

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND CUSTOMERS) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 1st February 2017.

PRESENT: Councillor M F Shellens – Chairman.

Councillors Mrs B E Boddington, S Greenall, Mrs S L Taylor, R G Tuplin, D M Tysoe and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors P L E Bucknell, R C Carter, Mrs L A Duffy, Mrs R E Mathews and Mrs D C Reynolds.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors D Brown, R Fuller, R Harrison and R B Howe.

51. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11th January 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

52. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor M F Shellens declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to Minute Number 61, by virtue of his membership of the Huntingdon Freeman's Trust.

53. 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 February 2017 to 31st May 2017.

Members were informed that there will be a task and finish group to review the Corporate Plan. Councillors M F Shellens, R G Tuplin, D M Tysoe and R J West volunteered to participate in the task and finish group.

54. 3C SHARED SERVICES UPDATE

With the aid of a report by the Corporate Director (Services) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the 3C Shared Services Update was presented to the Panel. The Executive Councillor for Commercialisation and Shared Services introduced the report and informed Members that the report is the Quarter 3 Update Report and it is not as positive as had been anticipated.

The Panel was informed that the 3C Shared Services are not on course to achieve the targeted 15% savings across the board. In

addition, a number of the previous savings were one off savings and were therefore not embedded.

The Managing Director added that the only unresolved leadership staffing issue has been the management of Building Control, which is seen as crucial to resolve so that the service has stability. In addition, Members were informed that the Service Plans for Legal and ICT are on track however the Building Control Service Plan is a working progress.

Following a question from the Chairman regarding what would the Council do differently and what would the Council do the same, the Managing Director informed the Panel that what the Council would do differently would be: have a map of the money down to the last penny; have more strategic investment in the service; ensure a greater service resilience (as the services have struggled to recruit the right calibre of personal so has therefore relied on interims) and align the decision making process. In terms of what would be done the same, the Panel was informed that the Council would be bold in its ambition.

When asked if there was going to be more shared services, Members were informed that the emphasis in the short term is to concentrate on the existing shared services, however future shared service arrangements have not been ruled out.

In response to questions of governance and the reviewing of targets, the Panel was informed that the report before them is a quarter three update report and that there will be a report presented at a future Panel meeting which outlines these issues.

A Member stated that they thought the business cases were not robust enough, only 20% of audits have been dealt with which shows the shared services have not got to grips with demand, recognises there is an Action Plan but is disappointed that there is no further details and argued that in terms of recruitment every post is crucial to the organisation. In response, the Managing Director informed the Panel that the Business Plans did the job but they were based on the old services and would look different if they were done today and agreed that every post is crucial. In addition, the new Business Plans will be ready in either March or April 2017.

In response to the Managing Director, the Panel requested to view the content of the Action Plan.

Following a question regarding the provision of services across three councils, Members were informed that the Council are confident that the services continue to be delivered across three councils and that each council has a portfolio holder dedicated to the delivery of shared services.

The Chairman questioned how many agency staff are the 3C Shared Services employing and stated that could a report be sent to the Panel, via email, monthly. Another Member questioned the cost of agency staff. The Panel was informed that the Council will always need agency staff and that some agency staff cost more due to the technical expertise that they bring.

55. LOCAL LETTINGS PLAN FOR BEARSCROFT FARM

With the aid of a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Local Lettings Plan for Bearscroft Farm, Godmanchester was presented to the Panel. Members were informed that Cross Keys are developing 51 affordable homes on the site and that 8 homes are currently being delivered. The affordable housing will be dispersed across in four clusters across the site.

The Executive Councillor for Housing and Regulatory Services added that the aim of the Local Lettings Plan is to deliver a mixed, more cohesive community. The Panel was informed that future lettings on other sites will be conducted using the Lettings Policy however Local Lettings Plans will be considered if it is deemed to provide a benefit.

When asked how the scheme would be viewed, the Panel was informed that the Council believe that the scheme will be viewed positively. The Council has recognised that previous lettings on larger site have not worked as well as anticipated.

It was iterated to Members that the site is not a local exception site and that there isn't provision for local residents to Godmanchester.

The Local Lettings Plan and what it means in terms of the Council's Lettings Policy was explained to the Panel. The Lettings Policy prioritises people in Band A over people in Band B and C however the Local Lettings Plan applies to this particular site and has its own priorities to enable a good mixture of people rather than a larger concentration of unemployed or vulnerable people in one area.

When asked if the Plan is a change of policy, Members were informed that the Plan is an appendix to the policy that applies to Bearscroft Farm only.

A Member asked if the Lettings Policy could be amended to reflect the Local Lettings Plan, however the Panel was informed that although Local Lettings Plans would be considered for larger sites, the Lettings Policy won't be amended as it complies with legislation and that to amend the policy to reflect the approach taken in the Local Lettings Plan would be difficult.

The Panel supported the Local Lettings Plan and recognised the benefit in assisting the creation of communities. However the Chairman raised a concern that there may be some residents who may feel that the Plan is not fair and would attempt to challenge it.

(At 7.36pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor D Brown left the meeting and did not return.)

56. DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY

With the aid of a report by the Local Taxation Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy was presented to the Panel. During the introduction of the report, the Panel was informed that the report is covers different types

of discretionary relief and the main change/beneficiaries in 2017/18 was for discretionary rate relief on rural shops.

In response to the question: could hardship relief cover a particular urban area undergoing some deprivation, the Panel was informed that the award of relief could only be considered on the specific circumstances of individual applications; to qualify for an award it must be proved that the ratepayer was suffering hardship and that it was in the interest of local taxpayers to make the award.

