

## 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, 21 February 2024

PRESENT: Councillor M J Burke – Chair.

Councillors T Alban, B S Banks, M L Beuttell, A Blackwell, R J Brereton, S Bywater, J Clarke, S J Conboy, S J Corney, S J Criswell, L Davenport-Ray, D B Dew, 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, P A Jordan, 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 and N Wells.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors E R Butler, S Cawley, A E Costello, S W Ferguson, S Wakeford, G J Welton and R J West.

### 51 THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

A 'Thought for the Day' was presented by Councillor M A Hassall.

### 52 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 13th December 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### 53 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

### 54 CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR'S ENGAGEMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair referred to the recent death of former District Councillor L W McGuire who had served as a District Councillor from 2007 until 2010 and then between 2018 and 2022 as Ward Councillor for Yaxley. During his second term he had served as Chair of both the Corporate Governance Committee and Licencing and Protection Committees. He was also appointed Vice-Chair and then Chair of the Council in May 2021. Councillor McGuire was currently the longest serving member of Cambridgeshire County Council serving from 1985 to 1992 and again from 1997 until the time of his passing. As well as being a long serving and dedicated member of Cambridgeshire Fire Authority. He had been granted the status of Honorary Alderman at a meeting of Cambridgeshire County Council on 13 February 2024 in recognition of his achievements. Following tributes from Councillors T D Alban, J A Gray, S J Conboy, T D Sanderson, Members then observed a moments silence in memory of the former Councillor.

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

## **55 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

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

## **56 FINAL 2024/25 REVENUE BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2025/26 TO 2028/29)**

In conjunction with a report by the Director of Finance and Resources and a PowerPoint presentation (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book), Councillor B A Mickelburgh, Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources presented to Members the 2024/25 Budget, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2025/26 to 2028/29, the Fees and Charges Schedule for 2024/25, the Treasury Management Strategy, the Capital Strategy, the Investment Strategy, the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement for 2024/25 and other associated matters for the Council's consideration and approval.

In accordance with Section 30 (2) of the Local Finance Act 1992, the Council also considered proposals for levels of Council Tax in 2024/25 for various parts of Huntingdonshire District.

By way of introduction, the Executive Councillor explained that the Treasury Management Strategy was largely structured by government regulation and was very similar to the previous year. Members were informed that there had been an increase in some of the financial transaction limits, including the limits with banks and local authorities and money market funds. This would facilitate a wider range of financial transactions and make a broader range of Environmental, Society, Governance Investments available.

In terms of the Council Tax resolution, Members attention was drawn to the proposed increase of 3.21% or £5 a year in Council Tax for 2024/25. This was compared to the rate of inflation which started at 7.8% in the previous year and currently stood at 4.2%. Both figures were currently higher than the proposed increase.

With regards to the proposed Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy, Councillor Mickelburgh reiterated his previous observations that a budget should be no more than the administrative allocation of resources based on the need to provide services.

Councillor Mickelburgh then drew attention to two new amounts set aside for investment and one which had been carried across from previous years. Members were informed that the first was a £1m pot for developing ideas that would generate future income or savings. Ideas to be funded from this reserve would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel once business plans had been generated and evaluated. A further pot of reserved funds had been set aside for use toward the Council's Workforce Strategy, to implement what is proposed and affordable.

The Council were informed that the Administration would continue to place New Homes Bonus into the Commercial Investment Reserve but investment in commercial property had been paused as the Council's commercial assets were returning a low yield. Councillor Mickelburgh went on to announce that discussions regarding the Council's commercial investments would be opened to all Members of the Council, to enable a more transparent and democratic investment decision making process.

The Council's attention was then drawn to some of the successes achieved by the Administration's responsible management of the budget, including the utilisation of 22% less gas within Council buildings, support offered to residents to make similar financial and carbon savings, the Council Tax Support Scheme, the protection of existing levels of support for Hunts Forum and Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire and the reduction in the use of contractors and consultants.

With the assistance of the PowerPoint Slides, the Council were then acquainted with some of the detailed figures within the 2024/25 Budget and provided with an explanation. The Council were advised that the nature of the annual local government finance settlement, coupled with the forthcoming end of the New Homes Bonus and other hidden pressures continued to make it difficult to forecast ahead. It was expected to use the projected surplus from the current and 2024/25, 2025/26 financial years to meet any deficit. This would leave the Commercial Investment Strategy reserve intact to generate future revenue reserves.

