

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, 17 July 2024

PRESENT: Councillor S R McAdam – Chair.

Councillors B S Banks, M L Beuttell, A Blackwell, M J Burke, E R Butler, S Bywater, Catmur, S Cawley, J Clarke, S J Conboy, A E Costello, S J Criswell, L Davenport-Ray, D B Dew, S W Ferguson, I D Gardener, J A Gray, J E Harvey, P J Hodgson-Jones, S A Howell, N J Hunt, M Kadewere, P Kadewere, D N Keane, J E Kerr, C Lowe, R Martin, B A Mickelburgh, D L Mickelburgh, J Neish, Dr M Pickering, B M Pitt, T D Sanderson, D J Shaw, S L Taylor, I P Taylor, D Terry, C H Tevlin, S Wakeford and N Wells.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors T Alban, R J Breton, S J Corney, C M Gleadow, M A Hassall, A R Jennings, P A Jordan and R A Slade.

15 PRAYER

The Reverend James Bamber, Minister for Huntingdon Methodist Church opened the meeting with a prayer.

16 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 22nd May 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

17 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

18 CHAIR'S ENGAGEMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

(At 7.10pm Councillor P J Hodgson-Jones took his seat at the meeting).

The Chair referred to the recent death of District Councillor Graham Welton who sadly passed away in June 2024. Councillor Welton was first elected in May 2022 and represented the St Neots Eatons Ward. During his time as Councillor, he was a Member of both Overview & Scrutiny Panels; Environment, Communities and Partnerships and the Performance and Growth Panel. Originally a London Bus Driver, the Chair reported that Graham latterly made his home in Eaton Ford, where he also represented St Neots Town Council. Following tributes from Councillors R Martin, S J Conboy and T D Sanderson, Members then observed a moments silence in memory of the former Councillor.

The Chair also took the opportunity to remind Members about the seminar on Integrated Water Management Studies which was scheduled to be held on Thursday 18 July 2024 at 6pm on Microsoft Teams. All Members were invited to attend.

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). In doing so, the Chair took the opportunity to announce that he would be supporting two charities this year – Magpas and the Papworth Trust.

19 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.

20 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 reminding Members that 2024 represented a significant milestone as the Council celebrated its 50th Anniversary and by placing on record her sincere appreciation to Officers and Members who had supported everything that had been achieved in the past year.

The Executive Leader then went on to report upon the achievements of the Council over the past year. In this regard, Members were advised that through the adoption of the Council Tax Support Scheme which offered support of up to 100% off the Council Tax Bill for households on the lowest incomes, the Council had provided more support for the people who needed it most within the District.

The Council had also made significant achievements towards the aim of helping residents to live in a safe, high-quality home regardless of health, stage of life, family structure, income and tenure type. During 2023/24, 703 affordable homes had been completed, 494 of which were specifically for affordable and social rent which had offered much needed options for the community and had helped with housing waiting lists and prevented excessive use of temporary accommodation. Through the Houses for Ukraine Programme, the Council's Communities and Housing Teams had ensured that no families presented as homeless and the use of Disabled Facilities Grants had enabled 185 people to continue to live at home safely.

The Executive Leader was also pleased to report that the Council One Leisure's Active Lifestyles and Sports Development programmes were continuing to see high levels of attendance and that the Community Health Prevention Project had enabled the roll out of free physical activity courses to prevent cardiovascular disease. Funding from the Integrated Care System had also supported the ESCAPE Pain Pilot System, a group rehabilitation programme for those suffering with chronic joint pain. The Council also noted that One Leisure Facilities had recorded over 1 million admissions.

The Executive Leader then drew attention to the role of good employment in improving people's quality of life and the administration's aspiration that local people should be able to develop their skills to take advantage of opportunities with businesses and education providers working more closely to deliver an inclusive economy. She was pleased to report on the opening of the East Anglia Energy Academy in St Ives in May 2024, which would bring new jobs, skills and investment to the District, together with the Academy a joint venture between Reed Environment and Oxford Energy Academies which aims to attract more people to the trade skills career path and upskill. The support of the District Council's Economic Development Team had enabled Reed to accelerate their timeline significantly.

