

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (CUSTOMERS AND PARTNERSHIPS) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 4th October 2018.

- PRESENT: Councillor T D Alban – Chairman.
- Councillors B S Banks, R E Bellamy,
S Bywater, B S Chapman, S J Criswell,
J W Davies, Ms A Diaz, K I Prentice,
Mrs S Smith, Mrs J Tavener and
D R Underwood.
- APOLOGIES: No apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor D M Tysoe.

27. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6th September 2018 was approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

28. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

29. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel received and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) which has been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st October 2018 to 31st January 2019.

30. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman updated Members on the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme. The Panel was informed that the Work Programme Working Group decided to focus on leisure and health and that Councillors Gulson and Neish of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) will participate in the work.

The Panel was informed that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) will be working on the areas of housing and skills.

Members discussed finishing the work of the Tree Strategy Working Group. This will involve going through the existing policy before recommending changes. The Panel was informed that previously the Tree Working Group had discussed Parish Tree Wardens and how to promote the role. The next steps will involve Members of the Group meeting with the Arboricultural Officer.

A Member suggested scrutinising the process of planning, in particular engagement and communication with residents. In addition, it is proposed to scrutinise the relationship between consultees and officers and how the applications are managed. Members decided not to pursue this topic for scrutiny.

The Panel,

RESOLVED

- 1) to accept the topics selected by the Work Programme Working Group.
- 2) to appoint Councillors Alban, Prentice, Smith and Tavener to work on leisure and health.
- 3) to appoint Councillors Diaz and Smith to work with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) on housing and skills, and
- 4) to finish the work of the Tree Strategy Working Group with Councillors Banks, Chapman, Davies and Tavener appointed to the group.

(At 7.22pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor D M Tysoe entered the meeting.)

31. ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2018

With the aid of a report by the Corporate Team Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Annual Complaints Report 2018 was considered by the Panel.

In 2017/18, the Local Government Ombudsman received 20 complaints in regards to Huntingdonshire, out of which only three were investigated. Of those three, two were upheld, one was due to the speed of communication and the other was due to the quality of the communications.

The Council received 565 Stage 1 complaints in 2017/18 with the majority relating to the Operations service as a result of the waste round reconfiguration. It was explained that Stage 1 complaints are responded to by the service and Stage 2 complaints are responded to by a senior manager who has not previously been involved in the process. There are also a number of unreasonable complainants which requires the Council to appoint a single point of contact.

The Executive Councillor for Digital and Customer explained to Members in detail why Operations had a high volume of complaints. The waste round reconfiguration contributed to this as there were a number of missed bins. Also, if a resident informs the Council that their bin has been missed three times then this becomes a Stage 1 complaint. The Executive Councillor explained that action had been taken to reduce complaints and discussed the benefits of in-cab technology in managing missed bin complaints.

Following a query, it was explained to the Panel that when the Council receives compliments they are shared on an informal basis and therefore not formally recorded.

Discussion ensued on unreasonable complainants and it was explained that there is a potential for services to be withdrawn. This means that when a complainant repeatedly asks questions of a similar nature then a decision could be taken not to respond particularly if an answer has previously been provided.

Clarification was given on registering complaints. Members were informed that they can't register a complaint on behalf of the resident and that Members should encourage the resident to register the complaint themselves.

It was confirmed that the majority of complaints were submitted online. In addition, if a resident telephones the Council to follow up on an electronic complaint or letter, regarding the same issue, it is classified as the same complaint.

A Member asked what software is used and is there any intention to upgrade it. In response, the Panel was informed that the system is not as user friendly as users would like. If a complaint is submitted online then it would appear on the system however, if it is submitted by other methods then it is up to Officers to enter the complaint manually.

Following a query regarding potential audits of procedures, confirmation was given that there will be a review of the complaints process.

The Panel stated that they are keen to see developments in the software and a breakdown of the types of complaints. Members note the positive comments and also note that it is not necessarily about the number of complaints received but rather the way they are dealt with.

(At 8.06pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor S J Criswell left the meeting and did not return.)

Chairman