

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, 19 July 2023

PRESENT: Councillor M J Burke – Chair.

Councillors T Alban, B S Banks, M L Beuttell, A M Blackwell, R J Brereton, E R Butler, S Cawley, J Clarke, S J Conboy, S J Corney, A E Costello, S J Criswell, L Davenport-Ray, S W Ferguson, I D Gardener, C M Gleadow, J A Gray, K P Gulson, J E Harvey, M A Hassall, P J Hodgson-Jones, S A Howell, N J Hunt, A R Jennings, M Kadewere, P Kadewere, D N Keane, J E Kerr, C Lowe, R Martin, S R McAdam, 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, N Wells, G J Welton and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S Bywater, D B Dew, P A Jordan and S Mokbul.

12 THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

A 'Thought for the Day' was presented by Councillor Jonathan Gray.

13 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 17th May 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

14 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

15 CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR'S ENGAGEMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair referred to the recent death of former District Councillor Gordon Thorpe who had served seven years as a District Councillor for the St Neots Eaton Socon Ward from 2004 to 2011. Further tributes were paid by Councillors B M Pitt, R J West and Members then observed a moments silence in memory of the former Councillor.

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).

The Chair also took the opportunity to announce that he would be supporting four charities this year – The Little Miracles Children’s Charity, The Huntingdon Community Cancer Network, The Kite Trust and Magpas.

16 NOTICE OF MOTION

Councillor S J Conboy moved and it was duly seconded by Councillor J A Gray that

This Council:

- will not tolerate the abuse and intimidation of elected members or candidates. We will do all we can to debate without inciting hate so that all councillors in Huntingdonshire District Council, and future candidates, feel safe and able to fulfil their democratic roles.
- will speak with courtesy and respect.
- will write with courtesy and respect.
- will behave with courtesy and respect.

This Council RESOLVES to:

- Challenge the normalisation of abuse against councillors and uphold exemplary standards of public and political debate in all it does.
- Endorse the Local Government Association (LGA) “Debate Not Hate” Campaign.
- Write to the local Members of Parliament to ask them to support the campaign using the LGA’s template letter)
- Write to the Government (using the LGA’s template letter) to ask them to work with the LGA to develop and implement a plan to address the abuse and intimidation of politicians.
- Regularly review the support available to councillors in relation to abuse and intimidation and councillor safety.
- Work with the local police to ensure that there is a clear and joined-up mechanism for reporting threats and other concerns about the safety of councillors and their families.
- Take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of councillors and officers.

In presenting the motion, Councillor Conboy explained that debate was an essential part of democracy, but hate was not. Elected Councillors were united in their desire to serve their communities and stood for election because they were passionate about the people they represented and the wards that they served. Passion was not a bad thing; however, passion could be obtained without making things personal or derogatory. She reminded the Council that as councillors it was common to express differences of opinions. Different perspectives enriched the decisions that were taken on behalf of Huntingdonshire residents and were better for understanding all members views and concerns before they were taken.

Councillor Conboy went on to state that the notion in politics of opposition, scrutiny and holding to account was often tainted by what was seen in the media and how politics was sometimes conducted on the television.

Councillor Conboy went on to explain that she was shocked at the abuse and intimidation faced by national politicians but even more so to learn that local councillors can also face this. However, she was pleased to report that this was not the case within the Chamber at Huntingdonshire where colleagues sought to respect each other's views, find common ground and welcomed scrutiny from all to improve policy and delivery. Councillor Conboy concluded by explained that she was bringing this motion to Council not because it was required to address concerns but because she hoped the Council would never find itself slipping into the abyss of behaving badly and she urged all members to support the cross-party motion.

In seconding the motion, Councillor JA Gray endorsed what had been said thus far. In addressing the Council, he reiterated that hate was everywhere, particularly online. He drew attention to the growing impact of social media as a damaging aspect of public discourse particular given the potential for anonymity. He went on to state that there were very few who could claim to be very good listeners, most people thinking about the response, rather than genuinely listening to what is being said. In concluding his remarks and using an old metaphor, Councillor Gray suggested that he and his group would commit 'to play the ball and not player' within the Council Chamber.

