

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 Tuesday, 8 July 2025.

PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chair.

Councillors A Blackwell, J Catmur, B S Chapman, I D Gardener, A R Jennings, R Martin, S R McAdam and S L Taylor.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S J Corney, Dr M Pickering and C H Tevlin.

15. MINUTES

The Attendees from the meeting held 10th June 2025 have been amended to reflect the presence of Councillors J Catmur and S Taylor.

The final paragraph of minute 25/11 was amended to read:

Councillor Taylor sought clarification on the progress and spend so far regarding funding for the health and wealth building that was put aside at full Council.

After which the minutes of the meeting held 10th June 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

16. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor C Gleadow declared an other registerable interest in minute 25/22 by virtue of being a ward Councillor for St Ives.

Councillor S Taylor declared an other registerable interest in minute 25/22 by virtue of being a ward Councillor for St Neots.

Councillor A Jennings declared an other registerable interest in minute 25/22 by virtue of being a ward Councillor for St Neots Eatons.

Councillor S McAdam declared an other registerable interest in minute 25/22 by virtue of being a ward Councillor for The Stukeleys.

Councillor A Blackwell declared an other registerable interest in minute 25/22 by virtue of being a ward Councillor for The Stukeleys.

Councillor B Chapman declared an other registerable interest in

minute 25/22 by virtue of being a ward Councillor for St Neots Eatons.

17. 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.

18. OUTSTANDING RESPONSES FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Panel received and noted the responses received in relation to questions arising at previous meetings of the Panel.

Further detail was requested pertaining to minute 25/10, Cold spots. It was confirmed this would be taken away and a response sought.

19. LOCAL PLAN ENGAGEMENT REVIEW

By means of a report by the Senior Planning Officer of Strategic Growth (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), The Local Plan Engagement Review Report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Gardener and Chapman sought clarification regarding engaging with Parish Councils concerning developments for sites within their area but also if sites bordering their area will be included in this as well. The Panel heard that at the next stage of consultation, there will be a draft local plan which will include all of the sites and will go to all the Parish Councils.

After a question from the Panel, it was heard that the consultation period would be 6 weeks as they have now reached the key part of the Local plan process which must be completed by December 2026.

Councillor Jennings expressed his thanks for the detail in the report, but queried the percentages of increases since the last consultation calculated as he does not think this is accurate. He sought confirmation as this will be published to the public domain. He drew attention to point 5:9, the responses from a wide variety of stakeholders, members of the general public and Parish Councils and requested a breakdown of the sources of respondents. The Panel heard that this would be taken away and responded to by the Officers.

Councillor Taylor requested clarification as to whether the Cambridge Fire & Rescue service and the East of England Ambulance service were represented as consultees as any growth would affect the respective services. The Panel heard that the list of statutory consultees are those that are required by regulation. It was confirmed that both services were in the consultation database and they are in contact with them through the development of infrastructure study.

After a question from the Panel, it was heard that a report would be published regarding the Statement of Compliance which will set out the duty to cooperate and actions.

Councillor Martin drew attention to point 7:5 of the report and requested if the Members could be given a week's notice so they can respond to any questions from their constituents. The Panel heard this will be actioned.

Councillor Martin joined the meeting at 19:15.

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.

20. CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE UPDATE 2024/25 Q4

By means of a report by the Head of Policy, Performance & Emergency Planning (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), The Corporate Peer Challenge Update 2024/25 Q4 Report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Martin expressed his appreciation of the report and drew attention to Recommendation 1, commenting that the restructuring is going well but wanted to know how the Cabinet fit in the structure. The Panel heard that there have been no changes yet but could possibly look at a further review over the next year but it may be prudent to wait until the next administration to do this.

In response to a question regarding communication and engagement, the Panel heard that this is more of a document rather than a strategy and Officers would be coming back with the internal communications document via an update which will help reinforce the Corporate Plan and consolidate the messages included.

Councillor Catmur commented that it would be appreciated if the Original Actions and the Linked Actions could be traceable for ease of reading. The Panel heard this could be actioned.

After a question from Councillor Blackwell, the Panel heard that there could be updates on particular actions but they would be back next Quarter for the full update to the Panel. It was also confirmed that they are trying to be more mindful in their reports and not to give overwhelming amounts of pages for the Panel to review and encouraged the Panel to feed back through the Chair moving forward.

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.