Councillor Mickelburgh then moved the recommendations which were duly seconded by Councillor S J Conboy who reserved her right to speak.

In response and behalf of the Conservative Group, the Leader of the Principal Opposition Group, Councillor J A Gray then moved the following amendment to the recommendations which was duly seconded by Councillor A Jennings who also reserved his right to speak –

'Reverse the decision to implement the garden waste subscription service and refund those residents who have already signed up for it. HDC residents will continue to receive free fortnightly collection of their Green Bin and therefore continue to dispose of food waste weekly'.

*(At 19.48 the meeting adjourned to enable the details of the amendment to be circulated and read by all Members. The Meeting resumed at 19.53).*

On resumption, the Leader Councillor J A Gray introduced the Amendment. In doing so he drew attention to the papers which had been circulated and prepared in conjunction with the Council's Section 151 Officer and her Finance Team. These outlined the financial impact of the amendment and the proposal for funding it across the MTFs period. Council Gray reiterated that Members needed to make a political decision between drawing upon a reserve which was not required for five years and protecting a service that residents felt passionate and strongly about. He encouraged all Councillors to represent the views of their residents and support the amendment.

The Council were then provided with advice from the Council's Statutory Section 151 Officer who indicated that she could not support the proposed budget amendment. Whilst it just met the requirements relating to the adequacy of reserves, in her professional opinion it did not meet the robustness criteria or evidence value for money.

In debating the matter, several councillors spoke against the proposed amendment and indicated that they would not be supporting it. Councillor L Davenport-Ray outlined concerns with regards to the proposed reduction of reserves to the legal minimum and in the absence of a robust plan to demonstrate how the Council would function without income from the subscription service over the course of the MTFS period. Her concerns regarding the reduction of reserves to minimum levels were supported by Councillor T D Sanderson in the unstable financial climate and funding structures in which local authorities found themselves. Concerns were also expressed with regards to the late presentation of the proposal and the significant costs which would need to be incurred in reversing the implementation of the scheme by Councillor S L Taylor.

Also speaking against the proposed amendment, Councillor N Hunt outlined the need to ensure that the Council had a reasonable and sensible financial way forward so that it could continue to provide all services to all residents. In light of the financial position affecting a number of Councils currently, he expressed concerns at the last-minute proposal which would place the Council and the residents it serves in a precarious position with only minimum reserves.

Councillor B Mickelburgh commented on his perception as to what appeared to be a sudden change in direction in the former Conservative administration's previous long-term approach to the financial direction of travel. Members were also advised that should the £10m reserves be left in the Debt Management Office, it would generate £500k per year which was greater than any Council Tax increase could achieve. He indicated that he was unable to vote for the amendment which was not financially prudent.

Speaking in support of the amendment, Councillor S Bywater urged the Council to consider those who may not be able to afford the new service and the implications for the elderly, the disabled and low-income families. In response to which, the Executive Leader reiterated that the Administration had acknowledged and taken steps to address concerns about those residents who were unable to afford the service through the provision of the grant scheme and alternative offers for extra support including Saturday refuse vehicles. Throughout the delivery and implementation of the scheme, the needs of these residents would continue to be assessed and alternative solutions implemented.

Having reminded the Council of the 6,000 residents who had signed the petition objecting to the introduction of the scheme, Councillor R Martin urged Members to listen to the views of their residents by voting for this amendment. Similarly with reference to listening to the views of residents, Councillor K Gulson urged Members to support the amendment which delivered a balanced budget without implementing an additional charge on residents.

Finally, and in drawing the discussion on the amendment to a close, Councillor A Jennings addressed the Council in support of the amendment. He emphasised

that the amendment provided an option for all Members who were concerned about the implementation of green bin charges without reducing budgets for other front-line services. He reiterated that the proposal fell within the parameters of a balanced budget and outlined again the methodology of using the Commercial Investment Reserve to fund that position. In doing so, Council were also advised that it was anticipated that prudence in some of the assumptions which had been made within the Budget meant that it was anticipated that much less of this reserve would actually be used. He concluded by urging all those with any doubts regarding the green waste scheme, to listen to their residents and vote for the amendment.

