

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH) held as a Remote Meeting via Microsoft Teams on Wednesday, 8th July 2020

PRESENT: Councillor S J Corney – Chairman.

Councillors E R Butler, B S Chapman, J C Cooper-Marsh, I D Gardener, Dr P L R Gaskin, M S Grice, J P Morris, A Roberts, S Wakeford and D J Wells.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor D B Dew

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors T D Alban, B S Banks, R E Bellamy, S J Criswell, J W Davies, Mrs A Dickinson, R Fuller, D A Giles, J A Gray, D N Keane, J Neish, Mrs J Tavener, D M Tysoe and Mrs S R Wilson.

4 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 4th March 2020 and 17th June 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

6 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 July 2020 to 31st October 2020.

7 RECOVERY REPORT

With the aid of a report by the Managing Director (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the impact of Covid-19 on Huntingdonshire and the recovery planning was presented to the Panel.

After a presentation by the Managing Director, Councillor Giles asked what the current situation regarding rough sleepers was. In response it was explained that the Government have extended the funding and that the latest efforts would be focused on stabilising the lives of the homeless and finding permanent solutions.

The second question asked by Councillor Giles was whether the District Council could collaborate with local schools and provide empty rooms for classes so that pupils could be taught in safe socially distant settings. Members were reminded that education and schools is primarily the remit of Cambridgeshire County

Council but also a high number of schools are academies and are part of academy networks which have their own solutions.

Following a query from Councillor Wakeford, it was confirmed that the Community Impact Assessment, which is an appendix of the Recovery Report, is an evolving document that will assist Officers when assessing how to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and the necessary steps that need to be taken.

Councillor Roberts asked about mobile phone coverage and stated that it has to be a priority as mobile phones are important for some businesses to function and, for others residents, during lockdown has been sometimes the only connection to the outside world. The Panel was informed that there is a project called Connecting Cambridgeshire and that Officers know where the areas of poor signals are. This in turn is important in addressing if Huntingdonshire is to become a digital economy.

Councillor Alban asked what preparations the Council has made with the Parish Councils in order to get them prepared for a second wave. In response the Managing Director stated that building relationships with Parish Councils is an activity that the Council have spent a lot of time on but there is further consideration to be done on how the broader parish base feeds into the recovery.

Councillor Tysoe questioned what the timescales for the recovery plan are and how will it be put together. Members were informed that the recovery plan is currently being drafted and a proactive stance is being taken. Officers will work on the draft recovery plan and one will be ready in the autumn but that this will be caveated under the assumption there aren't local spikes or lockdowns.

The confidence of the data was questioned by Councillor Wakeford, however the Panel was reassured that they could have the highest confidence in the data. In addition, the Managing Director added that there are not many gaps but where there are is because the data hasn't been prepared prior to the publication of the report. The aim of the data is to get it in the lowest units possible so that the Council can understand how Covid-19 has affected each town and village and form recovery plans based on the data.

A discussion ensued regarding broadband provision within Huntingdonshire and Councillor Chapman stated that if the District was to differentiate itself from other areas then it would need to become more technologically advanced and install full fibre broadband. Councillor Chapman argued that this, in turn, would attract more people and businesses to the District.

Following a query from Councillor Gardener on micro businesses, Members were informed that all information and assistance for businesses can be found at the WeAreHuntingdonshire website.

Councillor Gaskin commended Officers on the communication the Council has had with residents during the Covid-19 pandemic and has encouraged Officers to continue to explore all avenues of communication with all residents.

The Panel,

RESOLVED

- 1) to accept the Community Impact Assessment as a comprehensive summary of the impacts of Covid-19 on Huntingdonshire, and
- 2) to support the Council in the construction of recovery plans based on the themes of economy, environment, social and community.

8 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).

9 ANNEXE 1

Consideration was given to Annexe 1 (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book).

10 RE-ADMITTANCE OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

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

11 DECISION TRACKER

With the aid of a report by the Managing Director (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the decision tracker was presented to the Panel.