21. INCREASING AFFORDABLE HOUSING- INSPIRED SOLUTIONS

By means of a report by the Head of Economy, Regeneration & Housing Delivery (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), The Increasing Affordable Housing – Inspired Solutions Report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Gardener expressed concern in point 3:3 which advises Inspired Solutions (IS) have not completed any developments but have agreements in place for 750 homes for other Local Authorities and wanted clarification of how many homes have actually been completed. He surmised that if they have not completed any other developments, how can we guarantee that they can deliver. The Panel heard that per the report, IS have not completed any properties to date but are at various stages of completion in different areas. They confirmed that discussions with IS have been more challenging and probing because of this and have the opportunity of engagement with other Authorities who are working with IS as part of their continued due diligence. Confidence was expressed to the Panel that other Councils are ahead of Huntingdonshire, and they will be liaising with them to ensure they agree with the approach that is being taken. The Panel heard that the concepts presented to the other Authorities were innovative and new which is why they have not completed yet. The Panel were advised that the nature for the Partnership resulted in modest up-front costs and if they do not provide the units as agreed, the Council will not be liable to pay for the tenancies. This means there is a substantial limitation of risks to the partnership as set out.

Councillor Gardener requested confirmation that if there is an issue with another Authority, can Huntingdon pull out at any point without incurring additional costs. The Panel heard that the Council will continue with their due diligence throughout the project and the only costs incurred would be legal costs for this due diligence. Only once it reaches the point when they have sites that they are actively considering and entering into lease agreements, would the Council incur additional costs.

Councillor Gleadow requested further confirmation that there will be no exposure for the Council until they enter into formal agreements. This was reiterated to the Panel and it was highlighted that whilst there is risk in every partnership, this is considered low risk and reasonable against the benefit this would be for residents in the area.

Councillor McAdam praises the report and what it promises but his concern lies with IS not having completed any projects to date. He requested clarification as to how the Council reached the decision to partner with them rather than another Organisation that have experience. He made reference to the

pension funds that are mentioned in the report and asked how confident the Council can be making this decision, suggesting they should take a step back to reconsider all the options available before moving forward. It was confirmed that the Council had met with other Developers but they have confidence in IS and what they are proposing. It was acknowledged that there is low risk and no guarantee that it will come forward but there is a risk of inaction for our residents who are on the Housing Register and that this is an opportunity to improve the quality of housing available to them.

Councillor McAdam reiterated his concern with partnering with IS who don't have a proven track record, asking if it made more sense to go with a Developer who has. He stated that he needs confidence which he does not feel as this comes with a risk of homes not being completed in a timely manner. The Panel heard that there is a measure of risk as this is a new approach which is being taken, and attention was drawn to page 156 of the reports pack that the individuals employed by IS have experience in delivering housing schemes and financial models. It was highlighted that the Council are trying to be innovative as they are solely reliant on Housing Associations for homes and that Huntingdonshire have a good track record in the last few years of providing affordable homes. They recognise that this cannot be guaranteed to continue so they are looking at different ways to achieve this. This is a low-risk way of trying to address the 3000 residents on the Housing Register at any given point in time.

Councillor Martin expressed his concern of choosing a Developer with no experience and considers this a risk to the Council. He asked what makes IS better than the other Developers who the Council have spoken to. He suggested providing the site and asking Developers to pitch their ideas for the space as an alternative option. He requested a firm plan be presented to the Panel as he found this report vague. The Panel heard that the Council will not be providing the land, this would be sourced by IS. It was confirmed that the business model is upfront private funding, to achieve the acquisition and build. The suggestion Councillor Martin made is a different model of housing provision but this is a contract with IS who would take the responsibility for sourcing the land. The Panel heard that IS are the best fit with HDC's ideals, such as social consciousness, environmental sustainability and their model is not based on buying up existing housing stock but developing their own. This agreement would not commit to exclusivity or impede HDC working with other housing providers

Councillor Martin thanked the Officers for their explanation and expressed his appreciation for the work that has gone into this but he still has the concern that IS do not have the track record he would be comfortable with and wondered if this was the right

time to do this as the review of the new Local Plan is underway. He requested clarification as to why this is not part of those discussions and how it will fit into it. The Panel heard this report does not have a Planning significance and anyone can bring forward houses in compliance with the current Local Plan and dealing with the housing situation should not be delayed because of the review of the Local Plan. It was pointed out that quick wins for IS would be to look at existing planning permissions that have already been granted on sites that have not come forward.