Following the lengthy debate and being put to the vote, the amendment was declared to be LOST.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 the following Members voted for, against or abstained from the Motion -

For the Motion (16) – *Alban, Beuttell, Brereton, Bywater, Clarke, Corney, Criswell, Gardener, Gray, Gulson, Hodgson-Jones, Jennings, Keane, Lowe, Martin, Neish*

Against the Motion (27) – *Banks, Blackwell, Burke, Conboy, Davenport-Ray, Dew, Gleadow, Harvey, Hassall, Hunt, Jordan, Kadewere M, Kadewere P, Kerr, McAdam, Mickelburgh B, Mickelburgh D, Pickering, Pitt, Sanderson, Shaw, Slade, Taylor I, Taylor S, Terry, Tevlin, Wells*

Abstentions – *None (0)*

In returning the debate and discussion to the substantive motion, the Leader of the Principal Opposition Councillor J A Gray addressed the Council again. In doing so, he thanked the Section 151 Officer and the Council's Finance Team for their efforts in producing the 2024/25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy. He also reiterated that the Authority stood on strong financial foundations and commented on the prudent assumptions which had been made in terms of both income and expenditure, which is what had given the Opposition the confidence to introduce the amendment.

In terms of specific items within the Budget, Councillor Gray again expressed disappointment at the inclusion of the charge for the green bins, a matter which he considered should have been taken to the electorate in 2026. However, he recognised the need to include provision for workforce reform, emphasising the need for the development of a clear plan for this purpose involving discussion with Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Employment Committee. He also indicated his support for the inclusion of an amount for additional recycling costs and encouraged the Overview and Scrutiny Panels to review the ideas which came forward from the monies which had been set aside to generate ideas for income and savings from the new reserve.

He went on to express some disappointment that there was no further investment in staff within the Planning Service, given the growing number of complaints he was receiving regarding enforcement and conservation and urged the Joint Administration to give the matter further consideration. Comment was

also made regarding several of the projections for the Leisure Service which appeared ambitious in some areas and the absence of the promised free car parking being delivered for the residents of St Neots.

In closing his remarks, Councillor Gray again referred to the prudence which had been exhibited in the preparation of the 2024/25 Budget and the need to demonstrate confidence in the affairs of future years. Despite the core principles being sound, ultimately, he was unable to support the proposed budget due to the continued inclusion of the green bin subscription charge.

In the ensuing debate, several Councillors spoke in support of the proposed Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Councillor L Davenport-Ray drew attention to the pressures and challenges facing local authorities across the country and the need to find innovative ways to fund these challenges. She went on to explain that grant income would be obtained for specific projects such as Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, the Council would continue to update its buildings to reduce the amount of energy it consumes. Efforts would also be made to rebalance energy use towards electricity use and even produce electricity, through the installation of solar panels at Ramsey Leisure Centre. Councillor Davenport-Ray reiterated that the proposed Budget demonstrated decreasing net expenditure over the next 5 years and the Joint Administration was taking proactive action to manage its budgetary position.

Councillors P and M Kadewere also outlined their support for the 2024/25 Budget. In doing so Councillor P Kadewere reminded the Council that the Joint Administration had inherited an £8m deficit and that decisions needed to be made to protect the Council's services for future years. Whilst Councillor M Kadewere referred to events taking place at other Councils across the Country and the need to take the opportunity to invest in the Council's future financial resilience such that residents could always rely on the Council to provide services to those that need them.

Councillor P Hodgson-Jones spoke against the proposed Budget and in doing so queried why the level of Council Tax was being increased to the maximum permissible level when additional income would be achieved from the green bin subscription charge. He also expressed his disagreement at the assertions which had been made regarding the projections of an increase in income over the lifespan of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

The Deputy Executive Leader and the Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor T D Sanderson took the opportunity to respond to the points which had been made earlier in the debate with regards to the investment in staff in the planning service. Members were reminded of the difficulties in recruiting and retaining planning officers and he reported that recent months had seen the closure of a significant number of enforcement cases. He undertook to provide assistance with any specific cases as necessary.

The Executive Leader, Councillor S J Conboy thanked all Members for their passionate and committed contributions to the debate.

Councillor Conboy took the opportunity to remind Members that the Council was in a sound financial position because of the prudent decisions that had been made and the work that had been undertaken to reduce costs and to look for

efficiencies. On entering office, the Joint Administration inherited a Budget deficit of £8m and minimal reserves. However, a Budget was set last year which set out a way to address that, together with clear Budget principles which would continue to be followed to prioritise front line services. Work on income generation would also continue.

