

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 3rd March 2016.

PRESENT: Councillor G J Bull – Chairman.

Councillors T D Alban, P L E Bucknell, E R Butler, R S Farrer, L George, D Harty, B Hyland, J M Palmer, M F Shellens and J E White.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs A D Curtis.

21. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 4th February 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

22. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were received.

23. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel received and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which has been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st March 2016 to 30th June 2016.

The Panel 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.

24. PROJECT MANAGEMENT SELECT COMMITTEE 12 MONTH REVIEW

With the aid of a report by the Programme and Project Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Project Management Select Committee 12 Month Review was presented to the Panel. Members were acquainted with the report and the inclusion of the Octagon within the Capital project schemes to effectively manage the underspend.

The Panel were informed that there are six project governance boards and each board has a member of CMT, two to three Heads of Service and other key officers from different areas of the Council.

Members were addressed by the Head of Customer Services in respect to the project of the new website. The Panel were informed that the website went live in October 2015 and the project

management had 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 6 and the removal of 1400 unlinked documents.

The Panel were 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 was it £0 the Panel was informed that it was because there was no budget approved in the capital budget 2015/16 and that the budget was approved afterwards.

In response to a question as to why the project boards do not have a Member on the board the Panel were advised that the Corporate Governance Panel did not feel the need for a Member on the board.

After a question in regards to the migration of customers over to the website Members were informed that the Council does measure migration and that 90% of new benefit claims and 67% of change of circumstances are online. Peak usage of the website were the weeks up to Christmas.

The Panel was informed that the way projects are managed in terms of budget and end date has changed as now the focus is on what is vital and deliverable within the timescale and if vital objective are delivered then the other objectives would be revisited.

A Member asked if a facility could be constructed to enable residents to search for their ward Member using their postcode. The Panel was informed that the website could be personalised so when a resident enters their postcode the local bin collections appear the next step is to ensure that the local ward Member appears as well.

Following a question of the process and safeguards for when projects go wrong Members were informed that for Capital projects risks would be picked up by finance and the other projects have the project managers reporting regularly with risks picked up by the project board.

25. CORPORATE PLAN

With the aid of a report by the Corporate Team Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Corporate Plan was presented to the Panel. Members were acquainted with the Corporate Plan and how it links with Service Plans. The Panel noted that Overview and Scrutiny would have the information they require to hold Portfolio Holders to account.

When discussing the vision and strategic priorities and objectives the Panel 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 noted that the number of priorities has been cut from four to three.

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

Under Enabling Communities section Members were concerned 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 were 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 were doing in regards 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 was informed that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Customers) have a Working Group investigating the issue.

Members questioned whether the objective of 'supporting economic growth in rural areas' within the Sustainable Growth section was 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 can't be influenced.

In 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 were also keen to include Molesworth underneath the same action point.

The Panel 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 were advised that this was an error and the action should have read 'collecting money that is owed'.

Concerns were raised regarding the measurement of 'accelerate business growth and investment' underneath Sustainable Growth. Members 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 were informed that the quarterly reporting would have an explanation with every distinct measure.

This led on to the suggestion of moving the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Finance and Performance) to a quarterly cycle to coincide with the Corporate Plan quarterly reports. Members received were supportive of the suggestion however recognised the requirement for additional meetings at busier points of the Municipal Year.

After a discussion concerning the elements within the Corporate Plan beyond the Council's control, the Panel was 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 suggested adding a section on the interdependencies with other agencies and authorities that the Council relies upon to help deliver the Corporate Plan.

Following a question regarding the measure of 'gross number of affordable homes delivered' underneath Sustainable Growth, Members were informed that there are national definitions for affordable housing and they do take into account of the local property values.

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 were informed that there would be new electronic housing benefits form which would make the process quicker.

(At 8.09pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor T Alban left the room).

(At 8.13pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor T Alban returned to the room).

26. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel received and noted a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of studies being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Communities and Customers and Economy and Growth.

Following a discussion on the Health Economy and the work stream of 'the impact of growth on GP surgeries, school places and hospital capacity' the Panel was reminded that Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Customers) are currently working on the study.

27. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROGRESS

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel reviewed the progress of its activities since the last meeting. As there was only

one item on the programme and that had concluded Members were informed that the programme would not be on future agendas unless a new study was proposed.

Chairman