

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) held in CIVIC SUITE 0.1A, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON PE29 3TN on Thursday, 4 September 2014.

PRESENT: Councillor R Harrison – Chairman.

Councillors P L E Bucknell, G J Bull, E R Butler, I J Curtis, Mrs A Dickinson, T Hayward, P G Mitchell, P D Reeve and M F Shellens.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S Cawley and D Harty.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors J D Ablewhite and J A Gray.

28. MINUTES

Subject to the inclusion of Councillor Mrs A Dickinson in the list of apologies, the Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10th July 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

29. MEMBERS INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

30. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel considered and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). It was agreed that a copy of the Huntingdon West Masterplan would be circulated to all Members of the Panel when it became available. Councillor M F Shellens also requested a copy of the Huntingdonshire Infrastructure Business Plan in due course.

In terms of forthcoming items of business within the Panel's programme, it was agreed that a copy of the report on the Council Tax Base should be provided to all Panel Members in December 2014. Members were also advised that the Medium Term Plan should now be referred to as the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

31. PROJECT MANAGEMENT UPDATE

(Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Resources, was in attendance for the discussion on this item).

Pursuant to Minute No. 14/26, the Panel considered a joint report by the Head of Customer Service and the Corporate Team Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) updating Members on

the progress made by the Council's Corporate Project Management Board in improving the project management arrangements within the Authority. By way of introduction, Councillor J A Gray reminded Members that the Cabinet wished to adopt a more business-like approach to its operating arrangements. He hoped that Members would see the progress that had been made by the Project Management Board as evidence of the underlying importance of undertaking projects in a professional and proper manner within the Council.

Members' attention having been drawn to the key activities which had been undertaken by the Board to-date, they were informed that consideration would now be given to the way in which programmes in the form of related projects of work, could be better managed with the Authority. Training would be provided on the use of the project management toolkit and the Board would revisit its membership and Terms of Reference in light of the appointment of a new Senior Management Structure.

Prior to opening up the item for general discussion, the Chairman reported that he had agreed with the Leader of the Council that Project Management would be one of the three key areas that the Panel would review during the Municipal Year; the others were the Facing the Future programme and the Base Budget review. This report would signal the start of the Panel's deliberations on Project Management.

In considering the contents of the report, Members discussed a range of matters including the Council's project management methodologies, the membership of the Project Board and the terminology used within the report. A Member emphasised the need to pay due attention to the development and writing of specifications as part of the project management process.

In response to a question regarding the absence of any reference to the involvement of elected Members within the process, the Head of Customer Services reminded the Panel that the developments outlined within the report reflected the methodology and mechanics for delivering pieces of work which had been agreed by elected Members. Opportunities for Member involvement included discussions such as the present one and post project reviews would start to be made available to Overview and Scrutiny in due course. In addition, Executive Councillors would continue to review and question the progress of projects on a regular basis.

At the suggestion of the Chairman, it was agreed that the Panel would revisit these discussions at its November meeting, prior to inviting the Corporate Office Manager to provide a further update to the Panel in December 2014. It was suggested that the update should include a demonstration of the project management toolkit, an overview of the programme of projects and the flow chart, which had been developed to explain the options available to manage projects. Following the receipt of this information, it was the Chairman's intention that the Panel could trial the use of the Select Committee approach to challenge Cabinet Members on the Council's Project Management arrangements.

In supporting the approach that had been suggested, a Member enquired whether there would be any merit in comparing projects that had been undertaken using the new approach with previous projects. In response, the Head of Customer Services explained that Officers would reflect on the processes on a daily basis and that the Project Management Board would continue to assess and challenge project management arrangements and make changes as necessary. The value of the new system would be the delivery of quality projects on time and on budget. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the steps taken to improve project management be noted;
- (b) that the intention for the work of the Board to continue be noted; and
- (c) that the Corporate Team Manager be requested to prepare an update for the Panel's meeting in December 2014.