A debate then ensued during which Councillors Tevlin, Howell and Hodgson-Jones spoke in favour of supporting the motion. In so doing, comments were made regarding the tragic deaths of MPs Sir David Amiss and Jo Cox, the need to be able to feel that councillors can live in a society full of free and fair speech without fear of intimidation and harassment and the need for Local Government to be a leading advocate on the need for change.

Comments were also made that the strength of the democratic process depended on the ability of elected members to represent their communities without fear. Concern was also expressed that 70% of councillors across the nation had experienced abuse and intimidation in 2022 and it was alarming to note that the severity and frequency appeared to be on the rise. Councillor Howell suggested that the way Councillors conducted themselves sent a message to those who observe and listen and that by upholding the principles of respect and courtesy Huntingdonshire District Council could set an example for others to follow.

Having been put to the vote, the Motion was declared to be CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

17 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10.1, the following Public Question was presented to the Council -

What factors contribute to the Huntingdonshire District Council's Decision to disregard public input and proceed with the implementation of garden waste green bin subscription service, despite the absence of a public consultation process and provisions of inadequate and inconsistent evidence presented to the Scrutiny Committee?

In thanking the questioner for his question, the Executive Leader began by confirming that she had read all the comments that individuals had submitted alongside the current petition, together with letters, Facebook posts etc and that she hoped that the questioner had been able to watch the Cabinet meeting held yesterday evening.

By way of background, she went on to explain that the implementation of a garden waste green bin subscription service had been a difficult decision for the Joint Administration which had been driven by financial issues. From the outset of their election in May 2022, the challenge for the Administration had been to understand and address the budgetary position which it had inherited.

Councillor Conboy went on to explain that at the Council meeting in December 2022, the Council agreed a set of budget principles for the forthcoming year which had set a clear steer as to what the Council would seek to achieve and what they would seek to protect. These principles included the need to protect front line services and an agreement that non-statutory services or those that compete in a commercial environment shouldn't burden those taxpayers who can't take advantage of them.

She went on to explain that in February 2023, the Council set a balanced budget which didn't utilise reserves and yet protected front line services at a time of soaring inflation and a cost-of-living crisis. As part of that budget several savings and income generation schemes were put forward – including garden waste subscription. She reiterated that the decision to propose a garden waste subscription service was not one which was taken lightly or without significant discomfort. Guidance provided by the Council's Responsible Financial Officer (S151 Officer) recommended that the Council needed to reduce its reliance on central government funding and to develop sustainable ways of generating income. Such that over the next 4 years, the Council might face a potential funding deficit of 9.7M. Introducing a garden waste subscription service was identified as a keyway of protecting front line services from service cuts.

The Executive Leader explained that unlike household waste and recycling there was no requirement for the District Council to collect garden waste and that not all properties in Huntingdonshire used the service. In fact, records illustrated that out of 83% of those properties with a green bin, 30% were not regularly using it. The current garden waste collection scheme costs the Council more than 800K a year. Rather than remove the service, given the value it represents to many residents the Joint Administration were of the view that this should be kept and charged for much like the existing bulky refuse service. Across the country, 65% of authorities already charged for this service as did a number of authorities in our region.

Regarding public consultation, the Executive Leader went on to explain that as a matter of law there is no general duty to consult before making this sort of decision. However, Huntingdonshire District Council believed in keeping residents informed of what is happening and had chosen to inform residents of their intentions. In doing so, the Council had tried to be transparent about the challenges it faced and the decisions which needed to be taken. Whilst the Administration were committed to listening and responding to feedback, the bottom line was that the Administration needed to balance its books.

