

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, 4 September 2025.

PRESENT: Councillor N J Hunt – Chair.

Councillors T Alban, M A Hassall,
M Kadewere, C Lowe, S Mokbul,
B M Pitt, D J Shaw and N Wells.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S Bywater, S J Criswell and D Terry.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor S Howell.

18. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10th July 2025 were approved as a correct record of the meeting held and were signed by the Chair.

19. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor D Shaw declared a other registerable interest in minute 25/21 as an employee of the Environment Agency.

Councillor M Hassall declared a other registerable interest in minute 25/22 as a ward member.

20. 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 September 2025 to 31st January 2026 were presented to the Panel.

The Panel debated the request for members to attend a Working Group meeting to discuss the formulation of the Council Tax Premiums Policy. Councillors Hassall, Hunt and Pitt all expressed their interest in being involved in this meeting.

21. BUILDING ENERGY STRATEGY

By means of a report by the Facilities Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Building Energy Strategy was presented to the Panel.

The Panel heard that plans for implementation would be looked at on a site by site basis to balance the Council's journey to Net Zero with the lifecycle of existing plant equipment.

Concern was expressed regarding the legitimacy of green tariffs nationwide, due to the consistency and origin of the energy these tariffs were comprised of. The Panel were advised that a Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin (REGO) certificate had been provided by the Council's energy provider validating the green credentials of the origination of its energy. It was noted that the Council's current energy tariff was due for renewal in October 2026.

Further concern was expressed in relation to the energy efficiency rating of the Pathfinder House site, in particular the insulation of the building, despite it being relatively new. The Panel heard that the buildings construction with glass areas was partially the reason for this, however many improvements had been implemented since 2021 and once a review of these changes had been undertaken, further opportunities for energy saving would be investigated.

In response to a question relating to the energy consumption at Pathfinder House on Bank Holidays, the Panel heard that there had been a fault in the system which had not recognised the changes inputted for the Bank Holidays, this had now been rectified and would not be an issue going forward.

Concerns were expressed in relation to the various interpretations of green tariffs. Following a discussion on the matter, it was proposed to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report.

At 19:30 it was

RESOLVED

that the meeting stand adjourned.

Upon resumption at 19:33, the additional recommendation and it's wording was proposed by Councillor Pitt, this was seconded by Councillor Lowe and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

3) that further consideration be given to the relative merits of different Green Energy tariffs, given that the expression "100%

Green Energy" is interpreted differently by different people. That the council takes a view on these relative merits, and that this feeds into the procurement process in a timely manner.

The Panel heard that there was preference to keep using and to increase the use of green fuels across the Council's estate but that alternatives would be considered on this journey as technologies were developed. Councillor Pitt expressed further concern over the wording of Recommendation 2 in the report and questioned whether the implications could be further teased out.

In response to a question relating to the input of the Climate Working Group adding value to the formation of the report, the Panel heard that the feedback obtained had been a valuable part of the process.

The Panel were advised that any future buildings adopted into the Council's Estate would be subject to the same processes as existing buildings. It was specifically noted that the Council would be looking to develop the plant room at Sawtry Leisure Centre with energy saving options, however scope would depend on collaboration with the landlord as this would be a leased facility.

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 additionally, the Panel request that the Cabinet consider adding the following recommendation to their report;

3) that further consideration be given to the relative merits of different Green Energy tariffs, given that the expression "100% Green Energy" is interpreted differently by different people. That the council takes a view on these relative merits, and that this feeds into the procurement process in a timely manner.

Councillor T Alban entered the meeting at 19:15 during the report presentation and took part in the discussion thereafter.

22. PAXTON PITS NATURE RESERVE EXTENSION OF LEASES

By means of a report and presentation by the Head of Leisure, Health and Environment (copies of which were appended in the Minute Book), the Paxton Pits Nature Reserve Extension of Leases Report was presented to the Panel.

Following an enquiry, the Panel were advised that the

team were confident that the site, at its proposed increase size, could be managed with existing staffing arrangements following the appointment of an Apprenticeship Ranger.

It was confirmed to the Panel, that the site map within the report detailed the existing site with a black border and the proposed extension with coloured detail. It was also noted that discussions with Highways in relation to access and egress to the expanded site were ongoing.

The Panel also heard that opportunities to expand the site further whilst remaining financially sustainable would continue to be developed. It was also noted that the insurance liability premiums for the site had been established and that the detail on this would be circulated to the Panel following the meeting.

It was advised that opportunities for Paxton Pits and Hinchingsbrooke Country Park to be utilised on behalf of the Council as physical assets and how this may be facilitated with developers in the district were being developed.

It was observed that the bridleways across the site were due to be opened in 2029, however, should there be opportunity to open at an earlier date, this would allow for cycleways between St Neots and Huntingdon to be developed.

The Panel heard that the development project at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park was underway and that Officers would continue to investigate ways to develop and increase footfall and accessibility across both sites whilst maintaining financial sustainability.

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.

23. RIGHT TO GROW POLICY REVIEW

By means of a report by the Head of Operational Services (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Right to Grow Policy Review Report was presented to the Panel.

The Panel discussed the proposals presented in the report, which were felt to be well set out, there was concern however that by waiting for inclusion into the next Medium Term Financial Strategy or Corporate Plan would incur long delays

and that it was desired for more imminent action.

Concern was also given to the potential pitfalls of some of the project suggestions in particular issues surrounding liabilities and potential for fraud.

It was felt that empty allotments throughout the district presented an opportunity for residents to grow food themselves and that apps such as the OLIO app which encourage users to share end dated food to avoid wastage could be beneficial. Other existing projects such as community fridges were also discussed with the Panel reflecting on the community spirit which was prevalent during COVID, and felt that this could be developed further to address this need. The Panel requested for these existing technologies and projects to be highlighted as opportunities for residents identifying their availability through signposting.

The positive aspects of growing your own food such as mental health benefits and food awareness were discussed. The Panel discussed the benefits of central projects versus signposting communities to opportunities for them to interpret and implement to best serve their needs. The Panel were in favour of requesting an additional page to be added to the Council's website to share suggested projects which could be adopted by residents and community groups in the form of a toolkit, along with communication and signposting for existing opportunities. It was added that interested community groups could develop this into pilots with the support of their ward member.

In conclusion the Panel agreed that a short summary would be developed from the discussion and passed to the relevant Executive Councillors and in particular to note the signposting of allotment vacancies throughout the district and to create an online toolkit signposting interested residents and community groups to suggested opportunities. It was also suggested to co-ordinate with Support Cambridgeshire due to their position within and ability to communicate with the community.

Chair