In terms of the local economy and the administration's aspirations for it to be a place where businesses choose to start up, grow and invest, the Executive Leader reported that the Shop Front Grant Scheme had now been extended to include all market towns within the District. To date, a total of 31 grants had been awarded at a total value of £136,894. The Council were informed that in recognition of the unique challenges faced by rural enterprises, £350,000 had been secured from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to support the growth of rural business, which would enable them to diversify income streams and help create positive change, innovation and growth for the District. It was also reported that the Market Towns Programme continued at pace. Work had started at the beginning of the year in St Neots town centre to ensure that it was fit for the future, more accessible and could respond to the growing population and the number of people who live and work in close proximity. Investment in the Priory Centre would also make it a more attractive and exciting venue for amateur dramatics, touring shows and community events. Similarly in Ramsey, work was ongoing to improve the Great Whyte area by redesigning and enhancing public spaces and developing new, low-cost opportunities for independent traders to sell goods and services in the town centre.

Members were informed that the Council had also continued to take positive action to reduce carbon emissions and become net zero by 2040. A trial utilising hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) in refuse vehicles had been completed in collaboration with Cambridgeshire Police and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue. Such that the HVO used by HDC, police and fire service vehicles had already reduced the combined services carbon footprint by 72 tonnes of CO₂. In addition, the Council's Biodiversity for All Programme was continuing to enable and encourage local people and businesses to reduce carbon emissions and increase biodiversity across Huntingdonshire. The Council had also held its first-ever Climate Conversation in November 2023 which had enabled residents, community groups, business owners, farmers, town and parish councils and environmentalists to learn and share ideas for tackling climate change. The Executive Leader was pleased to report that the Council's ongoing efforts to tackle the causes and effects of climate change had seen the Council climb the ranking tables in the Climate Emergency UK scorecard results, to a position around the national average.

The Executive Leader went on remind Members that essential services formed the basis of the Council's everyday work and around 80% of Council resources were aligned to business as usual and the Council must continue to set an excellent example of the standards it expected for its residents. The Council

were informed that some of the day-to-day work over the last year had seen the Council collect 97% of Council Tax, the Council had administered over £250K of Energy Bill Rebate support payments and had been awarded Green Flag status at Paxton Pits and Hinchingsbrooke County Park for the sixth year in a row. It was also reported that at the beginning of July 2024, nearly 43,000 households had successfully subscribed to the Garden Waste subscription service.

The Executive Leader reiterated that as more councils across the country faced financial difficulties, she was proud that Huntingdonshire continued to deliver on its promise of long-term financial sustainability. The Council had set a balanced budget, which did not spend reserves and protected front line services, all in a time of decreasing government funding, rising costs and greater pressure on services. By building strong financial foundations, it was hoped that the Council could plan and enhance services in accordance with the things that matter most to residents.

Looking forward, the Executive Leader remarked that whilst much had been achieved there was always more that could be done. The Council were reminded that it had recently participated within a Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge because it was committed to continuous improvement. Later this year it would be taking part in a Planning Peer Challenge. Whilst the introduction of a new Contextual Outcome Measures Dashboard to benchmark Council Performance and a new Continuous Improvement Delivery Plan would underpin and focus attention on the work which is undertaken over the next two years to ensure the Council is as efficient and effective as possible.

Members were advised that there was much to look forward to over the coming year. The Council would progress with the delivery of Civil Parking Enforcement across the District and would also be working on preparing to deliver a weekly food waste collection service for those that could not compost. Work would continue to update the Local Plan which sets out how the District would grow over the next two decades and Huntingdonshire Futures grants will continue to provide local organisations with funding to put on event or activities that support the Huntingdonshire Futures vision. Work would also be ongoing to deliver a Community Health and Wealth Strategy to link the broader social determinants of health with a Community Wealth-Building approach and the Council would continue to provide a wide range of existing statutory and important services seeking to improve their efficiency and effectiveness through the Customer Change programme.

The Executive Leader then took the opportunity to pay tribute to the Council staff and expressed her appreciation to them for the efforts they made to ensure that Huntingdonshire was the best place possible. She explained that following extensive engagement with staff a new Workforce Strategy focussed on attraction and retention, engagement and wellbeing would be rolled out over the forthcoming year.

The Council were also advised that 'Do, Enable Influence' would also continue to be a crucial phrase for the Council over the course of the year as it looks to take on a more enabling role, utilising partnership working and empowerment to reduce demand for traditional public services. Members were informed that the Council would continue to work constructively with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Cambridgeshire County Council and health

colleagues which would allow the Council to proactively influence and contribute to further devolution deals for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Work would also continue to invest in building positive and productive relationships with local town and parish councils, other public bodies and the third sector and a new Communications and Engagement Strategy would underpin this approach.

In concluding her remarks, the Executive Leader outlined her appreciation to all Members of the Council. She reiterated that the collective will of councillors within the Council Chamber had enabled the Council to put Huntingdonshire at the front and centre of delivery. It had been repeatedly demonstrated that work could be undertaken across party boundaries, valuing different opinions and treating others respectfully. The Council has achieved an awful lot over the last 50 years and as it looked ahead to the next 50 years, the Council continued to lay the foundations for a prosperous future that will deliver a greener, fairer Huntingdonshire for all.

