

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in the BURGESS HALL, WESTWOOD ROAD, ST IVES PE27 6WU on Wednesday, 21 July 2021

PRESENT: Councillor L W McGuire – Chairman.

Councillors T D Alban, L A Besley, Mrs M L Beuttell, G J Bull, S Bywater, J R Clarke, Mrs S Conboy, S J Corney, S J Criswell, Miss R D'Souza, D B Dew, R Fuller, I D Gardener, Dr P L R Gaskin, D A Giles, Mrs S A Giles, M S Grice, K P Gulson, M Haines, Mrs P A Jordan, Mrs M Kadewere, P Kadewere, D N Keane, C J Maslen, H V Masson, D J Mead, J P Morris, J Neish, J M Palmer, B M Pitt, K I Prentice, A Roberts, C Smith, Mrs S Smith, D Terry, R G Tuplin, D M Tysoe, S Wakeford, R J West and Mrs S R Wilson.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors B S Banks, S M Burton, E R Butler, B S Chapman, J C Cooper-Marsh, J A Gray, M J Humphrey, T D Sanderson, Mrs P E Shrapnel and D J Wells.

15 PRAYER

Pastor Joyce of the International Prayer Church opened the meeting with a prayer.

16 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 19th May 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

17 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

18 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: SECTION 89 - ST NEOTS EAST WARD

The Returning Officer reported that following a by-election in the St Neots East Ward on 8th July 2021, Councillor Ben Pitt had been elected to the District Council. The Chairman welcomed Councillor Pitt to his first meeting of the Council.

19 CHAIRMAN'S ENGAGEMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Council noted those engagements attended by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman since the last meeting (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book).

20 STATE OF THE DISTRICT 2021 (ANNUAL REPORT)

The Chairman invited the Executive Leader, Councillor R Fuller to address the Council on the State of the District 2021 and to open the debate which was scheduled to follow. A copy of the PowerPoint presentation is appended in the Minute Book.

In his opening remarks Councillor Fuller began by reflecting back on his State of the District address the previous year that focussed on the Council's immediate Covid response and was proud to report on a record of action that been undertaken since then to support communities around the District. His sincere thanks were offered to both Officer and Members who supported the delivery over the last year, with new ways of working being deployed.

Focussing on the business community, Members were advised of the successful delivery of a range of discretionary grant schemes alongside the mandatory Government schemes resulting in the award of £56m to support local businesses. Alongside this £22m of business rate reliefs and the securing of an additional £1.4m of Government funding to further business recovery and growth support schemes and the direct delivery of £900k of hardship funding and Council Tax support payments.

Attention was drawn to support of £65k funding for the community and food banks, together the Council's own stock of food and supplies for vulnerable and shielding residents, the extension of the Community Chest fund to £50k for Covid support and Covid recovery projects and the success for the Council in the being an early adopter of the Kickstart youth employment scheme.

In referencing his first public statement on the Coronavirus on 18th March 2020, the Executive Leader reminded Members of the Council's priority to assist the business community, maintain essential services and support the most vulnerable in the District and this has guided all the Council had achieved over the last 16 months in response to the pandemic.

The Executive Leader explained that the resultant delivery of new services in response to the pandemic would have been easy for this to impact on other areas of activity, but he reported that the direction of the Cabinet was to maintain business as usual. This can be demonstrated by the continued delivery of the waste and operations service, with the District Council being one of only 5% of all Council's that have managed such an achievement.

Members were informed of the success in preventing 523 homelessness cases throughout the past year and the eventual accommodation of 108 individuals under the Government's 'Everyone In' scheme, as well as new Homelessness and Housing Strategies securing £25k of Government funding to continue the Council's outreach service to support rough sleepers.

An update was provided on the channel shift of an increase in residents accessing services digitally at times to suit them, with more than 24k online portal accounts created and activity taking place outside normal working hours. A further update was provided on the award of £12.2m of Community Infrastructure Levy funding towards a range of infrastructure projects around the District, the most awarded in a single year so far.