Following a short introduction, Councillor Morris asked how long the suspension of car parking charges is likely to continue, in response the Executive Leader confirmed that currently there is no confirmed date for the reintroduction of car parking charges but that the situation remained under constant review. The Executive Leader add that he has regular meetings with Group Leaders in which he updates them on every decision he has taken in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Councillor Wakeford asked that beyond the Group Leader meetings, could Overview and Scrutiny be notified of the decisions at an earlier stage. The Executive Leader confirmed that decisions needed to be taken quickly and that informing the Group Leaders and then sending a weekly Member Briefing electronically was deemed to be the most efficient way to keep all Members informed. The Executive Leader reminded Members that until legislation had been past the Council was unable to convene virtual committee meetings.

The Executive Leader was asked by Councillor Giles whether any Member had criticised any of the decisions made. In response, the Executive Leader stated that he was not aware of any Members who have criticised any of the decisions taken.

12 FUTURE POLICY FOCUS

With the aid of a report by the Interim Corporate Director (Place) (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the Future Policy Focus of the Executive was presented to the Panel.

In discussing the report, Members discussed the possibility of adding the following topics onto the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for the 2020/21 Municipal Year: Waste Strategy, Digital Strategy and the Housing Strategy to 2025. The Panel

RESOLVED

that the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) would, in consultation with the Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen, plan the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme and commence any work as appropriate.

13 3C LEGAL, ICT AND BUILDING CONTROL SHARED SERVICES ANNUAL REPORTS 2019/20 AND PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT RENEWAL

With the aid of a report by the Corporate Director (People) (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the Shared Services Annual Performance and the Partnership Agreement Renewal was presented to the Panel.

After the Corporate Director (People) presented the report, Councillor Alban asked how the Council maximised the benefit it gets from the ICT products, particularly global products such as the Office 365 suite. In response it was explained that the Council has little influence over development of global products however the Transformation team, and the intelligent client, work with Council services to understand business needs and ensure that they are able to maximise the benefits from these tools. This approach means that services do not have to be technology experts but are supported to use the tools that can make them both more efficient and more effective.

Councillor Tysoe commented that the decisions on investment in the ICT service by the Council are showing their value and worth, particularly in the way that services have been able to work largely as normal during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Concern was raised by Councillor Tysoe over the resilience of the Council as it is now more reliant on IT and how would the Council cope if the IT system failed. The Panel was reassured that the Council have disaster recovery arrangements in place, steps have been taken to strengthen the resilience and that the plans are constantly reviewed. It was noted that before digitisation a risk was still present but it was sat elsewhere, e.g. in irreplaceable sets of paper files. Following digitisation the risk of complete loss is very low but risk profiles change alongside process change and the Council keeps such issues under review.

A question was raised by Councillor Wakeford whether governance is going to be robust enough to adapt to working with potential new partners. Members were reassured that the governance arrangements are robust enough and that there is little appetite to bring new full Shared Service Members into the partnership, therefore any expansion would likely involve delivery of services under contract.

RESOLVED

that the Panel's comments on the 3C Legal, ICT and Building Control Shared Services Annual Reports 2019/20 and the Partnership Agreement Renewal be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration.

14 INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT 2019/20, QUARTER 4

With the aid of a report by the Performance and Data Analyst and the Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the integrated performance of the Council for the period 2019/20, quarter 4 was presented to the Panel.

The Panel's attention was drawn to a number of key actions and performance measures from 2019/20. Many of these showed good performance and a number of them, such as the delivery of Council Anywhere, high levels of volunteering and low levels of staff sickness, have contributed to the Council's ability to deal proactively with Covid-19

In reference to performance indicators 35 and 36, Councillor Alban commended the Call Centre staff and commented that when he spoke to a Call Centre Advisor he wouldn't have known that they weren't in the Office.

Councillor Tysoe asked when a plan on restarting capital projects would be brought forward. Members were reassured that information on restarting capital projects would be included in the quarter 1 report of 2020/21 which is expected to be presented to the Panel in October 2020.

RESOLVED

that the Panel's comments on the performance measures be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration alongside the Integrated Performance Report 2019/20, Quarter 4.

15 TREASURY MANAGEMENT SIX MONTH PERFORMANCE REPORT

With the aid of a report by the Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) the treasury management performance of the Council for the six month period between 1st October 2019 and 31st March 2020 was presented to the Panel.

After the short introduction by the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources and the Chief Finance Officer, the Panel did not make any comments in relation to this report.

Chairman