In response to some of the concerns which had been expressed about vulnerable residents within the District, Councillor Conboy reminded Members that the Council operates a Resident's Advice and Information team that can assess people's personal circumstances and look at ways of accessing sustainable and small funding pots to achieve their goals. It would continue to offer that service and support, particularly around household expenditure. She was also pleased to report that the consultation had now started around proposals for a new Council Tax Support Scheme.

In addressing the concerns that had been expressed by some about the environmental impacts of the garden waste subscription scheme, Councillor Conboy reminded the Council that garden waste could be composted and used as mulch. In addition, because only those residents that subscribe would need that collection, this would reduce CO2 emissions. Whilst there continued to remain concerns that adding to grey bins wasn't environmentally friendly, statistics had shown that the levels of organic waste found in grey bins were already quite high and further work needed to be done to find ways to reduce the overall volume of organic waste collected.

In concluding her remarks, the Executive Leader reiterated that the District Council was committed to working with residents, towns, parishes, and District Councillors to understand how they could implement the proposals. She understood that people felt passionate about these proposals, and it was not the preferred choice of the Joint Administration, but she was keen to work with and listen to the views of local communities to reduce, recycle, and reuse.

18 STATE OF THE DISTRICT

The Chair invited the Executive Leader, Councillor S J Conboy to address the Council on the State of the District and to open the debate which was scheduled to follow.

Councillor Conboy opened her address by placing on record her sincere appreciation to Officers and Members who had supported everything that had been delivered in the past year. She was pleased to report that twelve months on since her appointment as Executive Leader, she had seen the District Council record better delivery and progress on critical actions compared to the previous year.

The Council were reminded that last year the Joint Administration had committed that they would -

- ❖ work in co-operation towards a greener fairer Huntingdonshire
- ❖ commend the excellent work undertaken by Council staff
- ❖ set a new strategic direction for the Council.

Council was also reminded that the Joint Administrations key objectives over the last year would focus on the following -

1. Tackling climate change and caring for the environment
2. Enhancing employment opportunities and supporting businesses
3. Supporting the needs of residents
4. Improving the housing situation

5. Strengthening our communities.

The Council were also reminded of the financial position inherited by the Joint Administration and the budget principles which were agreed at the December Council meeting which provided the Administration with a clear steer on the way in which they should prioritise their thinking in terms of making savings.

In addition to supporting Huntingdonshire residents, the Administration had also made commitments to support District Council staff during the year.

The Executive Leader went on to report in detail and at length on specific progress against the five objectives which had been set at the start of the year.

Looking ahead to the forthcoming year, the Executive Leader explained that the agreement of a new Corporate Plan in March 2023 outlined the Council's three key priorities:

- ❖ Improving the quality of life for local people
- ❖ Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations
- ❖ Delivering a good quality high value for money services with reasonable control and compliance with statutory obligations.

She reiterated that working together would continue to be an overarching principle for the Council. The challenges facing the Council could only be solved through collaboration and the Corporate Plan calls on the Council to play more of an enabling role to make more use of partnership working and to empower people to reduce demand for traditional public services.

The Council were advised that the Council would continue to communicate throughout the year regularly with residents and listen and respond to concerns in shaping its policies and priorities. The Administration would continue to draw on insights from councillors from all political persuasions whilst working together to ensure that the council provides good services and good value. The Council would also continue to work constructively with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Cambridgeshire County Council, and colleagues in health and to foster the positive and productive relationships it had grown with local town, parish councils, other public bodies, business partners and the third sector.

Finally, and in concluding her remarks, the Executive Leader referred to the Place Strategy which had been the subject of engagement over the course of the last year. Members were informed that over the summer stakeholders would be brought back together to bring the Strategy to life and that examples would continue to be sought from other parts of the country or abroad that may inspire the adoption of similar initiatives. It was hoped that these initiatives would challenge our existing way of thinking and encourage us to achieve better outcomes for Huntingdonshire.

In response on behalf of the Conservative Group, Leader Councillor J A Gray began by also expressing his appreciation to the Council's employees who have worked hard to achieve many of the things the Executive Leader had referred to over the last twelve months. He also went on to put on record his thanks to the

Executive Leader for the way in which she had undertaken her role during the past year.