Attention was drawn to discussions held previously on the potential impact of the pandemic on the Council's finances, with the suspension of car parking charges, closure of leisure centres, commercial rental income under pressure and other fee income predicted to reduce significantly, the Executive Leader explained that there was a risk of a much larger gap of £8m predicted in the Council's budget but due to the actions taken by the Cabinet and Senior Officers, together with the Government support received, he was pleased to report the fantastic achievement of a £60k underspend on the budget figures set the month before the pandemic took hold. It was further noted that despite not knowing the outturn figures for the year, a Council Tax freeze was delivered for this financial year.

Members were acquainted with details of a range of new projects delivered in addition to the other achievements in the previous year to deliver the manifesto commitments of the administration and response to emerging priorities to ensure Huntingdonshire continued to thrive. This has included the rolling out of electric vehicle charging points in the Council's car parks, provision of a brand new park in St Ives and the securing of nearly £4m in grant funding to decarbonise the Council's buildings.

The Executive Leader referred to the issue of problem parking around the District and the successful introduction in the responsibility of civil parking enforcement for on-street parking offences, as well as other successful projects that had been delivered that were not required as statutory services or commitments but demonstrated the ambition of the District Council.

Attention was drawn to future projects including the transformation of an area by the river in Godmanchester, an agreement with the Longhurst Group to develop nine redundant District Council land holdings to deliver 100 new affordable homes, delivery of the £1.5m Covid recovery accelerated town centre work with secured funding from the Combined Authority and the significant investment in the St Neots town centre regeneration plans, with similar proposals planned for Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey.

The Executive Leader highlighted the OxCam Arc project, one the Government's top ten stated priorities, with Huntingdonshire sitting at the gateway to the rest of Cambridgeshire and encouraged Members to engage constructively to avoid missed opportunities. Despite the Arc concept not being perfect, particularly with some of the proposals associated with the East-West rail link, the potential benefits to Huntingdonshire residents, particularly in and around St Neots, should be embraced by all Members as unparalleled opportunities for the residents.

Members were urged to maintain the momentum and continue to rise to the challenges that may still emerge from the longer-term effects of the pandemic and recovery. The Executive Leader expressed his positivity and ambition for the opportunities available to the District Council, being the ninth largest in the country, to continue to strive for excellence that has been delivered in abundance over the last year.

In concluding, the Executive Leader referred back to his first speech as newly elected Leader in December 2019 of ambitious vision, provider of vital services and always there for the most vulnerable residents and relevance of such words today.

In response, on behalf of the HDC Independent Group, Deputy Leader, Councillor Ms S Smith thanked the Executive Leader for presenting to Members a comprehensive update of the Council's programme of activities for the last year. In referring back to the budget meeting in February 2021, with the unprecedented year of uncertainty and disruption, Councillor Ms Smith acknowledged and thanked the Officers and Members on the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Panels who had ensured the robustness and transparency of the decision making and the collaborative working in the voting in favour of the budget. In noting the support funding provided from the Government in terms of the Income Compensation Scheme and Council Tax Support Scheme to all authorities, this has placed Huntingdonshire in a stronger position than many other authorities. In reflecting on the positive outcome in the award of £2m New Homes Bonus, confirmed before the budget meeting, the Finance Team demonstrated their professionalism in adapting to accommodate this in the budget.

Councillor Ms S Smith referred to the challenges ahead, particularly with the Government's proposed changes to the planning laws that may result in the re-writing of the Local Plan and other planning policies but was encouraged by the administration's commitment to civil parking enforcement and decriminalisation of on-street parking enforcement, as well as the ongoing work with Disabled Facilities Grants despite the reduction in funding in the current financial year.

In her concluding remarks, Councillor Ms Smith reflected on the collaboration and consultation on the Future High Streets Fund Project and it was hoped that the District Council would continue to work with the respective Town Councils and local residents to ensure the smooth delivery and implementation of these improvements to continue to demonstrate the same level of joint working that was delivered over the past year.

Councillor Mrs S J Conboy on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group thanked the Executive Leader for his hard work and paid tribute to the hard work of the District Council staff. In reflecting on the previous year where some had been bereaved, furloughed, lost business income and many suffered ill health and communities, although isolated during the lockdown periods, also demonstrated great community support in pulling together. This also included the way councillors worked together, irrespective of their political standing and worked together to put the residents first.