Councillor Blackwell expressed her own concerns, referencing no business plan, a basic website, no completed houses and no costs. She drew on page 155 of the report pack, commenting on there being no legal agreement. The Panel heard that UKREiiF is a legitimate setting to meet Organisations in the scope of doing business. It was reiterated to the Panel that the risk to HDC is minimal financially and not bringing this forward means missing an opportunity to deal with the housing issues the Council faces.

Councillor Catmur mentioned the risks involved and queried the Pension scheme, asking for clarification as to whether this is HDC staff's pension and if they have invested into it. He requested that the risk section of the report be expanded to include the additional risks raised by the Panel. The Panel heard that the Officers will reflect on the language used for the risks as they believed the points raised had been covered already. It was advised the risk is to the objective of 200 homes being provided for the next 40 years to the Council but what is the harm to the Council if that objective is not met and invites the Panel to reflect on this and to clearly explain what their concerns are.

Councillor Jennings echoed the sentiments raised by the other Panel members and advised the specific risks he sees are void and vandalism risk. He expressed concern and suggested taking a step back to see how the projects IS already have in place work out. He highlighted the issue that the housing provisions for the other Authorities in question are very different to the housing provisions of Huntingdonshire and that IS are not working with any similar District Councils outside of London. Councillor Jennings requested making an amendment to the recommendations in the report. The Panel heard again that the risk is modest and that there is no liability to the Council if the houses are not provided.

Councillor Chapman confirmed there is a need for affordable housing but there is no comparison between the London market and areas of Huntingdonshire so he does not draw comfort from this. He questioned the timing, referencing that the homes should be delivered within 36 months when the Council is facing

LGR and has a potential end date of 18 months. The Panel heard that HDC are not proposing to invest a stake in these properties so this would not be the Council's liability. The stake they do have would be purchasing the properties at a significant discount at the end of the 40 years. Regarding the timing of the project in relation to LGR, this will be completed within the 40 years of the project, and this was taken into consideration in the 200-unit figure put forward and any Local Authority who HDC could be merged with, would also need affordable housing. The risk the Officers are concerned about is the responsibility of covering the costs of the housing if we cannot provide a tenant.

Councillor Taylor expressed her support of the proposal, although she understands the concerns of the Panel, she urged them to remember why the Council are doing this and that is the need for affordable housing. She feels the risks are low but would have liked to see more figures, referencing point 3:10 that the Council would need to set aside the budget of potential void risk areas and damage caused by tenants. She sought the figures of what this would actually cost the Council. She expressed concern regarding LGR, particularly wanting to ensure these homes go to residents of Huntingdonshire as it stands now and wants clarification on how to safeguard these properties from being built outside of Huntingdonshire. The Panel heard that there are decisions yet to be taken that cannot be predicted, such as post LGR and how they will deal with the housing lists going forward. The Officers heard that they would take the request regarding budget figures away and see what they can produce.

Councillor Gleadow advised that there is further clarification that the Panel wants to see before the proposal moves forward and to come back with a more detailed proposal. The Panel heard that their comments would be taken away and reflected upon.

Councillor Blackwell commented that the Panel have been provided with a draft letter of intent and sought clarification as to the Members who do not want to proceed with this as she was concerned about the report reaching Cabinet with mixed messages.

Councillor Gleadow asked for confirmation relating to the specific wording for the new recommendation to Cabinet and Councillor Martin seconds Councillor Jennings proposed additional recommendation to the Cabinet.

The Panel hears the new Recommendation and a vote is called. 6 Members are For, 1 Against and 1 Abstainer.

Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for Cabinet to make a decision upon the recommendations within the report, and additionally, the Panel request that the Cabinet consider adding the following recommendation to their report;

- 1) The recommendation in paragraph 2.1 relating to the principle of establishing a partnership with IS has been accepted.
- 2) However, for the reasons outlined above, the Panel has voted on and approved a formal proposal that **the Cabinet should be RECOMMENDED not to delegate authority to Officers as set out in paragraph 2.2.**

22. REGENERATION OPPORTUNITIES REPORT

By means of a report by the Head of Economy, Regeneration & Housing Delivery (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), The Regeneration Opportunities Report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Jennings praised the proposal's substance and that this Company has a proven track record which he approves of but referred to Appendix A's missing information. The Panel heard this information was later in the report. He sought clarification as to what the Council are entering, is it providing the £1 million from the reserves immediately or are they recommending moving onto the next stages, then come back to the Panel when they are ready to commit the £1 million. The Panel heard confirmation that the recommendations being heard are to support the principle of working forward and developing proposals, but this would include upfront costs in stage 1 from the reserves. They do not anticipate this will reach £1 million but this has been flagged for stage 1.