Councillor Conboy reiterated that the decision to introduce a garden waste subscription service was not one which had been taken lightly and the Administration remained committed to work to identify opportunities to support those who wished an alternative. Members were informed that the numbers wishing to subscribe to the service had exceeded the first year's target. However, the Joint Administration would continue to do further work to reach those who needed additional support. Councillor Conboy also reiterated that it would not have been possible to set a balanced budget the previous year without the inclusion of the subscription scheme.

Members were also reminded that the Budget proposed was supported by the Council's Section 151 Officer. Unlike in other parts of the country, the Authority was not facing the prospect of having to issue a Section 114 notice and that was in part due to the difficult decisions which had been taken. Councillor Conboy also took the opportunity to reiterate that the Authority only receives seven pence from every pound which it collects, from which it continued to provide services to residents despite facing its own inflationary pressures. Efforts would continue to be made on an ongoing basis to ensure that any additional monies received were used to generate further income for the District Council.

With regards to the District Council's workforce, the Executive Leader explained that steps were being taken to address several years of pay freezes. The implementation of a new Workforce Strategy would provide opportunities for staff to feel supported and valued within the organisation.

In concluding her remarks, Councillor Conboy reminded Members that this was a prudent Budget which enabled the Council to deliver on the next stage of the Corporate Plan and deliver good quality front line services.

Finally, and in drawing the debate to a close, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources took the opportunity to respond to several points which had been made earlier in the debate concerning the Materials Recycling Facility and comments he had made the previous year. He then reiterated that he looked forward to working with all Members moving forward in the interests of the future long-term stability of the Council and serving the residents of Huntingdonshire.

It having, been previously moved and seconded, upon being to the vote, it was

## RESOLVED

- a) that the proposed overall Budget 2024/25 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2025/26 to 2028/29 (Appendix 1) to include the Revenue Budgets at Section 2, the Capital Programme at Section 3 and the 2024/25 Fees and Charges at Section 7, Annex A be approved;
- b) that an increase of 3.21% Council Tax for 2024/25 be approved, i.e., the Band D Charge will increase to £160.86;

- c) **that the Council note the Council Tax Base for the whole Council area and individual Towns and Parishes (para 6.2) as approved by Chair of Corporate Governance Committee and Section 151 Officer on the 14 December 2023 (and subsequent publication as a key decision);**

*The tax base (T) which is the amount anticipated from a District Council Tax of £1 is £66,095.90*

- d) that the following amounts calculated by the Council for 2024/25 in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended by the Localism Act 2011 (the Act), the Local Government Finance Act 2012 and associated regulations: -

- i. the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) (a) to (f) of the Act **Gross revenue expenditure including benefits, Town/Parish Precepts - £90,705,092**
- ii. the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) (a) to (d) of the Act **Revenue income including reimbursement of benefits, specific and general grants, use of reserves and any transfers from the collection fund - £71,254,857**
- iii. the amount by which the aggregate at (i) above exceeds the aggregate at (ii) above in accordance with Section 31A (4) of the Act  
**This is the “Council Tax Requirement” including Parish / Town Precepts (item i minus item ii). It is the cash sum to be funded from District, Town and Parish Council Taxes - £19,450,235**
- iv. the Council Tax requirement for 2024/25 divided by the tax base (T) in accordance with Section 31B (1) of the Act  
**District plus average Town/Parish Council Tax (item iii divided by District tax base) - £ 294.27**
- v. the aggregate of all “Special items” referred to in Section 34 (1) of the Act.  
**The total value of Parish/Town precepts included in i and iii above - £8,818,049**
- vi. the Basic Amount of Council Tax for 2024/25 being item iv less item v divided by the tax base (T) in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act.  
**The District Council’s Band D Tax for 2024/25 - £ 160.86**
- vii. the basic amounts of Council Tax for 2024/25 for those parts of the District to which one or more special items (Parish/Town precepts) relate in accordance with Section 34 (3) of the Act are shown by adding the Huntingdonshire District Council amount to the appropriate Parish Council amount in column “band D” set out in Table 1 attached.