Councillor Gray reminded the Council that he had pledged in the previous year that his Group would support those things that made sense and would oppose those things we thought were wrong and as an opposition he believed that they had played their part during the previous 12 months. He was also pleased that there had been a general acknowledgement internally and externally that the Authority had been well run under the previous administration. On a personal note, he was heartened to hear that the Commercial Investment Strategy had not been abandoned and looked forward to this entering the Overview and Scrutiny policy space in the year ahead.

In terms of the Council's financial position, Councillor Gray explained that he had been heartened by the budgetary position in February 2023 which had been in part made possible by Government making further funds available and which has vindicated his assurances back in February 2022 that the deficit in the MTFS would be closed. He expressed disappointment that he continued to hear talk of a £8M budgetary deficit given the Council's new budgetary position. He went on to explain that whilst the Council appears to be entering a situation where it was going to be producing surplus MTFS' which add to the surplus sitting in reserves, the Council is cutting services, raising charges, and creating new charges at a time of a squeeze on people's incomes post Covid.

In turning to another of the Administration's activities over the course of the past year, Councillor Gray welcomed the consultations which had taken place on the Place Strategy, Electric Vehicle Charging Points, St Neots Town Centre, and the forthcoming Council Tax Support Scheme which were consistent with the Joint Administration's agreement to communicate, engage with and listen and respond to the concerns of residents. Given that this formed a clear part of the Joint Administration's agreement, however Councillor Gray suggested that residents might enquire why this did not extend to issues such as the increase in one leisure charges, the implementation of an alternative land management strategy, the rewilding programme, and the garden waste subscription service. If the Administration wanted to state with credibility that they were genuinely interested in listening to the views of Huntingdonshire residents, this should include matters of a controversial nature.

In concluding his remarks, Councillor Gray reminded the Council that the electorate had not voted for the Joint Administration at the elections in 2022, nor the agreement that binds that Administration together. He went on to remark that he had not seen any of their members vote in any other way than in support of the Executive Leader's position. In doing so, he reiterated that Members of the Conservative Group were able to take their own decisions with the interests of their residents in mind.

Having commended the Joint Administration for the delivery of 460 Affordable New Homes during the year, Councillor D Terry went on to raise his specific concerns at planning decisions within the St Neots Eynesbury Ward which had resulted in the demolition of 179 garages and 80 parking spaces to build 48 new affordable homes. This had had a significant impact on parking within the area and had been against the recommendation of the Town Council and despite objections from over 40 residents.

In seeking to respond to some of the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition directly, Councillor L Davenport-Ray reminded the Council that the Conservative Party had included an alternative land management strategy within their last election manifesto and refuted the suggestion that members of the Joint Administration did not vote according to their own political ideals and decision-making ideas. She also referred to public consultation, and the fact that meaningful consultation should not include options which the Council was unable to fund or afford.

Councillor T D Sanderson took the opportunity to reiterate that Central Government settlements were usually issued for one year only and therefore it was difficult to make any assumptions going forward regarding the availability of funding. He also suggested that he would be interested to see alternative budget proposals from the Conservative Group going forward, together with their suggestions for addressing the financial issues facing the Authority.

In taking her turn to address the Council, Councillor S L Taylor took the opportunity to place on record her appreciation to the staff, particularly those within her portfolio of waste, one leisure and street scene who had provided excellent support to her during her first year within her Executive Councillor role.

Councillor D Shaw then spoke to put on record his appreciation to those involved with the Health Inequalities project which had provided funding to the Brampton Hub to help young people with mental health issues within his ward. The Executive Councillor for Community and Health took the opportunity to outline his pride in leading this portfolio. He went on to explain that population health was an important issue that the NHS was now getting to grips with, and which the Council's new Corporate Plan really holds to heart. He indicated his delight that the project in Brampton was working so well and expressed his support to the 14 other organisations and 55 projects that were part of the initiative. Council was advised of that significant value which was being obtained from the District's Residents which was a real tribute to the way the Administration was operating.