It was highlighted to the Members the ongoing impact of Covid and the challenges that still existed, particularly in relation to building the local economy and managing the impact on the Council's budget. Councillor Mrs Conboy also referred to the Corporate Plan, that was achievable but ambitious based upon the assumption of returning to normal and likely that work will be different with access to service provided in a different way. In concluding, she thanked fellow Members and staff for their hard work during this difficult period that was a testament of commitment to putting the residents first.

On behalf of the Labour Group, Councillor S Wakeford echoed the sentiments of the previous Members and the impact on all over the past year. The Council had reacted well to meeting the challenges of the residents and referenced the successes highlighted by the Executive Leader, including the successes in preventing homelessness and work with rough sleepers. He welcomed the non-partisan approach and looked forward to working with the current administration in its return to some sense of normality. Councillor Wakeford concluded by commending the hard working Council staff for the help that they had provided to residents over the past year.

Councillor A Roberts highlighted the successes of maintaining front line services and delivery of new facilities such as the new Berman Park in St Ives. As a representative of one of the market towns in the District, he reported upon work with the Town Centres Recovery Officer that had been supporting welcome back grants, the Shop Locally and Think Local campaigns and looked forward to the work associated with the Accelerated Town Centres Programme.

Councillor D Dew commended the Executive Leader on his exceptional and thorough report of activities and had risen to the tremendous challenge over the past year. He also commented upon the observations by parish councils of how well the District Council had been operating in a partnership and collaborative way, as well as at recent meeting he had attended the District Council had been held up as exemplar and commended all Members and Officers.

21 CORPORATE PLAN REFRESH 2021/22

In conjunction with the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) held on 7th July 2021 and recommendation of the Cabinet, consideration was given to a report by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on an update on the refresh of the Corporate Plan 2021/22. The Executive Leader reminded Members that this was the last refresh for the four-year Corporate Plan that had been introduced in 2018 to take account of the Council's decision to move to whole Council elections every four years. It was further explained that the Covid actions had been removed and a separate Covid Plan had been drafted to complement the Corporate Plan.

Having been advised that the Cabinet supported the refresh at their meeting on 15th July 2021, it was

RESOLVED

that the revised key actions and performance indicators for inclusion in the Corporate Plan for 2021/22 be approved.

22 QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

Arising from questions from Councillor Mrs S A Giles on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) up to and including April 2021, Councillor J Neish, Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning, explained that all the information was available on the District Council's website. In so doing, he reported that up to and including 14th July 2021 there had been £47m generated and £16.9m had been

allocated to projects at various locations around the District, with the market towns taking the largest proportion, since the Council became a charging authority in 2012. He reported that the current balance of the CIL budget was around £21m and plans to support infrastructure strategic transport items such as the A428, A141, A14, A1 and East-West rail to support the delivery of growth in the District. This was all caveated with uncertainty surrounding the planning reform proposals and potential changes to CIL with the charging authority.

In response to a comment from Councillor T Alban on issues surrounding increasing frequencies of internet outages in Stilton this year and the ability for the District Council to take action in support of taking up such issues with Openreach and Connecting Cambridgeshire, Councillor D N Keane, Executive Councillor for Corporate Services, reported upon ongoing work by the District Council working with Openreach to deliver full fibre broadband across Huntingdonshire. Further work was being undertaken with Openreach to expand this coverage to other parts of the District, both urban and rural and undertook to take this issue forward on behalf of the parishes.

Councillor R J West commented upon the success of the Council's refuse collection service having recently won the APSE Award for this service and requested that the thanks be conveyed to the Team for their achievement. In response, Councillor Ms M L Beuttell, Executive Councillor for Operations and Environment, undertook to pass on the praise to the Team for their hard work.

Councillor P Kadewere raised a question in relation advice to communities to keep them safe with the restrictions being lifted and Covid cases continuing to rise, whereby Councillor S Bywater, Executive Councillor for Community Resilience and Well-Being, reported that the increase in numbers was not unique to the District with an upward trend nationally and urged residents to continue to follow the Government guidance and to act responsibly.

23 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES

In conjunction with the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) held on 7th July 2021 and recommendation of the Cabinet at their meeting held on 15th July 2021, consideration was given to a report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on a review of Parliamentary Constituency boundaries.

