
Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Finance and Performance)

Report of the meeting held on 3rd March 2016.

Matters for Information

10. PROJECT MANAGEMENT SELECT COMMITTEE 12 MONTH REVIEW

The Panel has received the Project Management Select Committee 12 Month Review. Members have been acquainted with the report and the inclusion of the Octagon within the Capital project schemes to effectively manage the underspend. The Panel has been informed that there are six project governance boards and each board has a member of Corporate Management Team, two to three Heads of Service and other key officers from different areas of the Council.

Members have been addressed by the Head of Customer Services in respect to the project of the new website. The Panel has been informed that the website went live in October 2015 and the project management has been reviewed for its effectiveness.

The project has achieved a number of objectives it set out to do including: being able to view the website on different devices; the reduction of content meaning the website is less cluttered; pages quicker to load; the reading age reduced to an average of 10 and the removal of 1400 unlinked documents.

The Panel has been informed that the website is viewed by a good range of age ranges and that the next step of the project is the ongoing management of the website.

Following a question regarding the net budget of the Octagon scheme and why there was none the Panel has been informed that it was because there was no budget approved in the capital budget 2015/16 and that the budget was approved afterwards.

Arising from a question on the migration of customers over to the website, Members have been informed that the Council does measure migration and that 90% of new benefit claims and 67% of change of circumstances are online.

Following a question of the process and safeguards for when projects face difficulties, Members have been informed that budget issues for capital projects are identified by the Accountancy Team on a monthly basis. It has been explained that all project management governance issues for capital and revenue projects are identified by the

Programme Office as part of their regular reporting and scrutiny of project sites and conversations with Project Managers. These findings are the basis for the quarterly report that is received by Overview and Scrutiny and the Cabinet.

11. CORPORATE PLAN

Members have been acquainted with the Corporate Plan and how it links with Service Plans. The Panel has noted that Overview and Scrutiny will have the information they require to hold Portfolio Holders to account.

When discussing the vision and strategic priorities and objectives the Panel has expressed a preference for the first vision statement of 'we want to continue to improve the quality of life for the people of Huntingdonshire and work towards sustainable economic growth whilst providing value for money services'. Members have noted that the number of priorities has been cut from four to three.

The Panel has agreed that there should be some preamble however not too detailed as Members felt that the document should remain a clean strategic document.

With regard to the objectives and action points, the Panel has made the following observations:

- Under the Enabling Communities Section Members have highlighted their concerns that the discrepancies between the market towns and villages would mean that the objective of 'ensuring that our streets and open spaces are clean and safe' would be difficult to achieve;
- Concerns have been raised that the action point within the Enabling Communities Section of 'reduce incidences of littering' would be difficult to measure;
- Following a question on what the Council are doing in respect to the objective of 'support community development and enabling the voluntary and community sector organisations to develop, and working with communities to build resilience' within the Enabling Communities Section, the Panel has been informed that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Customers) have a Working Group investigating the issue;
- Members have questioned whether the objective of 'supporting economic growth in rural areas' within the Sustainable Growth Section is achievable as rural areas suffer from slow broadband and they are competing with the enterprise zones;
- The Panel did not believe the action within the Sustainable Growth Section of 'continue to work with partners and influence the Local Enterprise Partnership's Strategy, to secure resource to facilitate delivery and mitigate the impact of new housing and to drive economic growth' was realistic as Members believe that the Local Enterprise Partnership is difficult to influence;
- With reference to the action of 'facilitate delivery of new housing on the large strategic site at Wyton' underneath the Sustainable Growth Section a Member wanted to emphasise the

requirement for infrastructure, in particular road infrastructure. Members are also keen to include Molesworth underneath the same action point;

- The Panel has noted that the action of 'Zero Based Budgeting (ZBB) Phase 2 is undertaken to identify further service savings' under the Section of Efficient and Effective Council meant that the next process of ZBB would take place within the lifetime of the Corporate Plan;
- Under the Efficient and Effective Council Section the action of 'collecting money that is saved?' was noted as particularly confusing however Members have been advised that this is an error and the action should have read 'collecting money that is owed';
- Concerns have been raised regarding the measurement of 'accelerate business growth and investment' underneath Sustainable Growth. Members have emphasised that they would like this to continue especially the measure of 'processing of planning applications on target – major (within 13 weeks or agreed extended period)';
- Following concerns that the objectives and actions could be achieved not as a result of Council intervention, the Panel have been informed that the quarterly reporting will have an explanation with every distinct measure;
- Following a question regarding the measure of 'gross number of affordable homes delivered' underneath Sustainable Growth, Members have been informed that there are national definitions for affordable housing and they do take into account of the local property values; and
- A Member raised a concern that the measure of 'number of days the process Housing Benefit changes of circumstance' underneath Efficient and Effective Council would be adversely affected by the level of zero hours contracts. In response Members have been informed that there would be a new online housing benefits form which would make the process quicker.

The suggestion of moving the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Finance and Performance) to a quarterly cycle to coincide with the Corporate Plan quarterly reports has been presented to the Panel. Members were supportive of the suggestion however recognised the requirement for additional meetings at busier periods during the Municipal Year.

After a discussion concerning the elements within the Corporate Plan beyond the Council's control, the Panel has been reminded that the Council should try to influence those elements if it is important to Huntingdonshire as the Council has a responsibility to look after the District and its residents. In response a Member has suggested adding a section on the interdependencies with other agencies and authorities that the Council relies upon to help deliver the Corporate Plan.

Other Matters of Interest

12. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel has been acquainted with the contents of the Notice of Key Executive Decisions, which has been prepared by the Executive Leader.

The Panel has noted that the Shared Services Governance matter for decision was included in error and the line would be removed from the Notice of Key Executive Decisions.

13. WORKPLAN STUDIES

The Panel has received details of the studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

14. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE) – PROGRESS

The Panel has reviewed its programme of studies.

G Bull
Chairman