Councillor N J Hunt outlined his perceptions as a backbencher on the activities of the Administration over the last year and his pride in being part of an Administration which in his opinion was setting a positive and optimistic view for the future of the District. He expressed his appreciation at working with such an optimistic and talented bunch of people on both sides of the Council Chamber. He also took the opportunity to reiterate that the members of the Administration work together to build a consensus in decision making and provided examples of where opportunities had been taken at Overview and Scrutiny to amend Cabinet recommendations.

Finally, and in direct response to some to Councillor Gray's comments, Councillor S Ferguson drew attention to the 2022 Conservative Manifesto which stated that if re-elected the Conservatives would convert at least 25% of Huntingdonshire's grass areas such as roadside verges to meadow grass and wildflowers to further support wildlife and nature.

In exercising his right to reply, Councillor Gray thanked members of the Administration for listening and explaining their positions. He also reiterated that his comments surrounding whipping had not been intended to offend anyone and

had been a reference to full Council as opposed to meetings of Cabinet and Committees. Having outlined the reasons for not preparing an alternative budget for 2023/24, Councillor Gray undertook that the Conservative group would prepare one in future years. Finally, he clarified that the remarks with the Conservative manifesto had referred to verges and wildflower areas and that the Conservative Party had never stated that they would not keep play and recreation areas cut for Huntingdonshire residents.

19 QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

A question was raised by Councillor Dr M Pickering to the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene regarding the Alternative Land Management Scheme. Having been asked to provide an indication of the feedback received, Councillor S L Taylor explained that the majority of this had been positive. Although there were 4 sites where residents and Parish Councils had expressed concerns. Officers would continue to work with all communities and the parish / town councils and encourage the residents to allow the project of alternative land management to run its course.

Arising from a question by Councillor C H Tevlin, the Executive Councillor for Planning provided a detailed and in-depth clarification regarding the operation and process of the District Council's No Amendment Policy for Planning Services and the impact upon Development Management. In doing so, he explained that no amendments advice was available on the District Council's website and that the District Council's approach was supported by the Planning Advisory Service.

Following a request from Councillor M L Beuttell, the Executive Councillor for Waste Street Scene and Open Spaces updated the Council on the status of Civic Parking Enforcement (CPE) which she reported was currently running to time and not overspent. In doing so she reiterated that Huntingdonshire were not experiencing the issues that were being reported in the media regarding Fenland CPE and undertook to talk further with Councillor Beuttell outside of the meeting if this was considered necessary.

Pursuant to Minute No. 76 of the meeting held on 29 March 2023, Councillor T Alban sought an update on action which had been taken to address issues regarding sites owned by Housing Associations in Huntingdonshire which benefited from planning permissions, yet no development had commenced. Having noted that this formed part of the strategic element of the portfolio of the Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy, and Housing. Councillor S Wakeford explained that as part of the Council's annual monitoring Registered Providers were asked about their development plans for developing sites and this now included other sites without active plans. He also reported that the situation was not as widespread as Councillor Alban had first feared and that the overall delivery target for affordable housing was on target at this stage of the year. Whilst agreeing to set out the current position in writing, he stated that concerns only existed relating to 3 Cross Keys sites, two of which were in Councillor Alban's ward.

In response to a question from Councillor J E Kerr with regards to the progress which was being made in the development of a new Local Plan for Huntingdonshire, the Executive Councillor for Planning reported that over 300 potential sites had been submitted in response to the Call for Sites consultation and 270 responses had been received to the draft settlement hierarchy. It was intended to take an update on the Local Plan and Planning Services more generally to the October cycle of meetings.

In response to a question from Councillor J Neish regarding the numbers of planning withdrawals, the Executive Councillor for Planning undertook to take forward a suggestion regarding the setting of targets for withdrawals. Considering the references to the recent experiences and confusion at the Development Management Committee with regards to amendments, the Executive Councillor undertook to seek detailed clarification on the definition of amendments and provide a written response.