The Executive Leader drew Members attention initially to the recommendation of whether Members wished to make any representations to the Boundary Commission for England given the initial proposals may be contentious for political parties with advice given to local political groups. Members were informed of the Cabinet support for the initial proposals, although not ideal that the parliamentary constituency boundaries were not coterminous with the District boundary, but welcomed Members views on the proposals.

It was noted that concern was raised at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) in respect of the new proposed constituency of St Neots and the inclusion of the District Ward of Fenstanton and St Neots Wards within the South Cambridgeshire District would have no affinity with the other residents located across the District boundary.

Councillor D A Giles indicated his concern with the proposal in terms of the future proofing and suggested the inclusion of Wyboston across the border in Bedford Borough District that had a projected increase in electorate with the large housing development and impact on St Neots.

Councillor B M Pitt referred to similar concerns with the growth in electorate projected for the St Neots East ward in Loves Farm and Wintringham Park and with these projected electorate increases of over 6.5k would push the proposed constituency for St Neots over the recommended threshold for the size of each constituency.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Boundary Commission for England be informed of the Council's support for the initial proposals for the new Parliamentary constituencies affecting Huntingdonshire, with the highlighted concern of the inclusion of District Ward of Fenstanton and St Neots Wards in the new St Neots constituency and of the likely effect of the increase in electorate of St Neots East ward on the proposed St Neots constituency.

24 REVIEW OF MEMBERS ALLOWANCES - REPORT BY THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

(At 8.18pm, during consideration of this item, Councillor Mrs P A Jordan joined the meeting).

The Managing Director presented a report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager, to which was appended the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) summarising the outcome of the interim review of the Members' Allowances Scheme by the Independent Remuneration Panel.

Attention was drawn to the establishment of the Combined Authority in 2018 and enhanced demands on District Council appointments and their commitments. Members were appraised of details of the Independent Remuneration Panel that met on 9th and 10th June 2021 and attention was drawn to the final report that had a net effect on the Members' Allowance budget of an increase in the overall budget of £6,093 if the proposals were implemented to take effect from 2nd June 2021. The proposals also offered a short-term solution that would be subject to further review at the full review of the Members' Allowances Scheme scheduled for review in 2022.

Councillor Mrs S J Conboy, although in agreement to the extra work that was imposed on Members appointed as representatives to the Combined Authority, suggested that as a full review would be undertaken the following year the matter should be deferred for a year.

In response Councillor D B Dew commented as a current representative on the Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee and explained that the work involved large Agendas and reports, with long meetings and working

groups established and if Members were expected to step up to these roles it was necessary that they be recompensed for their time. He also explained that the District Council was in the minority of the other constituent authorities that had either included an allowance in their scheme for their Members or the matter was under review.

In reflecting on the comments raised by the previous Members, the Executive Leader, Councillor R Fuller, felt that by deferring a decision would not be appropriate and intimated that irrespective of the decision on the report he would continue in his role on the Combined Authority whether they were approved or not. The Executive Leader also considered it appropriate for a remuneration to be in place for all Members appointed as representatives to support them in their work and explained that there had been a saving on the Members' Allowance budget as he had retained a Portfolio and the Cabinet had also not appointed additional Members.

Subject to the removal of recommendation (d) of the report now submitted and voting thereon, Councillor L W McGuire moved the recommendations and was duly seconded by Councillor K Gulson and the Council

RESOLVED

that with effect from the 2nd June 2021

- (a) the Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) paid to the District Council's Executive leader be reduced to £14,813 and the establishment of a new separate SRA of £5,100 to be paid to the Huntingdonshire District Council appointee to the Combined Authority Board;
- (b) the Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) paid to the District Council's Deputy Executive Leader be reduced to £11,110 and the establishment of a new separate SRA of £1,685 to be paid to the substitute appointment to the Combined Authority Board;
- (c) the Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) of £946 be paid to those members of the District Council who are appointed to the Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Audit and Governance Committee;
- (d) the non-payment of a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) to the substitute District Council appointees to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny and Audit and Governance Committees;
- (e) the Special Responsibilities recommended for the Council's appointees to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority be exempt from the one SRA rule which is currently in place in the Huntingdonshire District Council's Members Allowances scheme; and
- (f) the Special Responsibility Allowances for Huntingdonshire District Council Members appointed to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and its committees be indexed to the locally

agreed cost of living percentage increase in Huntingdonshire District Council local government staff salaries and implemented from the date of the annual meeting for the same year that it applies to staff, up until the end of 2021/22 financial year, which is when the current authority for indexation expires.