32. FACING THE FUTURE - PROGRESS

(Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Resources, was in attendance for the discussion on this item).

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel received an update on progress made to-date with the delivery of the Facing the Future programme. The Executive Councillor for Resources reminded Members that Facing the Future continued to be an important initiative as it was imperative that the Council delivered efficiencies across the Authority. Although a number of proposals had been put on hold, it was envisaged that progress would begin to be made more rapidly now that the restructure of the Council's Senior Management Team had been completed. In addition, all Cabinet Members were currently reviewing all outstanding ideas and proposals within their portfolios.

Having noted an overview of the current status of the 460 individual proposals within the programme, Members were advised that the full list was maintained centrally and included target dates, status flags and latest updates. Programme management responsibilities would shortly be transferred to the newly established Corporate Team.

The Head of Customer Services explained that to support the delivery of the programme and improve staff skills for delivering change, a number of Officers had now received training on the 'Lean' improvement technique. Members were also reminded that there were twenty five to thirty proposals relating to potential Shared Services. Updates specifically on Information Technology and Legal would be provided at the next meeting.

Prior to opening up the item for general discussion, the Chairman outlined his intention that this report should form the start of the Panel's review of the progress of Facing the Future. With this in mind

he had requested a further update in November 2014.

In considering the contents of the report, Members were informed that the list of ideas in Facing the Future was monitored by the Head of Resources and that savings were entered into the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as they were identified. They were assured that it would be possible to identify savings generated by the programme within the MTFS when it emerged in December 2014. The Panel also discussed the potential need to 'backfill' posts to enable trained Officers to deliver specific projects and were informed that should this be the case, the business case for change would include a full cost/benefit analysis.

Having discussed the additional information which might be required to enable them to challenge Cabinet Members, it was agreed that this should include financial information, details of savings to-date, savings predicted and specific information relating to individual Cabinet Members' remits and outstanding proposals. To support their ability to monitor this programme, Members requested access to the centrally maintained list of Facing the Future proposals.

In response to comments that it would be useful to provide planned timeframes for delivery of individual projects, Members were informed that the centrally maintained list required Officers to complete dates for the evaluation of business cases for individual projects and projected delivery dates. Having been reminded that the role of individual Cabinet Members was to provide oversight rather than to deliver specific projects, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the progress made in delivering the Facing the Future programme and the steps in place to continue delivering successes be noted; and
- (b) that the Corporate Team Manager be requested to prepare an update for the Panel's meeting in November 2014 to include financial information as requested.

33. CORPORATE PLAN - PERFORMANCE MONITORING

(Councillors J D Ablewhite, Executive Leader, and J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Resources, were in attendance for this item).

The Panel considered a report by the Policy and Performance Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) updating Members on progress against the key activities identified in the Council's Corporate Plan for the period 1st April to 30th June 2014. A revised copy of the Appendix was circulated at the meeting.

The Executive Leader explained that following the production of the Council's Vision and 2014/16 Corporate Plan, this was the first attempt to provide performance management information. Members' attention was drawn to the new report format which, in due course, would include an action column for each key action.

The Corporate Team Manager explained that the first quarterly report contained the key actions and performance indicators within the Council's Corporate Plan for 2014/16. Performance information had been split by theme and allocated to Overview and Scrutiny Panels accordingly. It was the expectation that Executive Members would attend to present future reports and answer questions on performance within their areas of responsibility,

Members were generally content with the layout of the information presented, subject to the inclusion of an action column for each of the key actions at a later date. Comment was made on the importance of identifying a direction of travel in each performance area.

Members then reviewed the actions within the strategic themes that had been allocated to the Panel. In response to questions regarding specific actions, the Panel was advised that the business case for previously identified energy reduction projects across the Council estate would be subject to the normal approval process and that the outcome of the staff satisfaction survey would be presented to the Employment Panel in November 2014.