Following comments made by Councillor J Neish regarding complaints which had been received from Parish Councils regarding the perceived lack of consultation on the rewilding programme and lack of grass cutting, the Executive Councillor for Waste Street Scene and Open Spaces reported that consultation had taken place, but it had not been possible to communicate with all Town and Parish Councils before the growing season. Members were reminded that this initiative was a trial and were encouraged to wait and see the results that had been obtained in terms of biodiversity. She also took the opportunity to reiterate that play areas could be cut with no issues.

In response to a question from Councillor J E Harvey regarding what the Council to support residents were currently awaiting approval for disability adaptations from Places for People, the Executive Councillor for Customer Services provided an update on the problems which had been experienced and the current situation. He was pleased to report that following a number of interventions Places for People have now committed to providing landlord consent within three weeks, although efforts would be made to reduce this further. They had also granted permission for 53 cases awaiting approval for adaptations which had been outstanding for some time. He reiterated that the Council would continue to work to hold Places for People to account.

The Executive Councillor for Waste, Street Scene and Open Spaces undertook to provide a written response to Councillor S Cawley's question regarding the extent to which One Leisure is subsidised by Council taxpayers who were not using the service and whether there were any plans to see that reduced.

In response to a Facebook post on the Council's One Leisure page and having regard to previous assurances that the Courts for Kids initiative would be extended to under 18s, Councillor T Alban sought reassurance from the Executive Councillor for Waste, Street Scene, and Open Spaces that this was still the case. In response, the Executive Councillor agreed to investigate the posting as it was her understanding that it was crucial that those in the 16-18 age group were kept active.

With reference to the Local Plan consultations and specifically the Call for Sites element, Councillor J A Gray commented on the alarm, distress, and confusion that this was causing in several communities and sought clarification as to what

action was proposed to address these concerns. In response having acknowledged that this was always part of the Plan which would cause anxieties, the Executive Councillor for Planning suggested that the information collected from the consultation now needed to be collated and fed into Overview and Scrutiny and that communication needed to take place with those parishes and communities which had the biggest concerns. In welcoming further dialogue with these communities, Councillor Gray suggested that there was general confusion regarding the process and that there was an urgent need for further communication in this regard.

In response to a question from Councillor C H Tevlin, the Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy and Housing updated the Council on the reasons as to why Ramsey and St Neots had not been included within the recent Shopfront Grants Scheme. In doing so, he reiterated that Ramsey was benefiting from additional funding and work was ongoing to develop the produce hub and that in St Neots the designs for the St Neots Market Square Improvement works had just been released.

Finally, in drawing questions to a close, Councillor M A Hassall with reference to the passing of the recent motion surrounding debate not hate, suggested that it would be good practise going forward to share questions in advance. Not only would this secure a better answer for the public, but it was not in the spirit of the motion to seek to catch out Executive Councillors.

20 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE 2022/23

In conjunction with a report by the Internal Audit Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillor N Wells, Chair of the Corporate Governance Committee presented the Annual Report for 2022/23 of the Corporate Governance Committee that outlined the work that had been undertaken by the Committee over the previous year.

In presenting the report, Councillor Wells explained that he (alongside the Vice Chair and the Executive Councillor) had taken part in the Local Authority's Audit Peer Challenge and the Committee were looking forward to working with officers on the implementation of the seventeen recommendations arising therefrom. Going forward, the Members would continue to work with officers on the creation of the role of independent non-voting members to join the Committee.

Councillor Wells also expressed his thanks to the committee members and the officers involved with the Committee for their engagement and commitment.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the Annual Report 2022/23 of the Corporate Governance Committee be received and noted.

21 TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT 2022/23

Prior to the introduction of this report, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources updated the Council on the delay of the publication of the Audit of the 2021/22 Accounts. Members were also advised of three observations emerging from the audit which required remediation and had contributed to the delay. It was currently hoped that the Audit would be received by the Corporate Governance Committee in September 2023. This had had a knock-on effect in terms of reporting for the 2022-23 accounts.