25 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE 2020/21

In conjunction with a report by the Internal Audit Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillor G J Bull, Chairman of the Corporate Governance Committee, presented the Annual Report for 2020/21 of the Corporate Governance Committee that outlined the work that had been undertaken by the Committee over the previous year. In congratulating Officers in the services that they had delivered over the previous year, it was

RESOLVED

that the Annual Report 2020/21 of the Corporate Governance Committee be received and noted.

26 TREASURY MANAGEMENT SIX MONTH PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report by the Council's Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) presented by the Executive Leader providing a six-month update in respect of treasury management activity for the period 1st October 2020 to 31st March 2021.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that that the Treasury Management Performance during the period 1st October 2020 to 31st March 2021 be noted.

27 CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY - UPDATE

(At 8.34pm, during consideration of this item, Councillor J P Morris joined the meeting).

In conjunction with the decision summaries of the recent meetings of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Executive Leader, Councillor R Fuller, presented an update of their activities. Copies of the decision summaries are appended in the Minute Book. He referred to the challenge being faced for the newly elected Mayor coming into office and was reported that he was currently in the process of setting his policy platform and ambitions for the next four years. Members were advised of the early casualties of the schemes proposed by the previous administration being the Cambridge Autonomous Metro and £100k homes had been discontinued. The Executive Leader further

highlighted the continuation of discussions on bus network reforms work to progress the affordable housing agenda.

Councillors D B Dew provided an update on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee and in particular drew Members' attention to the recent procedural concerns that had been highlighted following the election of the Chairman of the Committee and the process for deciding upon a tied vote that had not been detailed in their Constitution. The Executive Leader echoed the concerns raised and reminded Members of a decision that was publicly agreed by the Mayor that the Chairman of the Committee should be from a different political party to the elected Mayor. He also reported that the matter had been raised with the Mayor for further discussion at a future meeting of the Board.

Councillor A Roberts raised his concern in relation to the recent consultation exercise that was being undertaken in relation to the St Ives Transport Study and the now inclusion of two further bypass options that had not been shared previously. This had occurred despite the extensive work that had been undertaken previously by the Deputy Leader and himself working with the Combined Authority in securing previous commitment to proposals and the additional options being presented had led to concerns raised by residents as unsuitable options. Members noted that this matter had been taken up with the Mayor.

Members were provided with an update on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Audit and Governance Committee by Councillor G J Bull.

28 RESOLUTION TO EXTEND 6 MONTH RULE - SECTION 85 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT

The Managing Director presented a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) detailing a request to consider the extension of the six-month rule of non-attendance at meetings in relation to Councillor Ms P E Shrapnel on the grounds of her ill-health. Whereupon, the Council

RESOLVED

(a) that Councillor Ms P E Shrapnel's non-attendance at meetings be extended until 30th November 2021 in accordance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972; and

(b) that the Council's best wishes be conveyed to Councillor Ms P E Shrapnel for continued improvement to her health.

29 OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council held on 19th May 2021 is appended in the Minute Book and Members were advised that any issues or questions could be raised in relation to these meetings.

30 USE OF SPECIAL URGENCY PROVISIONS 2020/21

The Executive Leader informed Members that the use of special urgency provisions taken throughout the previous year had not been required and there were no items to report.

31 REPRESENTATION OF POLITICAL GROUPS ON DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEES AND PANELS

A report was submitted by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) relating to the principles of proportionality to be applied to the appointment of Committees and Panels in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and Part II of the Local Government Act 2000 following the by-election held on 8th July 2021 and change in proportionality on the Council.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the allocation of seats on Committees and Panels to political groups and non-aligned Members be determined as set out in the report now submitted; and
- (b) that the requirements for appointments to advisory/sub-groups in paragraph 5.3 be noted.

32 VARIATIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

Further to Minute No. 21/31 ante, it was

RESOLVED

that Councillor B Pitt be appointed to the vacant seat on the Licensing and Protection Committee/Licensing Committee.

The meeting ended at 8.47pm.

Chairman