the indicative scoring mechanism and that this could be developed for future reports. It was also noted that the report was presenting the technical and professional opinions in relation to the applications and that the

Panel were not expected to debate the decisions themselves. It was agreed that the team would pick up queries around the scoring mechanism outside of the meeting.

In response to an enquiry asking both the Executive and Officers to reflect on the new interim governance process, the Panel heard from the Executive Councillor, that in general the quality of applications submitted were excellent and that the process would be fine tuned prior to the next funding round which was anticipated later in the year. The Panel also heard that officers would look to develop the work engaging with parishes in supporting smaller applications and would look to continue the collaborative work already underway. It was noted that the governance had worked particularly well with the larger applications and that the key factor missing in the small projects was the link to growth.

The Panel questioned what risk management would be in place to manage the CIL process alongside Local Government Reform, following which, the Panel heard that the team were monitoring the risk and were continuing with business as usual until otherwise advised.

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.

72. LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENTS AND SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL FOR ADDITIONAL SITES SUBMITTED BETWEEN 1 AUGUST 2024 AND 31 JANUARY 2025

By means of a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Land Availability Assessments and Sustainability Appraisal for Additional Sites Submitted Between 1st August 2024 and 31st January 2025 Report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Chapman advised that several submissions had been made by St Neots Town Council for areas to be designated as green spaces and additionally a flood plain. The Panel heard that these submissions would be better suited to the St Neots Neighbourhood Plan and that the team had previously engaged with St Neots Town Council on numerous occasions as to how they could achieve this. In response to this, Councillor Chapman stated that he felt conflicting information relating to which plan these designations would be best suited to had been given over the past few years and reiterated his concern that given climate change the importance of the identified flood plain would be ever more important in protecting St Neots homes and residents from future flooding. The Panel were assured that this area could be recognised but through a different mechanism than the Land Availability Assessments. It was noted that Councillor Chapman's concerns would be addressed and managed outside of the meeting.

The Panel heard that work had been done to improve how parish councils could submit their responses. It was noted that following lessons learned in previous rounds, the latest round of responses had been a more manageable quantity of information and that there had been improved signposting alongside a mix of communication methods. It was also confirmed that parishes would have a point of contact should there be an issue in the submission of their responses.

The Panel were advised, that a report detailing the communications plan as well as feedback from the consultation would be brought back to the Panel in due course.

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.

73. PLANNING ENFORCEMENT

By means of a presentation by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), an update on Planning Enforcement was presented to the Panel.

The figures relating to open cases within the presentation were disputed by the Panel, due to discrepancies however the Panel were assured that the team were clear on the figures which they were working with and that the number of open cases would continue to reduce. It was agreed that further updates could be provided to the Panel in the future to highlight the progress being made.

The Panel heard that improvements has been made to the process of feedback for complainants and that this would continue to be looked at so that further progression could be made.

In response to a question relating to trees under Tree Preservation Orders removed without permission, the Panel heard that action was looked at on a case by case basis.

The Panel heard that in relation to shop frontage changes, reports of unauthorised work could be investigated. It was also noted that work had been undertaken by the Economic Development Team to improve shop fronts within market towns and to make the right changes.

74. CORPORATE PLAN REFRESH 2025

By means of a report by the Head of Policy, Performance and Emergency Planning (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Corporate Plan Refresh 2025 Report was presented to the Panel.

Concern was expressed over the proposed measurement of Corporate Plan Action 3 being number of business engagements achieved by the Economic Development Team, following which the

Panel heard that it was acknowledged that measuring the quality of engagement was important but difficult to do, it was noted that this measurement would be reviewed prior to finalisation.

The Panel were appreciative of the earlier timeframe of the report than in previous years. In response to a question relating to KPI 29, the Panel heard that this metric would be reviewed to consider futureproofing new homes to allow for changes in mobility of residents throughout their life. The Panel also heard, following a further question regarding KPI 39, that the Council had ambition to influence others and that the possibility of including the Alconbury Weald train station within this KPI would be investigated.

It was observed that the new target for KPI was too easy when taking past figures into account. In response to which, the Panel heard that whilst the Council was reluctant to set more lenient targets, it was important that the targets be realistic, however this target would be reviewed in line with the recently available quarter 4 figures and adjusted if necessary. It was further questioned the target achievability and wording of KPI 27, following which the Panel heard that the team had requested the revised target in order to push themselves but it was acknowledged that pushing too hard could prove counter productive, it was noted that the wording would be reviewed.

The Panel heard, that the Local Plan looks at ensuring a balance of identified housing needs would be met with future development and that the new Local Plan would be informed by the evidence gathered.

Concern was expressed that once in place, the support for Public Space Protection orders was minimal. The Panel were assured that the PSPOs were only implemented where the Police had assured support would be available and that a breakdown in what is achieved by these orders could be included.

In response to a question regarding risks that Local Government Reform may pose to KPIs, the Panel heard that a business as usual approach had been adopted and that necessary adjustments would be made as required as LGR progressed. It was further noted that this would be managed by the Local Plan Advisory Group.

The Panel heard that identified points would be reviewed with the appropriate teams and that outcomes to the points raised in the meeting would be communicated back to the Panel in due course.

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.

75. CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTIONS UPDATE

By means of a report and presentation by the Head of Policy, Performance and Emergency Planning (copies of which were

appended in the Minute Book) an update on the Corporate Peer Challenge Actions was presented to the Panel.

Whilst the Panel were pleased to see the update, it was felt that some of the actions Red Amber Green (RAG) status should be revisited with there being some debate over the status awarded and the base line set for the actions. The Panel were assured that the actions within the plan were addressed in a different way to the standard Key Performance Indicators of the Corporate Plan and that green status was awarded to actions which were on track as well as those completed. However, the Panel's comments were taken on board and adaptations to future reports would be made where possible. It was also noted that the Peers had revisited the Council and had been sceptical about the RAG statuses, however after discussion had assured the Council that they had no concerns.

The Panel were advised that not all of the actions were aligned with activity and that some would be picked up via other Committees and Panels such as Corporate Governance Committee.

Following concerns expressed by the Panel, the Leader reassured that the Council were committed to providing a meaningful response to the actions set. It was noted that the terminology of the Actions would be considered for future reports to ensure clarity.

Chair