

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in the CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER / STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 26 March 2025

PRESENT: Councillor S R McAdam – Chair.

Councillors T Alban, B S Banks, M L Beuttell, A Blackwell, E R Butler, S Bywater, S Cawley, B S Chapman, S J Conboy, S J Corney, S J Criswell, L Davenport-Ray, D B Dew, S W Ferguson, I D Gardener, C M Gleadow, J A Gray, K P Gulson, J E Harvey, M A Hassall, S A Howell, N J Hunt, M Kadewere, P Kadewere, D N Keane, J E Kerr, C Lowe, R Martin, B A Mickelburgh, D L Mickelburgh, J Neish, Dr M Pickering, B M Pitt, T D Sanderson, D J Shaw, R A Slade, S L Taylor, I P Taylor, D Terry, C H Tevlin, S Wakeford and N Wells.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors R J Brereton, M J Burke, Catmur, J Clarke, A E Costello, A R Jennings and P A Jordan.

79 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Council held on the 26th February 2025 and the Extraordinary Meeting held on 19th March 2025 were approved as correct records and signed by the Chair.

80 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

81 CHAIR'S ENGAGEMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Council noted those engagements attended by the Chair and Vice-Chair since the last meeting (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). In doing so the Chair advised of his intention to stand down as the Chair of the Council. He disclosed that he was initially shocked to be appointed as Chair of the Council but that it had been a great privilege to do so and thanked all the Members for their support. He expressed particular thanks to the Vice-Chair, Councillor D Dew as well as the Chief Executive Officer, the Elections and Democratic Services Manager and the Member Support Officer for their help and support over his tenure as Chair.

The Leader and Deputy Leader both expressed their thanks to the Chair for the hard work during his time in post. This sentiment was shared by Councillor R Martin who also highlighted the importance of the work done outside of the formal meetings, drawing particular attention to the Council Programme Group, where the Chair had listened to his concerns which was very much appreciated.

Councillor D Dew thanked the Chair for the opportunity he had gained by being appointed as the Vice-Chair. He also shared that it had been a very enjoyable experience and wished the Chair well for the future.

The Chair stated that the entire experience had been a highlight but particularly noted being sat in the Chair and listening to the well researched debated from his learned colleagues. He also noted that being able to go to Civic Events and fly the flag for Huntingdonshire and our residents had been a privilege and particularly his recent visit to the Air Ambulance Trust which included the presentation of £1000 donation to be used for a valuable and much needed piece of equipment.

82 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Chair reported that that there had been no public questions received by the deadline for consideration by the Council.

83 QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

It was observed by Councillor N J Hunt that recent comments by the national Leader of the Conservatives suggested that the target of net zero by 2050 was unachievable and asked the Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce whether the joint administration remained fully committed to the Council's Climate Strategy and that the Council remains on track to being net zero by 2040. Councillor L Davenport-Ray responded that the Council remained committed and on target for 2040 and added that whilst getting the Council to net zero may seem like a small drop in the ocean it was an important step for the Council to influence others and lead the way. Following a further question from Councillor Hunt, Councillor Davenport-Ray advised that she believed in a thriving not growing economy and that net zero presents the Country with opportunities for growth nationally not just within our District.

The Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene, Councillor S L Taylor, responded to a question from Councillor M L Beuttell who questioned the contingency plans in place should a power outage affect the Councils IT system and thus affect the in-cab refuse system identifying green bins to be collected. Councillor S Taylor advised that this was a risk identified by Internal Audit and that hard copies of the rounds were available for crews in the event of such an outage.

Councillor K P Gulson queried when the results of the November Peer Reviews for Development Management Committee would be shared, to which the Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor T Sanderson advised that this was due to be published imminently.

In response to questions relating to the installation of solar panels at the One Leisure St Ives site from Councillor N Wells, the Executive Councillor for Communities, Health and Leisure, Councillor S A Howell, advised that due to the embedded carbon of the panels there would be an expected payback of 5 to 6 years against a life span of 25 years. The Council heard that the panels had been part funded by Sports England and that power generated was going towards heating the pool and centre. The potential for EV chargers to be installed

would be investigated in the future but not planned for at this point in time. It was noted that the removed trees from the area had been diseased, and that work was being done to remove the stumps with replanting planned for Autumn.

Councillor B S Chapman stated that St Neots has the highest identified flood risk in Cambridgeshire, resulting in flood prevention being very important, in particular he identified an area of land covering 44 acres by the Willow bridge as a flood plain, and advised that over the last 12 months this area had flooded on five occasions. He asked the Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor Sanderson, to provide more formal protection for this area, particularly given the proposal to encourage planting in the area to create further flooding protection. Councillor Sanderson advised that this land had not been identified by the St Neots Town Council in the recent call for sites despite a significant number being submitted. It was advised that it would be more prudent to include the area in the forthcoming neighbourhood plan refresh. It was also noted that a report relating to the Call for Sites would be brought before the Overview and Scrutiny Panel in April 2025 where further discussion on the matter could be heard and that additional conversations and clarification with the Council's Planning Team could be held should they be required.