- viii. the amounts to be taken into account for 2024/25 in respect of categories of dwellings listed in particular valuation bands in accordance with Section 36 (1) of the Act are shown by adding the Huntingdonshire District Council amount to the Parish Council amount for each of the valuation bands in the columns “bands A to H” set out in Table 1 attached.
- e) that the amounts of the precept issued to the Council by Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridgeshire Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority and for each Parish Council for each of the categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands in accordance with Section 40 of the Act shown in para 6.3 attached be noted;
- f) that having regard to the calculations above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30 (2) of the Act, hereby sets the figures shown in para 6.4 as the amounts of Council Tax for 2024/25 for each of the categories of dwelling shown; **This is the total Council Tax to be collected, incorporating the requirements of all of the relevant bodies, for each town or parish area.**
- g) The Council notes that, in accordance with Section 52ZB of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the basic amount of Council Tax for 2024/25 is not excessive. **The basic amount at b(vi) above is not excessive as defined by the Government.**

#### **Tax Base 2024/25**

Abbotsley	272.3
Abbots Ripton	139.5
Alconbury	546.6
Alconbury Weston	297.9
Alwalton	126.1
Barham & Woolley	29.0
Bluntisham	774.3
Brampton	2,534.5
Brington & Molesworth	191.8
Broughton	102.4
Buckden	1,331.6
Buckworth	53.7
Bury	782.4
Bythorn & Keyston	157.0
Catworth	162.3
Chesterton	67.8
Colne	390.6
Conington	73.3
Covington	47.1
Denton & Caldecote	30.0
Earith	604.7
Easton	86.7
Ellington	240.5
Elton	297.7

Farcet	533.6
Fenstanton	1,339.4
Folksworth & Washingley	348.2
Glatton	137.9
Godmanchester	3,164.8
Grafham	235.2
Great & Little Gidding	129.0
Great Gransden	499.5
Great Paxton	371.8
Great Staughton	338.9
Haddon	23.6
Hail Weston	239.5
Hamerton & Steeple Gidding	55.4
Hemingford Abbots	327.5
Hemingford Grey	1,297.9
Hilton	454.4
Holme	251.0
Holywell-cum-Needingworth	1,105.3
Houghton & Wyton	820.9
Huntingdon	7,687.0
Kimbolton & Stonely	611.4
Kings Ripton	83.9
Leighton Bromswold	81.4
Little Paxton	1,688.8
Morborne	12.2
Offord Cluny & Offord D'Arcy	533.4
Old Weston	103.4
Oldhurst	107.7
Perry	258.2
Pidley-cum-Fenton	199.9
Ramsey	3,209.2
St.Ives	6,040.3
St.Neots	11,538.9
Sawtry	2,060.7
Sibson-cum-Stibbington	231.3
Somersham	1,415.2
Southoe & Midloe	156.0
Spaldwick	257.1
Stilton	819.0
Stow Longa	70.2
The Stukeleys	1,329.1
Tilbrook	131.0
Toseland	36.7
Upton & Coppingford	90.0
Upwood & The Raveleys	448.2
Warboys	1,595.2
Waresley-cum-Tetworth	148.4
Water Newton	39.5
Winwick	53.4
Wistow	232.8
Woodhurst	155.8

Woodwalton	83.4
Wyton-on-the-Hill	462.6
Yaxley	2,958.9
Yelling	152.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>66,095.9</b>

h) that the 2024/25 Treasury Management, Capital and Investment Strategies, MRP Statement and Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy be approved (Appendix 2).

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 the following Members voted for, against or abstained from the Motion -

For the Motion (27) – *Banks, Blackwell, Burke, Conboy, Davenport-Ray, Dew, Gleadow, Harvey, Hassall, Hunt, Jordan, Kadewere M, Kadewere P, Kerr, McAdam, Mickelburgh B, Mickelburgh D, Pickering, Pitt, Sanderson, Shaw, Slade, Taylor I, Taylor S, Terry, Tevlin, Wells*

Against the Motion (16) – *Alban, Beuttell, Brereton, Bywater, Clarke, Corney, Criswell, Gardener, Gray, Gulson, Hodgson-Jones, Jennings, Keane, Lowe, Martin, Neish*

Abstentions – *None (0)*

*(At 19.24 Councillor S A Howell left the meeting and returned at 19.26 but was not permitted to vote on this item).*

*(At 21.02 Councillor J Harvey left the meeting and did not return).*

## **57 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024-25**

In compliance with the requirements of Sections 38-43 of the Localism Act 2011, Councillor L Davenport-Ray the Executive Councillor for Climate and Environment presented a report by the Strategic HR Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) in connection with the District Council's Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25.