Councillor Jennings asked if this issue would be going onto Full Council due to the level of expenditure out of reserves as it is outside of the budget cycle. A supplementary item has been added to the report for Full Council's reference.

Councillor Taylor expressed her concerns over the report, highlighting that the company were met at the UKREiiF but the Council has not sought anyone else. She acknowledged their impressive track record but wonders why the funds from the reserves of £1 million is being given to a private company when this could be spent on the Council's own assets, referencing St Neots as an example. The Panel heard that the purpose of the proposal is to stimulate change in our market towns and to unlock a substantial degree of value for residents for market

towns and the economy as well as housing elements. It is a rare opportunity to spend in a way that unlocks measures of value. The Council would not be handing money over to a private company but developing proposals and engaging through a consultation process. The Council would seek feedback from residents which would inform what the Council does. The Panel heard that they seek to regenerate the market towns and do not wish to be reliant on grant pots to achieve this and they are confident in working with the selected company.

Councillor Gleadow acknowledged the track record of the proposed company but reflected that it very urban based and not market or conservation areas. She asked if they had experience in a similar region. The Panel heard that a lot of the company's activity is around Manchester, but they have worked on smaller projects in other areas such as in Farnworth. It was confirmed that they protect heritage assets, choosing to work with the existing buildings around sites such as this rather than demolishing for development. Homes England have given them a substantial funding which shows their confidence in delivery.

Councillor Chapman asked what this project will do that other reports such as the Inner Circle or Charter have not done. He commented that there was a lot of work regarding what can be done but nothing is being delivered. He expressed his support of Councillor Taylor's comments and asked why the money cannot be spent on implementing projects that are already in the pipeline. The Panel heard this is a delivery proposal which proposes to take the first stage towards implementing ideas from the Master Plans. Partnering with Capital and Centric (C&C) presents a delivery route which is cost effective as it would result in 2 years of interest rather than 30. It is a way of addressing what the market is not delivering.

Councillor Martin confirmed that he has been researching C&C since UKREiiF and expresses his enthusiasm for regeneration in this way, though not necessarily this business case. He referenced Councillor Taylor's comments regarding paying a private company but confirms that the benefit to the community from the projects they have already completed was greater than the money they had put in, using a ratio cost benefit of 1:3.5. He expressed his pleasure from photos seen of the works that have been done that emulate the styles of the existing structures. He expressed his concerns about the proposal and would like to see how this will look and how this will fit in with the regeneration of the market towns and how this can be utilised to improve those areas. The Panel heard Councillor Martin's research into this was appreciated and confirmed they would not propose working with C&C if they did not work to compliment the existing structures. The Panel were encouraged to recognise this as an opportunity that there will be further development in our market towns in the future and this gives

them the opportunity to influence who does that and what it will look like.

Councillor Taylor expressed her support of Councillor Martin's findings of C&C's past projects. Her concern stems from the business plan and how it could affect our residents, using the regeneration of St Neots as an example and the difficulties this presented. She urges the Council to engage with residents through this process as it can be controversial and sought further clarification as to why C&C want to work with the Council and why they need our funds. The Panel heard that C&C have had great success at public engagement and have a track record of doing this. They were advised that C&C wish to work with local partners, communities and residents in bringing forward things that are wished for and desired locally. The Council would be working collaboratively with them to bring forward to proposals.

Councillor Gleadow reiterated the need for huge local engagement for it to succeed and considers this a reasonable proposal.

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.

Councillor B Chapman departed the meeting at 21:30.

The meeting was adjourned at 21:30.

The meeting resumed at 21:35.

23. EXCLUSION OF PRESS & 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).

24. SHARED SERVICES AGREEMENT RENEWAL

The Panel were reminded of the Part Two nature of the item and that the contents of the report and subsequent discussion should remain confidential.

The Panel gave consideration to an exempt report by the Corporate Director - Communities (a copy of which was appended in the Minute

Book), The Shared Services Agreement Renewal Report which was presented to the Panel. Following the discussion, it was

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

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Chair