Councillor R Martin observed that an increase in car parks fees had been identified within the 2025/26 budget upon the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) but that Cabinet had also stated that there would be no changes to car parking charges for the first year of CPE and asked the Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene which was correct. Councillor S Taylor advised that following the implementation of CPE the Council would wait for up to a year before implementing any price rises in order to gather data and make an informed decision. It was noted that the Parking Strategy would be key in establishing this. The Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources, Councillor B A Mickleburgh, advised that the agreed budget was a best estimate of the year ahead, with rises to car park fees identified, however it was anticipated that the introduction of CPE would bring about behavioural changes on car park usage and that an informed decision would be made once the impact of this was known. The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources clarified that an in-year variation to the set fees and charges could be dealt with by budget management via the Section 151 Officer and that the detail on this was regularly reported through the democratic process in the form of quarterly reports.

In response to a question from Councillor J A Gray, who requested an analysis from the Leader on the weaknesses in value for money arrangements for governance identified by the Annual Audit report, Councillor S J Conboy advised that the Council were keen to strengthen governance and were robust in that challenge. It was noted that investment into the audit function had been made and that interim internal audit processes had been employed to bolster our resources. The report heard by the Corporate Governance Committee was a very thorough report and that there had been concern previously as this had not been as robust as needed. She welcomed the opportunity to develop the Council's governance arrangements and that the Council could continue to challenge themselves. It was noted that the process had not fundamentally changed since the previous administration but that the current administration were working hard to work out what changes were required going forward. The Executive Councillor for Governance and Democratic Services, Councillor J E

Harvey, further advised that there was an awareness of challenges within the audit department, but that new measures had been brought in to correct this and to improve the service going forward.

Councillor J Neish expressed concern about the known delays experienced for post via Royal Mail in the District and questioned the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance, Councillor S W Ferguson, whether leniencies would be applied for residents who had not received their Council Tax bills in a timely manner. Councillor Ferguson advised that it would be possible to move customers direct debits from the 1st of the month to the 15th, however this could only be done at the customers' request. He would endeavour to liaise with the Communications Team to ensure that as many residents as possible were able to be made aware of this fact.

The Executive Councillor Economy, Regeneration and Housing was questioned about apprenticeships by Councillor Hunt and how they could be used as a route into employment. Councillor S Wakeford advised that the Council undertook a range of activities to promote apprenticeships including partnering with local businesses to promote the benefits, working with schools for career events and tailoring apprenticeships programmes to align with market demands. It was also noted that the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority were supporting training providers and partners. It was agreed that the Councillors would meet to establish how Councillor Hunt could further support and promote apprenticeships. Councillor C A Lowe identified a company in St Ives, Oxford Energy Academies, who had created apprenticeship opportunities but were struggling to fill the vacancies. Councillor Wakeford advised that this was something which the Council were aware of and were supporting but was happy to speak to Councillor Lowe to follow up on the situation.

84 CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY - QUESTIONS

The Council received and noted copies of the decision summaries from recent meetings of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) and Members were advised that any issues could be raised in relation to these meetings.

Arising from which, Councillor M Hassall drew attention to a question which he had asked in December 2024 and a further question in February 2025 both relating to the staffing costs at the CPCA and that he had requested a detailed breakdown of the CPCA staffing budget, he noted that he had yet to receive a response. It was advised by the Chief Executive that an answer had been received and would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

Councillor R Martin expressed concern about a policy released by the Mayor during the pre-election period, the Executive Leader advised that she was not aware of this, however she would speak to the Monitoring Officer at the CPCA to express the concerns of the Councillor.

85 OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council held on 26th February 2025 is appended in the Minute Book and Members were advised that any issues or questions could be raised in relation to these meetings.

There were no questions raised.

86 VARIATIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

There were no changes to report.

87 APPOINTMENT OF MONITORING OFFICER

With the assistance of a report and exempt Appendix by the Chief Executive (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book and the Annex to the Minute Book respectively) regarding the appointment of a Monitoring Officer, the Council were advised of the outcome of the meeting of the Employment Committee which had met on 17th March 2025 to consider the appointment of a new Monitoring Officer.

Having noted that the proposal enabled the Council to fulfil the need identified by the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge in May 2024 to improve the Council's approach to governance, compliance and risk by providing a Monitoring Officer role, it was

RESOLVED

that the individual listed in the exempt Appendix to the report now submitted, be designated the District Council's Monitoring Officer with a start date to be confirmed following necessary employment checks.

88 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information;

- relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information); and
- in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.

89 WORKFORCE STRATEGY AND DUE DILIGENCE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

The Council gave consideration to an exempt report by the Head of Paid Service (a copy of which is appended in the Annex to the Minute Book), on the Workforce Strategy and Due Diligence for Local Government Reorganisation.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED

that the Council approved the recommendations of the exempt report now submitted.

Chair