

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 5th February 2019.

PRESENT: Councillor D B Dew – Chairman.

Councillors J C Cooper-Marsh, S J Corney,
Dr P L R Gaskin, D A Giles, M S Grice,
K P Gulson, J P Morris, S Wakeford and
D J Wells.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillors J Neish.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Mrs M L Beuttell,
Mrs A Dickinson, R Fuller, J A Gray and
T D Sanderson.

49. MINUTES

Subject to an amendment, the Minutes of the meeting held on 8th January 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

50. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

51. 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 February 2019 to 31st May 2019.

52. INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT 2018/19, QUARTER 3

With the aid of a report by the Corporate Team Manager and the Finance Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Integrated Performance Report 2018/19, Quarter 3 was presented to the Panel.

In reviewing the report a Member complained about the use of acronyms and abbreviations and asked that full descriptions be provided in future reports.

Following a query regarding the target for EDGE customers, the Panel was reassured that the Council was doing all it could to reach the target and that resources from other teams are being allocated towards tracking success in supporting customers into work.

(At 7.10pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor S Wakeford entered the meeting.)

53. FINAL REVENUE BUDGET 2019/20 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2020/21 TO 2023/24

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 2019/20 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 to 2023/24 was presented to the Panel.

A Member commented that the budget did not mention the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), however it was clarified that CIL is not recorded in the revenue budget. In addition, even though the Council hold CIL in an earmarked reserve, there is no guarantee that it would be spent on the Council budget.

Clarification was given regarding the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Financial Resilience Index. Members were informed that CIPFA have developed the index independently and that they don't formally report directly to any organisation. In relation to the Council's budget, the index does not show the Council in a good light. This is because CIPFA only took into account the last three years which shows a dip in reserves but does not state the reasons for it.

In regards to the Commercial Investment Strategy and any potential impact from the United Kingdom leaving the European Union, Members were informed that the Council have long leases with the tenants on those properties and that good due diligence was done before purchasing any property. There is also a contingency fund to cover costs if a tenant suddenly leaves.

After a question about a forecast rise in Car Park income, the Panel was informed that the extra income is expected to come from the changes to the car parking charging structure which is designed to encourage dwell.

At the invitation of the Panel, the Executive Councillor for Resources informed Members of Cabinet's considerations of the alternative budget proposals. Cabinet stated that funding play equipment should be done at a local level and that the local highways initiative is a County Council function. In respect to grounds maintenance, the evidence was not clear, however the Cabinet would consider a more thorough proposal. In regards to the Community Chest, the fund would have to be spent before consideration is given to increasing it.

A Member questioned why there had been a £200k overspend on the grounds maintenance element of the Leisure and Health budget during 2018/19. The Head of Resources stated he did not know but confirmed that he will investigate why.

Concern was raised regarding the litter bin removal scheme, however the Panel was informed that the scheme will not remove all litter bins, only those that are underutilised or in areas where there is more than one bin.

(At 7.33pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor T Sanderson left the meeting.)

(At 7.34pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor T Sanderson entered the meeting.)

(At 8.03pm, after the consideration of this item, Councillor M Grice left the meeting.)

54. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2019/20

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 2019/20 was presented to the Panel. The report covered the following: Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy, Investment Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision Statement and Flexible use of Capital Receipts Strategy.

A Member commented that they were concerned that the report only mentioned the Commercial Investment Strategy in terms of a financial activity and not in regards to greater economic benefits. It was explained that the strategy is prescribed and that greater economic benefits is covered by the Commercial Investment Strategy policy document.

(At 8.04pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor M Grice entered the meeting.)

55. COUNCIL TAX - REVIEW OF DISCOUNTS

With the aid of a report by the Revenues and Benefits Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Council Tax – Review of Discounts was presented to the Panel. It was explained that it is proposed discounts are removed for unoccupied and substantially unfurnished properties and that the premium levied on long term empty properties is increased.

