

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, 6 December 2017.

- PRESENT: Councillor D M Tysoe – Chairman.
- Councillors Mrs B E Boddington, R C Carter, S Greenall, R B Howe, Mrs R E Mathews, J M Palmer, Mrs D C Reynolds and M F Shellens.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors K M Baker and Mrs S L Taylor.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors D Brown and J A Gray.

39. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1st November 2017 was approved as a correct record.

(At 7.00pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor D Brown entered the meeting.)

40. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

41. 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 December 2017 to 31st March 2018.

In response to a question, the Head of Resources confirmed that Council Tax Base 2017/18 had been approved.

(At 7.01pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds left the meeting.)

42. REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES

With the aid of a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the Review of Fees and Charges was presented to the Panel.

In introducing the report the Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources stated that the fees and charges presented to Members was a draft and that there was an opportunity to suggest amendments.

In response to the question, why had the fees and charges which are set nationally been included, as there is nothing the Council can do to affect these, the Head of Resources reminded Members that it is a statutory requirement for Councils to publish a complete schedule of fees and charges including those that the Council has no control over.

The Panel welcomed the news that there will be no increase in car park charges next year and hopes that this stance is maintained as the schedule of fees and charges is finalised in the budget setting process.

Members noted that £140k of the £170k increase is being generated by One Leisure, in particular by swimming and swimming lessons. Concern was expressed that the increases would have an adverse impact upon customer numbers. In response, the Panel was informed that fees for swimming and swimming lessons have not increased in two years. Competitor analysis has been carried out and found that the fees at One Leisure remains cheaper than at leisure centres in Peterborough and Bedfordshire. In addition, it is not anticipated that customer numbers would be adversely affected by any fee increases as there are currently waiting lists for swimming lessons.

A Member suggested that to charge £5.50 per child to visit the Paxton Pits Visitor Centre was a little excessive. However they added that the fee for a zoo licence was not enough and that thought could be given to increasing it. The Executive Councillor responded by stating that the suggestions would be considered by Cabinet.

It was suggested that little increases in fees and often would perhaps be a better approach than no increase for a while followed by a large increase.

Concern was raised that there are large increases on room hire at the Countryside Park however there is no comparison data and it is difficult to establish what was raised in previous years. In response, the Panel was informed that where there is no obvious comparator the relevant Head of Service and Executive Councillor could decide to have an inflationary increase or a round number increase.

It was noted that the report does not contain information of the total revenue raised by fees and charges or how much is raised by each department.

The Panel welcomed reducing the charges for farmers' market traders to zero in order to encourage more traders.

A Member stated that the analysis in the report did not go into enough depth and where there are large increases the narrative to explain the reasons why was lacking. There was also no narrative on the competitor analysis and any stress testing carried out. In addition, the Cabinet may want to give thought to displaying the increase in fees and charges as a percentage of the total revenue raised.

(At 7.03pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor J A Gray entered the meeting.)

(At 7.04pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds entered the meeting.)

43. REPRESENTATIVES ON EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS - ANNUAL 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 Representatives on External Organisations – Annual Updates was presented to the Panel.

Following an introduction of the report from the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny), the Chairman stated that he thought that the area of representation on external organisations needed a bit of work.

The Panel agreed with the suggestion, by a Member, that the Cabinet could appoint Members from the non-majority Party to represent the Council.

Members raised the following points: attendance by the Council's representative is not always required as they may receive reports and Minutes from the external organisation; some Members are not aware whether the organisation they had been appointed to meets regularly or know of anyone to contact who knows that information and in some cases there is nothing of relevance to the Council emanating from the meetings and therefore there is no reason to provide a report.

The point was made that financial reports and Minutes of Internal Drainage Boards are available to the public however the Panel was reminded that the representatives are required by Cabinet to report back, in writing, to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

A Member noted that they had been appointed as a representative of the Council on an external organisation and that they had notified the Council of a dereliction of duty on the part of the organisation. The Panel,

RESOLVED

- 1) to recommend to Cabinet that there are other methods of providing an update (e.g. publically available reports and Minutes)
- 2) to ask Cabinet to consider appointing non-majority Party Members as representatives on external organisations.
- 3) to ask Cabinet to ensure that appointed Members are aware of the reason for their appointment.
- 4) to recommend that a Task and Finish Group is formed in order to perform an audit of external organisations and the process of appointments.

(At 7.44pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillors J A Gray and M F Shellens left the meeting and did not return.)

44. 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

all Panels' work programmes since the last meeting.

Councillor R C Carter provided an additional update on the One Leisure Value For Money Task and Finish Group and stated that since the update a further meeting had been held. The Group will ask previous Portfolio Holders questions with written answers provided. It is anticipated that the Group will report to the Panel in February 2018.

Chairman