

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, 3 June 2026.

PRESENT: Councillor A Wood – Chair.

Councillors L Ascroft, A Blackwell, S Bywater, S Cawley, S W Ferguson, R Ioannides, R Martin, S Smith, W Smith, H Tobias and T Tomlinson.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors I D Gardener.

SUBSTITUTES: Councillor S Bywater substituted for Councillor I D Gardener.

4. MINUTES

The Attendees from the meeting held on 1st April 2026 were amended to reflect the presence of Councillor C Tevlin and the apologies of Councillors J Catmur, B Chapman and S Corney.

Whereupon the Minutes of the meetings held 1st April 2026 and 21st May 2026 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. MEMBERS INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

6. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY– REMIT, ROLES AND STUDIES

By means of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Overview and Scrutiny – Remit, Roles and Studies report was presented to the Panel.

Errors in the Appendix were brought to the attention of the Officers who confirmed these would be corrected and circulated ahead of the next meeting.

7. 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.

Members raised queries in relation to the Parking Strategy Refresh. An update on its current progress was requested, including information about the costs associated. They also wanted

confirmation of when the Strategy would be presented to the Panel and the wider impact on the Town centre's vitality.

Members queried the absence of Civil Parking Enforcement from the Forward Plan and requested that an update be provided in relation to this matter.

A request was made for the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to consider Corporate Performance and associated indicators. Members expressed a desire to contribute to the development of these indicators, ensuring they reflect areas considered meaningful for scrutiny, rather than being predetermined.

8. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2025/26 (QUARTER 4)

By means of a report by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Corporate Performance 2025/26 Quarter 4 Report was presented to the Panel.

A query was raised regarding the RAG status within the report, particularly in relation to amber and red ratings. It was suggested that the inclusion of time-bound actions would be beneficial, enabling clearer timeframes for monitoring progress against these items.

The Panel commended the report, noting that the 80% targets were on track. Concerns were raised regarding Business Rates, specifically the reported £1.2 million shortfall out of £78 million. The Member queried the impact this was having on the Organisation, as well as the actions being taken to address it.

The Committee noted that the current economic climate is reflected in the collection rates for Council Tax and Business Rates. It was further observed that the rising levels of homelessness are, in part, attributable to an insufficient supply of new housing. Overall, Members recognised that residents are experiencing increasing financial pressures.

The Panel was advised that the Council operates as a collecting authority; therefore, the shortfall does not represent a loss solely to Huntingdonshire District Council. Members were informed that efforts to recover the outstanding amount are ongoing. It was further noted that the shortfall is attributed to the challenging economic climate and fluctuations within the Business Rates system. The Panel also heard that the Organisation is working closely with recovery partners to support the collection of this debt.

Members sought further clarification on the financial impact for the Council and residents.

Assurance was provided that the administration remains financially competent, although the specific local impact figures were not immediately available and would be provided separately. It was acknowledged that wider economic factors are contributing to current collection challenges.

After a question regarding Homelessness prevention, Members were informed that Places for People manages a significant proportion of social housing in Huntingdonshire. The Home-Link performance metric fell below target during the quarter, largely due to a disposal scheme involving properties deemed uneconomical to retain, for reasons such as poor energy efficiency and investment requirements.

The Council, while not directly managing housing stock, was engaged in the process and has raised concerns regarding the impact on affordable housing supply. It was noted that the Council will continue to work with, and where appropriate challenge, Places for People to minimise further losses.

Current performance was considered stable, although subject to fluctuations in housing delivery, and will be kept under close review.

The issue of affordable housing was raised and Members sought further clarifications on the actions being taken by the Council to reduce reliance on large-scale developments that are subject to delay. The Panel wondered how the Council intends to prioritise its resources to address internal challenges, including staff sickness and housing outcomes.

In response, the Panel were advised that housing delivery remains a key element of Council policy; however, it was noted that this is an area over which the Council has relatively limited direct control.

Members raised concerns regarding staff sickness levels, particularly those attributed to personal stress, and queried whether the newly appointed occupational health provider offered targeted interventions.

It was confirmed that a new provider is in place and offers additional services, including cognitive behavioural therapy, although these are subject to additional cost and are currently being reviewed by HR to determine how best to utilise them. Members were also reminded of existing support mechanisms, including the Employee Assistance Programme, which provides access to counselling and other support. In cases of stress-related absence, return-to-work plans are implemented collaboratively between staff and managers to support recovery and mitigate recurrence.