The Statement, which is required to be approved by Council by 31st March 2024 and produced annually, details the Council's policies relating to Officer remuneration.

Having noted that the Statement had been endorsed by the Employment Committee at the meeting on the 7th February 2024, it, was moved by Councillor L Davenport-Ray, duly seconded by Councillor C Gleadow and

**RESOLVED**

that the Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25 be approved.

## **58 LEAD AND DEPUTY INDEPENDENT PERSONS**

In conjunction with consideration of the item at the meeting of the Corporate Governance Committee on 24th January 2024, the Chair of the Committee, Councillor N Wells presented to the Council a report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) seeking the re-appointment of the Lead Independent Person for a further two-year period.

Councillor Wells reminded Members that in accordance with the Localism Act 2011, it was necessary for the Council to appoint one or more Independent Persons for the purpose of dealing with allegations under the Members Code of Conduct and any disciplinary proceedings against the Council's Statutory Officers.

The Council were then acquainted with the background to the proposed re-appointment and noted that the agreement of the current Independent Person to continue in their role had been obtained. Recruitment for a new Deputy Independent Person would take place during 2024 and Councillor P Hodgson-Jones emphasised that this should take place at the earliest opportunity.

Whereupon it was moved by Councillor N Wells and seconded by Councillor S J Conboy and

RESOLVED

that the re-appointment of Mrs Gillian Holmes to the post of Lead Independent Person be reaffirmed for a further two-year period to 30th April 2026 without the need for further ratification each year by the Council at its Annual Meeting.

## **59 POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW - 2024**

Having regard to a report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Chair of the Corporate Governance Committee, Councillor N Wells, acquainted Members with details of the outcome of a review of polling districts and polling places as required by Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

In discussing the content of the report, Councillor T Alban expressed his appreciation for the efforts which had been made to locate a permanent station in the village of Conington and a request was made by Councillor A Jennings to change the descriptor for the Polling District EN.

Whereupon having been moved by Councillor N Wells and seconded by Councillor P A Jordan, it was

RESOLVED

that the Schedule of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2024 as appended to the report now submitted be approved.

*(At 21.12 Councillor D B Dew left the meeting and did not return).*

## **60 QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET**

With reference to a recent unsuccessful grant application by Sawtry Swimming Pool to the second phase of a government scheme, Councillor S Bywater sought further information from the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene as to the measures the District Council intended to take to support residents in Sawtry and surrounding villages to access swimming facilities. He also enquired how the District Council planned to enhance swimming opportunities for children these areas. Councillor S L Taylor undertook to respond further outside of the meeting once she had discussed the matter with the Head of Leisure.

In response to a question from Councillor C A Lowe regarding conservation areas within the District, the Executive Councillor for Planning was asked whether there was a need to recruit additional staff given that the current Conservation Officer was only a part-time position. Councillor T D Sanderson undertook to respond in writing outside of the meeting.

In response to a request from Councillor J Kerr for an update on the Development Management Committee's statistics and figures, the Executive Councillor for Planning was pleased to report on an improved performance within the January 2024 figures.

With reference to the 2024/25 Budget which had just been approved, Councillor T D Alban requested further information from the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene on the measures which were being proposed to increase actual and budgeted income in One Leisure. In response to which, Councillor S L Taylor reported that a report on options would be forthcoming to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) on 7th March 2024 and Councillor Alban indicated that he was content to discuss this matter further at this meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor C H Tevlin regarding the reasons for the delay of the Hinchbrooke Park Project and the expected timeline for completion, the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene explained that the main reason for the delay was the need to be biodiversity net gain compliant. It was now anticipated that the planning application would be presented to the Development Control Committee in Autumn 2024, with final completion in Autumn 2026. The Executive Councillor emphasised the need for the District Council to lead by example with regards to biodiversity net gain and suggested that further discussions should be held at the Hinchbrooke Country Park Joint Group.

In response to a request for an update on the renegotiation of the 3C contract, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources, Councillor B Mickelburgh reported that preliminary discussions had started but it was not possible to give a detailed update at this stage. He would be attending a meeting the following week to progress this further. Councillor R Martin also suggested that the matter should be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for discussion in confidential session at the earliest opportunity.