A Member commented that they would like a speedier increase in applying the increased premiums to long-term empty properties; however they were informed that the speed of the increase is governed by legislation.

The suggestion was made that the Council could write to the owners of long-term empty properties regarding the changes.

The Panel was reassured that the properties of the deceased would be classified under a different category and treated differently to long-term empty properties. For all other long-term empty properties it was confirmed that the owner is responsible for the charge and that premiums will be applied from when they become empty.

Members welcomed the report and were supportive of the proposed changes.

56. OFF STREET CAR PARKING INVESTMENT AND AFFORDABILITY

With the aid of a report by the Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Off-Street Car Parking Investment and Affordability was presented to the Panel. In introducing the report the Executive Councillor for Operations and Regulation informed Members that all the improvements will take between three and four years to roll out.

A Member asked if consideration been given to those residents who forget their vehicle registration or enter the incorrect vehicle registration, the opportunity for response was not given, due to other questions.

A comment was made in respect to the communications of the changes. In response, the Panel was informed that once the decision to invest has been taken, then a full communications plan will be put in place.

In response to a query on additional car parking income, it was explained that the changes to the charging structure are to encourage an increase in dwell times and through this additional paid for parking time income is anticipated to rise. It was also noted that as the charging structure is altering to allow the customer to pay for what they use, a direct comparison between existing charges and new charges cannot be made.

Members were informed that where pay for what you use is implemented, 50% of customers have swapped over to use the check in, check out service. It was stated that the customer would need a debit or credit card to take advantage of the service and that customers using cash payment would have to pay for a set amount of time upfront.

Concerns were raised over the amount of personal data being collected; however Members were informed that personal data will only be viewed by authorised personnel and will be managed and deleted in accordance with General Data Protection Regulation. The Parking Service is audited by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency to ensure they are fully compliant in managing any personal data, failure would result in a withdrawal of their ability to have access to vehicle keeper information. It was confirmed that the Council has never failed to meet these requirements. Data for statistics will be anonymised but will still provide the Council with enough information to be able to make better and more informed decisions.

Following a question as to why the Council are not charging in all car parks, the Panel was informed that it would not be economically viable for the Council to charge for parking in some car parks. It was clarified that the Task and Finish Group agreed early on that Sundays should not be charged and existing small non-town based car parks without charge should remain so with opportunities explored to transfer them to community ownership where possible reflecting their main use. In addition, blue badge holders will not be charged for parking.

A Member commented that they expected pushback from the public in regards to changing the charging structure without the improvements and that openness on the future improvements will be

required. It was clarified that the charging structure will only be changed once the new machines are installed, in a phased approach as it is a requirement of 'Pay for What You Use'. In addition where possible, bay sizes will also be increased.

A Member stated that they are not convinced that charging for car parks will encourage retail in the town centres. The Panel was informed that car parks are not free as they have to be maintained and they incur business rates. In the event that charges were lowered or withdrawn the Council would need to find additional funding streams from elsewhere in order to achieve the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

(At 8.27pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor J A Gray left the meeting.)

(At 8.37pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor J A Gray entered the meeting.)

(At 8.57pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor J Cooper-Marsh left the meeting.)

(At 8.58pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor J Cooper-Marsh entered the meeting.)

57. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

58. HDC VENTURES LIMITED - SSL BUSINESS PLAN

With the aid of a report by the Head of Community (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) HDC Ventures Limited – SSL Business Plan was presented to the Panel.

Members were informed that the Council have found a business partner and that the collaboration will bring benefits to each party that would not otherwise have been achieved.

The Panel provided comments for consideration by Cabinet.

(At 9.17pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillors Mrs A Dickinson, M Grice and J P Morris left the meeting and did not return.)

59. RE-ADMITTANCE OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

That the press and public be re-admitted to the meeting.

60. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was presented to the Panel.

(At 9.37pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor J A Gray left the meeting and did not return.)

Chairman