In response to a question regarding the rate of Council Tax that had been collected and whether any change might have been caused by the welfare reforms, the Executive Councillor for Resources indicated that collection figures were buoyant and it appeared that the Council had pitched Council Tax at an appropriate level.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

34. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted relates to the financial affairs of a particular person (including the authority holding that information).

35. SALE OF LAND - ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON

(Executive Leader J D Ablewhite and Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Resources were in attendance for the discussion on this item).

With the assistance of a report by the Projects and Assets Manager (a copy of which is appended in the annex to the Minute Book) the Panel considered a proposal to sell Council owned land at the front of the Pathfinder House site fronting St Mary's Street. During the discussion, a number of Panel Members expressed concerns about the process that had been employed to arrive at the recommendation in the report. In response, Members were advised how the Executive Councillor's priorities had been applied and that it was his belief that the recommendations offered the best approach. Having been advised that work was underway to prepare a report on the Council's

future approach to capital investment, the view was expressed that the absence of this Strategy should not hinder the Council from disposing of other small parcels of land in its ownership at the current time.

It was noted that the Executive Councillor would not accept the best offer for the site unless it was of a certain value and that the Chairman of the Panel would refer Members' concerns to the Cabinet. Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to :-

- (a) agree to the sale of the St Mary's Street site in the current financial year using the approved agent and the best price sought; and
- (b) delegate responsibility to the Head of Resources (after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Resources) to accept the best offer for the sale of the site.

36. RE-ADMITTANCE OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the public be re-admitted to the meeting.

37. WORKPLAN

The Panel received and noted a report by the Scrutiny and Review Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing details of studies that were being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Social and Environmental Well-Being.

In response to a number of specific issues relating to the Council's waste collection practices and a question as to whether there had been a recent change in policy, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) explained that his Panel was currently assisting the Executive Member for Operations and Environment to review the Council's waste collection policies.

38. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) PROGRESS

The Panel received and noted a report by the Scrutiny and Review Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing progress on matters that had previously been discussed. It was reported that arrangements had been made for an Overview and Scrutiny Away Day on 13th October 2014 at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, which all Members were encouraged to attend. In addition, briefings for all Members on Risk Management and Council Finance had been arranged in advance of the Panel meetings in October and November 2014 respectively.

In reviewing progress on matters within the report, the Chairman explained that he had spoken to the Executive Leader regarding the

absence of any response from the Local Enterprise Partnership to the Panel's invitation for a presentation on its Business Plan and that he had undertaken to pursue this matter further. Members were also informed that following their discussions on Risk Management, the Chairman had reached agreement that the Corporate Governance Panel would refer any matters to the Panel where there was an opportunity for it to add value to ongoing work on this subject.

In terms of the Panel's future work programme, Members were informed that post project information on the developments at Huntingdon multi-storey car park and One Leisure St Ives would be provided to a future meeting. It was also reported that a presentation on the prosperity and vitality of the Market Towns had been planned for November and that the update on the Economic Growth Plan would now be presented to the Panel's meeting in January 2015.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) reported that arrangements were currently being made for a further visit to the Great Fen Project and an invitation would be extended to Members of the Economic Well-Being Panel in due course.

39. SCRUTINY

The Panel considered and noted the latest edition of the Decision Digest (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). In response to a question regarding the Cambridgeshire Long Term Transport Strategy and the refresh of Local Transport Plan 3, Members were advised that the notion of a relief road between Hartford and Godmanchester formed part of the consultation, however there were no definite proposals at this stage. In addition, Councillor T Hayward reported that he was meeting with the Highways Agency to discuss the need for improvements to the A1.

Councillor P R Reeve reported that he had received a number of complaints regarding the availability of officers in the Urban Design, Trees and Landscapes team. Having noted that the newly appointed Corporate Director for Delivery was reviewing communications and the responsiveness of the planning teams, Councillor G J Bull undertook to refer the matter to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being).

Chairman