With reference to previous comments regarding the installation of solar PV Panels at Ramsey, Councillor C A Lowe enquired whether it would be possible to consider solar PV and thermal panels, as well as new EV charging stations for

all new buildings. In response to which, the Executive Councillor for Planning reported that the Local Plan process had now begun and he would liaise with Conservative representatives on the Local Plan Advisory Group and other colleagues before responding.

In response to a question from Councillor J A Gray, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources agreed that improving and scheduling information to the Overview and Scrutiny Panels could bring better clarity and collaboration across the Chamber and within the Panels themselves.

## **61 CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY - UPDATE**

In conjunction with the decision summaries of the recent meetings of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and a PowerPoint Presentation (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book), the Executive Leader Councillor S J Conboy presented an update on the activities of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA).

As part of the presentation, Council were reminded that the Bus precept had been agreed at the last Combined Authority meeting and that Members have been working with Officers at the Combined Authority to feed back the views and comments of District Council Members regarding bus services. These had included issues around the need for joined up services and reconfiguring the connectivity between some of these services.

The Council's attention was then drawn to some of the specific improvements that were being investigated and were in development by the Combined Authority. Members were informed that representatives were also continuing to push for improvements across the rural areas of the District and to talk about whether a better hub and spoke model could be achieved.

Arising from the presentation, Councillor Gardener outlined the concerns being expressed by his residents at the recent increase in the Mayoral precept given the lack of public transport within the rural areas. He also raised a number of specific questions regarding the Ting service including the potential expansion of the areas served and its use for post 16 transport. In response to which, the Executive Leader reiterated that the Authority was trying to secure more public transport services within the rural areas. Whilst she agreed with his comments regarding post 16 transport, she was also mindful that some under 16s needed to use public services and that a Mayoral commitment had been made to offer a cheaper rate for younger people. Councillor Gardener was encouraged to discuss issues further with Combined Authority representatives outside of the meeting.

Having welcomed the inclusion of Fenstanton within the Huntingdonshire Strategy, Councillor C H Tevlin proposed that working groups should be established between authorities and wards to ensure that there is a joined up and linked approach to the provision of bus services. In response to which the Executive Leader reiterated that the need for a joined-up approach was important, and Councillor Tevlin was invited to provide any local intelligence to Councillor Davenport-Ray.

Councillor T D Alban took the opportunity to draw attention to the discrepancies with the bus services within his ward of Stilton, Folksworth and Washingley where some villages such as Stilton and Conington received a regular service, yet others like Holme received only one per week. The Executive Leader agreed to feed this information back. Information on nuances such as this was always of value.

Councillor J Neish commented on the absence of any information relating to the cost of buses at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on the Mayoral precept and questioned whether this had been forthcoming to the Board. He also commented on the timing of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which met merely two days before the Board meeting itself. In response to which, the Executive Leader confirmed that she had raised the issue of the timing of meetings with the Combined Authority, who had agreed to give the matter further consideration.

Councillor J A Gray outlined his concerns that the activity of the Combined Authority was being preoccupied by bus services and was losing focus on what could be achieved in other areas such as infrastructure, education, jobs, making connections etc. In response to which, the Executive Leader explained that the Corporate Plan does illustrate the contribution that buses make to the wider objections and that the District's requirements in other areas would be considered further as part of the devolution process.

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, Members were acquainted with the key points arising from discussions at recent meetings of the Committee. These included the extension of the Best Value Notice, the Mayor's Precept and Governance Challenges. As part of the presentation, the Council's attention was also drawn to the comments made by the Chair of the Independent Improvement Board regarding the actions required by the Board and its constituent members, together with the Governance and Best Value Challenges being considered and discussed by the Committee.

An update on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Audit and Governance Committee was not able to be provided.

## **62 OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS**

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council held on 13th December 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 issues arising.

## **63 VARIATIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS**

On the recommendation of Councillor S J Conboy, it was,

## RESOLVED

- a) that Councillor L Davenport-Ray be appointed to the Employment Committee in place of Councillor M A Hassall; and
- b) that Councillor M A Hassall be appointed to the Development Management Committee in place of Councillor L Davenport-Ray.

The Executive Leader also took the opportunity to put on record her thanks and appreciation to Councillor Hassall who had recently resigned from his position as a member of the Cabinet.

The meeting ended at 21.50.

Chair.