

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERSHIPS) held in LANCASTER & STIRLING, CIVIC SUITE, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 5 March 2026.

PRESENT: Councillor N J Hunt – Chair.

Councillors T Alban, S Bywater, M Kadewere, C Lowe, S Mokbul, B M Pitt, D J Shaw, C H Tevlin and N Wells.

APOLOGIES: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor S J Criswell.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors L Davenport-Ray and J E Kerr.

47. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 5th February 2026 were approved as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

48. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor T Alban declared a non-registerable interest in Minute 25/50 by virtue of being a regular visitor to Hinchingsbrooke Country Park.

Councillor B Pitt declared a non-registerable interest in Minute 25/50 by virtue of having previously been involved in the St Neots Festival held within the Priory Park in St Neots.

Councillor T Alban declared a non-registerable interest in Minute 25/51 by virtue of being a member of the RAF Wyton Band.

Councillor S Bywater declared a non-registerable interest in Minute 25/51 by virtue of being a veteran of the Royal Marines and a member of the Royal British Legion.

Councillor N Hunt declared an other registerable interest in Minute 25/52 by virtue of his employment.

49. 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 March 2026 to 30th June 2026 were presented to the Panel.

50. PARKS AND OPEN SPACE COMMERCIAL SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

By means of a report and presentation by the Head of Leisure, Health

& Environment (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book), the Parks and Open Space Commercial Sustainability Plan was presented to the Panel.

In response to a question from Councillor Shaw, the Panel were advised that the proposed activities would not be impacted by the ongoing works at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park. It was noted that this was a flexible plan which could react and adapt to ensure viability.

Councillor Bywater was in favour of the proposed plans but expressed concerns about the achievability of the scheme and people management within the parks, in particular being wary of large influxes of crowds in spells of good weather.

Following concerns in relation to Health and Safety expressed by Councillor Tevlin, the Panel were assured that full impact assessments would be carried out as activities were developed to fruition. It was noted that the One Leisure service had strong health and safety experience in the activity realm and that this expertise would be utilised to the Council's advantage. It was also confirmed that full staff training would be provided for all new activities as they came online.

Councillor Pitt commented on the exciting proposals within the report and noted that whilst driving down the deficit was good news, bring greater footfall to the parks was even better news. He commented that he was delighted to see the proposals for the Riverside Park in St Neots and noted that there was a mini golf course there in need of regeneration. It was agreed to follow up on more parochial details with Officers following the meeting.

Councillor Alban was enthusiastic about the proposals but expressed concern that the tranquillity of the parks and open spaces was part of their charm and that some of the proposed activities may disrupt this. He also expressed concern about the security of some of the activities outside of operating hours, in particular quad bikes, high ropes and axe throwing. The Panel were assured that the report provided an overview of possibilities and that as each activity progressed economic impact assessments would be undertaken. In addition the Panel were assured that solutions would be sought which were in the best interest of the local environment which also being financially viable.

Councillor Hunt reflected that with the drive to increase dwell times, there would be an increased need to use facilities and requested an update on the facilities at the Riverside Park in Huntingdon. The Panel heard that improvements and maintenance to facilities were planned for the coming year and that a specific update on the Riverside facilities would be communicated following the meeting.

Councillor Shaw observed that activities, in particular water activities had potential to be grouped in clusters and that whilst the aquapark was an exciting suggestion, additional opportunities for paddleboarding and canoeing could also prove to be relatively low cost and utilising a similar area. In addition he noted that there was an existing mountain bike trail within Hinchingsbrooke Country Park which could be updated and developed.

In response to a question from Councillor Lowe, the Panel heard that the aquapark should not be affected by wet weather during the summer time and that the projections within the report were modest and risk adverse to allow for the unpredictability of weather.

It was observed by Councillor Pitt that investment in regular play equipment could develop the parks into a low cost destination for families and that there was a potential to generate revenue through secondary spend during such visits. The Panel were assured that conversations were ongoing with the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Group and also local residents in relation to development at the Park and also proposed activities.

Councillor Tevlin reflected on her experiences with Rugby Borough Council and fun days organised by that authority within its parks to include children's entertainers. She also observed that scavenger hunts, such as those run by the National Trust tended to prove popular with families. The Panel heard that the team had already developed a popular Easter trail around the park and that there were ongoing collaborations with local schools to build on existing educational events.

