

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, 2 July 2026.

PRESENT: Councillor T Alban – Chair.

Councillors A Bulat, M J Burke, S Claffey, J Francis, C Innes, S Lancaster, C Lowe, S Mokbul, N Sarkies and M Young.

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor D McIlwain as substitute for Councillor Bywater and Councillor D Mickelburgh.

9. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of 4th June 2026 were approved as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

10. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

11. ONE LEISURE SOLAR INSTALLATIONS UPDATE

By means of a report and presentation from the Head of Properties, Facilities and Health and Safety (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book), the update on the One Leisure Solar Installations was presented to the Panel.

The Panel heard that the original specification had been based on 12 months of half hourly site data and optimising the install with sufficient to be able to run the site rather than excess. It was noted that if excess were generated the payback from the grid was approximately 30% of it's worth. Whilst batteries were also considered they were not felt to offer value for money at the time of the installation. It was noted that the payback period of under 10 years was achievable with the installation, however had the panels been increased, this would have been extended into a longer payback period. It was further observed by officers that the project offered good value for money as the return on investment is maximised at each site along with the generation capacity. Data would be sought from other Councils to give some comparison on the efficiencies and cost effectiveness.

It was clarified that the project at One Leisure St Ives had included a grant from Sports England towards the total cost of the project which

allowed for additional improvements to be added to the project and an alternative with the carpark canopy panels. This meant a longer payback period however this was considered to be acceptable within the detail of the project.

It was advised that due to emerging technologies the payback period of the One Leisure St Ives Outdoor site had changed since the initial plan, however this was still felt to represent good value for money and well within good practice, it also allowed for other opportunities to be explored such as utilising excess energy at other Council sites.

It was agreed that an update on changes to energy contracts and the impact on costs would be sought and communicated back to the Panel. It was noted that the projected figures were very conservative and that it was anticipated this would shorten the projected payback periods as a result.

It was observed that the previous expected payback period for solar panels had been 25 years so that the projected 7 years for the project was much improved. It was also encouraged that options for battery storage be developed in order to maximise efficiencies. It was noted that the One Leisure St Ives Outdoor site generated more electricity than it used during the day, therefore batteries had been investigated in order to store the generated energy to be utilised in the evening when energy would not be generated.

The Panel heard that lessons had been taken away from the project and were useful in informing best practice and maximising opportunities for future projects. It was noted that the opportunity to install panels at Pathfinder House was currently underway along with identifying additional sites to maximise opportunities.

It was noted that the costs predicted did not include disposal of the units once they had reached the end of their lifespan, however it was noted that all components were recyclable. It was also noted that no issues with the panels had been reported during the extreme summer temperatures experienced and that it had not been too sunny or hot for operations to continue.

It was requested that future calculations include the carbon footprint of the panels at point of purchase as it was noted that they were imported from overseas as well as ethical considerations of the country of origin. It was noted that even if a panel is manufactured within the UK, the components may still have the same country of origin as the complete panels.

12. COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WEALTH STRATEGY UPDATE

By means of a report and presentation from the Head of Communities and Operational Housing (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book), an update on the Community Health and Wealth Strategy was presented to the Panel.

The Panel heard that where applications did not meet the criteria for funding, Officers liaised with applicants with wraparound support to either revise and finesse their application or signpost to alternative and more suitable funding opportunities. The Panel also heard that

applications did not have to fill every box of the criteria but a scoring approach was undertaken to assess viability.

It was advised that the team were mindful of the impending Local Government Reorganisation timelines and that clear guidelines were set with successful applicants relating to timescales for funding and achievability of projects within those timeframes. Work was also being undertaken to future proof the scheme so that it could continue longer term and that this would be monitored to ensure viability continued for as long as possible.

It was noted that as part of the project and working alongside partners, work was undertaken to support young people into employment as well as supporting residents in crisis.

The Officers undertook to supply further details to Councillors to empower them in supporting the scheme within their wards.

13. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) an update on the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was presented to the Panel.

An overview of the Panel's requests for topics to be discussed was given alongside a rationale to show the consideration of these.

An update was given on the agreed project to look at Community Safety Partnerships and Councillors Bulat, Burke, Bywater and Francis volunteered to be part of the Working Group over the summer, with a view to receiving an update report at the September meeting of the Panel.

Councillor Alban expressed his view that updates on One Leisure and Hinchbrook Country Park activities should be sought with a view to them being planned into the October agenda. It was also noted that following a request on an update for the alternative fuels used by Operations, this would be brought to the October agenda.

It was noted that two or three scrutiny topics per year was a sustainable number to sit alongside the pre-planned Council reports and scrutiny work.

Councillor Alban reminded the Panel of the invite to the Great Fen project in September which had been arranged following requests from scrutiny.

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