Members were informed that so long as the United Kingdom stay in the European Union, the Council would have to comply with state aid rules. Once the UK leaves the EU, as things stand, the country wouldn't have any rules on state aid.

The Panel recommended that the Cabinet should endorse the recommendations of the report.

57. CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

With the aid of a report by the Internal Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Corporate Risk Register was presented to the Panel. Members were informed that four risks have been added to the register and 52 risks have been removed and the total number of risks have reduced to 66.

When asked why Risk 207 is no longer considered a significant risk, the Panel was informed that the risk relates to getting residents registered on the electoral roll and the Council has ensured it has done what it can in order to get residents registered.

The Chairman stated that he believes the following risks should be included on the Corporate Risk Register:

- The collapse of the shared services;
- the risk to Huntingdonshire's vulnerable residents as a result of a withdrawal of funding from Cambridgeshire County Council;
- the risk to the Council's ability to provide affordable services as a result of being unable to recruit to low wage positions;
- the risk to the financial position of the Council as a result of the accelerated reduction of the New Homes Bonus; and,
- the risk to the infrastructure of Huntingdonshire due to the decision of the Mayor of the Combined Authority disproportionately allocating funding to other districts.

In response to the Chairman's suggestions, the Panel was informed that the Corporate Risk Register only lists risks that the Council have control over.

58. INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT 2016/17 - QUARTER 3

With the aid of a report by the Head of Resources and the Corporate Team Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Integrated Performance Report 2016/17 Quarter 3 was presented to the Panel.

The Panel discussed the information contained within the report and

the potential to explore particular issues in more detail such as homelessness, although Members were reminded that other Panels are working on some of the issues highlighted. The Panel agreed to be notified if a report on homelessness policy is produced.

Following a question regarding the less than anticipated income from property rents, the Head of Resources informed the Panel that the lack of income is negated by the fact that the Council have not had to borrow money to purchase commercial investments.

In response to the question on how the Door Access Card project is progressing, the Panel was informed that Officers are hopeful that the project will be complete soon. In addition, Members were informed that there is a review of the RAG status for projects therefore meaning that a project with an unsigned lease would, in future, be ranked differently to a project that has major problems.

A Member complimented the commentary on the finance section of the report and stated that those comments answers a lot of questions Members may have.

Members discussed the idea of employment figures to be presented to the Panel, however decided that they would not want to duplicate the work of the Employment Committee.

The Panel was informed that the 'Making Assets Count' scheme will be absorbed by the work of the Combined Authority.

59. FINAL REVENUE BUDGET 2017/18 AND MEDIUM TERM PLAN FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2018/19 TO 2021/22

With the aid of a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Final Revenue Budget 2017/18 and Medium Term Plan Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2018/19 to 2021/22 was presented to the Panel. Following the discussion of the Draft Budget at the Panel meeting in January 2017, the Panel concentrated the debate on the parts of the budget that has changed since the draft.

In response to complaints that the font in the fees and charges section of the report is too small, the Panel was informed that this will be reviewed for 2018/19.

A Member raised a concern in relation to the additional cost of the transformation work and stated that the Panel should be presented with evidence that the money is being spent well.

Following the question as to why Council Tax was not raised last year but will be this year, the Executive Leader informed the Panel that the Council have frozen Council Tax for the past five years and have made efficiency savings in that time. However additional income is now required to invest and protect the services the Council provides, particularly as the Council are receiving an ever decreasing amount of funding from Central Government.

Another Member stated that the Cabinet and Officers have done well in making efficiency savings and stated that they believe Council Tax

should not increase beyond wage inflation. In addition they had attended the Treasury Management training and suggested that this is repeated in the next Municipal Year.

The Chairman suggested that the 1% pay increase for staff may not be enough as inflation has the potential to increase by more than 1%.

(At 8.57pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor R B Howe left the meeting and did not return.)

60. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2017/18

With the aid of a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Treasury Management Strategy 2017/18 was presented to the Panel. Members were informed that the report is very similar to the report presented to the Panel in the last Municipal Year and therefore Members decided to focus on the changes.

The Panel was informed that the Council has the ability to take out an interest only loan in order to purchase assets however the Council have not done this.

In response to the question of why doesn't the Council take out loans now whilst interest rates are low, the Panel was informed that it is not prudent to borrow money if the Council does not make any investments. Members noted that the Council only purchased three commercial properties out of 57 the Council has reviewed.

(At 9.04pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillors R Fuller and R Harrison left the meeting and did not return.)

61. REPRESENTATION ON EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS - QUARTERLY UPDATE REPORT

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the update of the representatives on external organisations was presented to the Panel.

Members stated they would like an update on item number 49, Huntingdon Freemens' Trust.

The Panel stated that they believe the report should be presented on an annual basis but with Members informed of any major changes in the meantime.

62. 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 Environment and Economy and Growth.

The Chairman stated that he believes the Car Parking Strategy Task and Finish Group, should not just review fees but investigate illegal and inconsiderate parking as well. The Chairman has agreed to

approach the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economy and Growth) to discuss the Group.

(At 9.09pm, during the discussion of this item, Councillor Mrs B E Boddington left the meeting and did not return.)

63. 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.

The Chairman informed the Panel that the meeting was the last scheduled meeting until June 2017 but reminded Members that either a further Panel meeting or a couple of informal meetings could be called in the meantime. The Panel has agreed to review the Corporate Plan and investigate social value in procurement. In addition to this Members agreed to review the Policy Development Group list and state if there are items that should be scrutinised in more depth.

Chairman