It was clarified, following an enquiry from Councillor Shaw, that the figures contained within the report showed an anticipated spend of £170,000 for the aquapark and that an anticipated £110,000 income could be returned within year one.

The Panel were assured, following an observation from Councillor Wells, that whilst some of the activities appearing to be aimed at younger residents and families, the parks would very much remain inclusive for residents of all ages.

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.

51. SIGNING OF THE HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL ARMED FORCES COVENANT

By means of a report by the Community Development Officer, Community Services – People Team (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Signing of the Huntingdonshire District Council Armed Forces Covenant Report was presented to the Panel.

Councillor Bywater thanked the Officer for sharing the report with him prior to it being brought through the democratic process and stated his strong support for the proposal to establish and formally adopt the Huntingdonshire District Council Armed Forces Covenant. He reflected on his experiences as a former serviceman and believed that such a Covenant was vitally important to enable the Council to do everything possible to support the district's Armed Forces communities. He stated that the covenant represented a clear and

meaningful commitment to ensure the fair treatment of Service Personnel, veterans and their families and for them to not be disadvantaged when accessing public services. Aligning the Council's approach with the statutory duties set out in the Armed Forces Act was in his view timely and necessary. He welcomed the clarity that the Covenant would bring and felt that it was essential that this be embedded across Council policies and aligned with neighbouring authorities. He was reassured by the Senior Leadership commitment detailed within the report as well as the commitment to report back regularly to Overview and Scrutiny and noted the accountability and transparency this would provide. He was fully in support of the proposal. Councillor Pitt echoed the comments of Councillor Bywater and deferred to his expertise on the subject and the knowledge of the Officers within the Council.

It was clarified to the Panel, following a comment from Councillor Shaw that the Working Group mentioned within the report would be made up of service area leads as identified by Heads of Service and that this group will meet quarterly. It was further noted that an Armed Forces Board would be established as a cross County group and would also meet regularly.

In response to a question from Councillor Lowe, it was clarified that staff training would be available and accessible for all Council staff through the Council's Learning and Development programme.

In conclusion, Councillor Hunt stated that he felt the report co-defined the things which the Council already did and that the comments of Councillor Bywater in support of the proposal greatly reassured him that this was the right thing to do.

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.

52. LOCAL AREA ENERGY PLAN 2025/26

By means of a report by the Interim Place Strategy and Climate Lead (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Local Area Energy Plan 2025/26 Report was presented to the Panel.

In response to a question from Councillor Alban, the Panel heard that conversations were open and ongoing with the Environment Agency to maximise community energy opportunities such as the identified community hydro electric project at Little Paxton.

Councillor Pitt echoed Councillor Albans thoughts and voiced his support for community renewable energy projects, acknowledging that these projects were particularly complex thus resulting in difficulty maintaining drive to see projects through to fruition. Councillor Davenport-Ray advised that recent updates would see a gradual change in new builds and hoped that continued support and improvements would strengthen the 2045 target achievability.

Councillor Lowe reflected on her experience with retrofit projects in older buildings and the Panel heard that work was being undertaken to improve this experience.

Following a question from Councillor Shaw, the Panel heard that grants such as the Warm Homes Upgrade Grant and the Boiler Upgrade Scheme were in place to assist in retrofitting older properties.

In response to an observation from Councillor Hunt linking fuel poverty with older buildings, the Panel heard that the joint administration were using their position to influence the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to support rural communities in fuel inefficiencies.

53. 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).

54. AWARD OF CONTRACTS FOR THE PUBLIC ADVICE AND INFORMATION SERVICE AND INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORT TO THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

By means of a report by the Head of Communities and Operational Housing (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Award of Contract for the Public Advice and Information Service and Infrastructure and Support to the Voluntary and Community Sector Report 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.

At the end of the meeting, Councillor Alban thanked Councillor Hunt and Councillor Kerr for their leadership as Chairs of the Panel over the preceding four years. He also thanked Council Officers for their support over the period in particular the Democratic Services Team, sentiments which were echoed by the Panel. In closing the meeting Councillor Hunt thanked members of the Panel for their support, co-operation and contributions.