Concern was expressed in relation to Performance Indicator 7 (PI7) for Homelessness Prevention. It was noted that the indicator appeared as 'green', which it was felt may be attributable to the Council having cleared rent arrears for residents. It was suggested that this could potentially distort the true position of the indicator and assurance was sought that the scheme was cost-effective and implemented for appropriate reasons.

In response, the Panel was advised that, whilst PI7 had at times been reported as 'amber', it had been recorded as 'green' for the majority of the year.

It was further suggested that it would be beneficial to receive a breakdown of the 528 cases, distinguishing between unique cases and those involving repeat assistance to the same residents, as this would provide greater insight into the underlying data.

Members sought clarification on service protection measures in the

context of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), particularly in light of anticipated efficiency savings.

It was emphasised that maintaining service delivery and workforce stability remains a key priority during the transition period. The Council will continue to operate as normal until April 2028, with services delivered in line with the Corporate Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Provision has been made within reserves to support LGR-related activity, with future costs shared across partner organisations. Members were advised that arrangements for ongoing scrutiny of the LGR programme are being developed, with updates to be provided to relevant panels and Full Council.

A request was made for regular, potentially quarterly, updates on LGR progress to be incorporated into the work programme.

The Panel noted the increasing figures in Staff sickness. It was queried why patterns in the reasons for sickness were only now being reviewed. It was emphasised the importance of staff wellbeing in ensuring the Organisation is able to meet its performance targets. It was confirmed that the Council has appointed a new Occupational Health provider, which presents opportunities to better support employees in the workplace and assist in maintaining staff attendance.

The Panel referred to the Council's reliance on Places for People, expressing the view that this had contributed to the negative performance of Performance Indicators 7, 8 and 9. They suggested that the concerns be escalated to senior representatives at Places for People, highlighting the impact that the sale of housing stock is having on residents, and stating that the level of service being received was not acceptable.

In response, it was agreed that the matter should be escalated, and it was noted that the Organisation is actively sharing the associated impacts with Places for People. Members were also invited to reach out to Places for People to engage with them directly as this would be a good opportunity to build relationships with them.

Attention was drawn to PI 32, short-term staff sickness and The Panel requested further analysis of the figures, noting that the current level represents a 15-year high. It was also suggested that additional detail be provided in relation to PI 16, particularly regarding "down days", as enhanced comparative information would be beneficial in explaining the indicator's current amber status.

Members questioned the explanations provided for recycling rates and fly-tipping performance being below target, particularly where attributed to seasonal and weather-related factors, and sought clarity on any operational measures being implemented to mitigate these impacts.

It was noted that garden waste forms part of the recycling metric and is therefore influenced by seasonal variations. While overall performance was considered satisfactory, officers highlighted the ongoing work of the Waste Minimisation Team in promoting behavioural change and supporting improvements.

Members emphasised the need to identify proactive operational responses to known risks and requested that this be considered further.

In response to a query on benchmarking, it was requested that a report be brought to a future meeting outlining the methodology, priority service areas, and comparative unit cost data. It was advised this request will be reviewed for feasibility.

Members also noted that Contact Centre performance indicators were positive; however, satisfaction data was not yet available due to competing priorities. It was confirmed that data collection will commence from July 2026, with reporting expected in the Quarter 2 performance report.

In relation to the Contact Centre data, it was suggested that a more detailed breakdown of calls received be included within the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to provide greater insight. The Panel were advised that the KPIs are established through the Corporate Plan. It was further explained that calls are categorised as avoidable and unavoidable contact. The suggestion to enhance the Contact Centre metrics was welcomed.

It was noted that PIs 13 and 23 appeared to be consistently achieving a green status and queried whether these indicators should be reviewed. Further clarity was sought regarding the presentation of data in PIs 30 and 31, particularly in relation to the thresholds and variances between red, amber, and green ratings.

The Panel was advised that the targets would be reviewed, and that additional information on the variances would be incorporated into future reports.

Members sought reflections on future priorities for performance reporting.

The Portfolio Holder advised that the portfolio is in a strong position and that discussions with officers are ongoing to refine priorities. Any changes to reporting and KPIs are expected to be incremental, with a continued focus on maintaining core service delivery alongside LGR.

After a question from the Panel, it was confirmed that projects such as Universal Studios would be added to Outcome 5, Economic Growth.

It was noted that uptake of the new Council Tax Portal was currently at 3% and further information was requested regarding how the service is being promoted.

It was confirmed that the Portfolio Holder would be meeting with the Head of Service to discuss this matter further.

Chair