Consideration then was given to a report by the Council's Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) presented by Councillor B A Mickelburgh, Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources. The report provide an update on the treasury management activity during 2022/23, including investment and borrowing activity and treasury performance. In doing so Members were advised that the Councils Commercial Property Portfolio performed better than the £1.3M that the Executive Summary implied and this was clarified within the appendix.

In considering the report, Councillor L Davenport-Ray asked a question regarding ESG investments and the differences which might be seen since the Council declared a climate emergency and markets become less volatile.

Having thanked the Executive Councillor for the update on the audit delay and having expressed the view that there did not seem to be any undue reason for concern in relation to the emerging observations, Councillor Gray questioned whether interest income was allocated across reserves equally. In response to which Councillor Mickelburgh explained that different accounting practises will demand different technical rules to be followed. However, he undertook to provide a further written response.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the Treasury Management Performance during the period 1st April to 31st March 2023 be noted.

22 REPORT OF THE SENIOR OFFICERS' COMMITTEE

Councillor S J Conboy, Executive Leader presented a report of the meeting of the Senior Officers Committee held on 11th July 2023 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the proposed appointment of a new Chief Executive, Head of Paid Service, Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer.

Having thanked those involved within the recruitment process for their contribution, hard work and deliberations during the appointment process, the Executive Leader also expressed her appreciation to Mr Oliver Morley for his assistance and support during the interim period. Whereupon it was moved, duly seconded and

RESOLVED

- (a) that Michelle Sacks be appointed as the Council's Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service, Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer with a start date to be confirmed following necessary employment checks which will be confirmed in consultation with Senior Officers' Committee and Group Leaders; and
- (b) that an extension to the appointment of Oliver Morley as the Council's Managing Director and Head of Paid Service, Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer be approved for a fixed term ending on the commencement of employment of Michelle Sacks.

23 THE STUKELEYS NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2022-2036

Having regard to a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the referendum of the Stukeleys' Neighbourhood Plan held on 8 June 2023, the Executive Councillor for Planning acquainted Members with the results of the referendum with 91.6% voting in favour of supporting the Neighbourhood Plan. As this exceeds the required threshold of 50% of votes case the Council was required to formally 'make The Stukeleys' Neighbourhood Plan 2022-2036 unless it considers that it would be incompatible with any EU or human rights obligations.

Whereupon it having been duly proposed and seconded it was

RESOLVED

that the Stukeleys' Neighbourhood Plan 2022-2036 as attached at Appendix 1 to the report now submitted be adopted with immediate effect to become part of the Statutory Development Plan for Huntingdonshire.

24 CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY - UPDATE

With the assistance of a PowerPoint presentation and the decision summaries of the previous meeting (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book), the Executive Leader Councillor S J Conboy presented an update of the activities of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

In doing so, the Council were advised of the availability of a new monthly highlights report which was a new reporting feature to the Combined Authority and recommended it to those who were seeking a general update on their key activities.

The Council were informed that the Board was continuing to work with the Independent Board to look at how to improve and develop the Combined Authority and the Executive Leader wished to place on record her appreciation to the previous Chair Sir Bob Kerslake who had recently passed away.

Members were advised that developments within the political world continued to move at pace and there was talk of new devolution deals across the Combined Authorities and the Elected Mayors. Whilst there was little detail yet, further information was expected shortly to enable decisions to be made.

Attention was drawn to the development of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan. Despite the original report starting from a premise that all areas had bus routes this assumption had now been made clear. The Executive Leader had met today with officers who are looking at how routes map geographically to demonstrate where services exist, where they don't and where there were potential opportunities. She reiterated that there may be some sensitive and challenging decisions ahead but wanted to work with councillors in affected areas to understand how and when services were used and opportunities for improvements.

In response to a request for an update from Councillor J Neish on the A141 St Ives Transport Strategy which appeared to have stalled, the Executive Leader undertook to establish the current status of the Strategy.

Councillor D J Shaw took the opportunity to raise the issues being experienced by Brampton residents with the 66 Whippet Bus Services, specifically the non-operation of services with no notice. Having been asked to raise the matter with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority who commissioned the service, the Executive Leader undertook to do so. Whilst she was not aware of the specific circumstances surrounding that route, all Members who encountered difficulties with CPCA commissioned services were encouraged to make any issues known so that they could be addressed.

In response to a question from Councillor J A Gray concerning when the Code of Conduct issues at the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority were likely to be concluded, the Executive Leader reported that she did not have a definitive answer but expected this to be fairly shortly. From the advice that she had received, the Executive Leader was told that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough were being considered as equal partners to all others in any potential devolution process. The real challenge for the authority would be to find common ground and to identify those areas behind which all the partners could unite. She genuinely believed that by finding that common ground, that was the way that Huntingdonshire could collectively get the best out of what's on offer.

Councillor S Ferguson referred to a recent map he had seen plotting bus departures across all districts within the County Council area. In doing so, he outlined his surprise that many areas of Huntingdonshire had much worse bus connectivity than Fenland, East South Cambridgeshire. This indicated that the District had a much lower base position than these areas and this should be reflected within the representations made to the CPCA.

The Executive Leader agreed that one of the challenges that officers would face in making recommendations to the Combined Authority would be to look at the distribution and frequency of services both in a way that was fair and equitable and in way that takes in account things which are specific to each area. There were areas of Huntingdonshire that were badly served or didn't join together in a useful way and there would be an opportunity to address some of these issues as part of the process. She urged all Members to help her and officers at the CPCA understand what works locally and why so that any future changes genuinely support communities.

With reference to the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, Councillor B Pitt suggested that Ting and demand responsive services offered a solution to the

challenge of not knowing what journeys people wanted to make and when and encouraged the Executive Leader to keep this as a potential option in her conversations and to carefully view the pilot results. Councillor West outlined his view that consideration ought to be given to the greater use of Community Transport and the Executive Leader remarked that she had already raised the potential to make better use of some of the services currently in existence and to think broader than our traditional sphere in thinking about travel and who delivers what.

In response to a request for an update on discussions surrounding bus franchising, the Executive Leader explained that she anticipated that discussions would take place in the Autumn as to what is franchised and when. It was likely that some tough decisions would need to be made at this time and she would welcome views from all Members on those services which might be ripe for reconfiguration.

With the assistance of a PowerPoint presentation (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillors M A Hassall and J Neish provided an update on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In so doing, the Council were informed that the Committee had discussed the Mayoral priorities for the forthcoming year and the impact of the appointment of the new Chief Executive Officer. Members were advised that it was expected that the franchising approach and bus service improvement plan would be considered in the Autumn and Members assistance in this regard was requested.

The Committee had also discussed the potential co-option of an independent member; however, it had decided against this at the current time.

Finally, Members were provided with an update on the details of the two meeting of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Audit and Governance Committee by Councillor S J Corney. The Committee had discussed a range of issues including the results of a recent staff survey and it was hoped that the outstanding Code of Conduct issues overshadowing the Authority would be dealt with in July, Unlike the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Audit and Governance Committee has requested that officers investigate the co-option of an independent member on a trial basis.

25 OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council held on 17th May 2023 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 changes to report.

26 USE OF SPECIAL URGENCY PROVISIONS 2022/23

With the assistance of a report by the Executive Leader (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Council were acquainted with the details of

two key decision which had been taken within the last year under the Council's special urgency provisions.

Having noted that it was a requirement within the Council's Constitution that executive decisions taken as a matter of special urgency be reported annually to the Council by the Executive Leader, it was

RESOLVED

to note the contents of the report.

27 VARIATIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

There were no changes to report.

The meeting ended at 9.58pm.

Chair