In response and on behalf of the Opposition Group, Councillor R Martin thanked the Executive Leader for the work she had undertaken to champion the District at a local and national level and for the courteous and respectful manner in which she led the Council. He also took the opportunity to reaffirm the commitment made by his predecessor, that the Conservative group would seek to be a collaborative opposition and support those policies which were sensible. However, they would continue to oppose those things that they thought were wrong or ideologically driven.

Having commented on the positive initiatives which had been referred to by the Executive Leader during the previous year and the use of innovation, Councillor Martin also referred to the significant changes which had taken place within the Authority. These included the appointment of a new Chief Executive, new Director for Place and the formation of a new Independent Group within the Joint Administration. He also commented on external changes and the impact that these might have locally, including the change in the national government and the appointment of three new Members of Parliament, for the Huntingdonshire area.

Councillor Martin welcomed the progress that had been made within the One Leisure service following its challenges during Covid and with rising energy prices and was encouraged with the ongoing work which was being undertaken to develop a long-term operating model. He suggested that the Council needed to undertake more long-term horizon scanning as it moved forward over the course of the next few years, to examine all areas of the District. He also took the opportunity to place his thanks and those of his group to all Members of staff within the District Council for their efforts and hard work over the past year.

Councillor Martin then went on to make reference to the poor visual state of the District, arising specifically from the growth of weeds in roads and footpaths. Having acknowledged that it had been the decision of Cambridgeshire County Council to cease their weed treatment programme, Councillor Martin enquired given there were members of the Administration who were also County Councillors and the references within the Executive Leaders speech to 'do, enable, influence', to what extent the Administration had sought to influence the County Council to reverse that decision. He went on to explain that not only were the growth of weeds unsightly, they had also blocked drains in many areas

causing issues with flooding. Whilst the decision had now been reversed, he urged the Administration to reflect further on any influence they could have had going forward.

Councillor Martin then outlined concerns with regards to the Council's continued use of the No Amendments Policy within the Planning Service. Whilst he argued that the Council were benefiting financially from applicants being required to reapply, there were many applicants who were unable to afford to re-apply. Having referred to a specific case in which the applicant chose to apply to another area of the county, rather than reapply, he urged the Administration to focus on the next year at looking at the policy and to make adjustments such that it worked better for what the Council was seeking to achieve in Huntingdonshire.

Turning to Overview and Scrutiny and the Council's decision-making processes, Councillor Martin emphasised the need to utilise the expertise and experience of all Members of the Council and suggested that the role of scrutiny should be embraced, rather than feared to deliver the collective aim of a better Huntingdonshire and a thriving District Council.

Going forward, Councillor Martin advised the Administration that they could expect the Conservative Group to challenge and push back more on certain decisions. However, this would continue to be undertaken fairly and with respect.

In concluding his remarks, Councillor Martin made reference to his attendance at the Hunts Forum Awards Evening held the previous evening which had provided an opportunity for volunteers across the District to be recognised for their contributions. He reiterated that the District Council should be doing more to thank these individuals and recognise the work they were undertaking. Without these residents who give up their time, their energy and their efforts to ensure that the District is a better place to live, the District would not be where it is today.

Councillor N Hunt took the opportunity to reflect on some of the initiatives which had been delivered by the Administration for younger residents within the District. In doing so, he made reference to the delivery of over 700 new affordable homes, the provision of sports and leisure facilities, the arrival of new skills and training providers to the region and the support which the District Council's Economic Development Team had provided to them. He also made reference to the Council's activities in tackling the Council's Carbon footprint, supporting the local energy plan and providing award winning parks and open spaces. He went on to reiterate to all Members, that the impact of local government could be felt by everyone and urged all Members within the Chamber to keep this in mind. He also outlined his excitement at the challenges ahead for the forthcoming year which he was hopeful would be productive for Huntingdonshire residents and young people.

In seeking to respond to some of the comments which had been made by the Leader of the Opposition, Councillor T D Sanderson and S Taylor provided an update on the situation with regards to the reintroduction of the County Council's weed treatment programme, which had not been helped by the recent period of wet weather. As part of which, Members were informed that chemical spraying was now taking place and the District Council had been working in collaboration with the County Council to manually remove weeds in response to complaints logged on the County Council's 'Report a Fault' service. Although the process

would be ramped up shortly. Further details were available on the County Council website.

With regards to planning, Councillor Sanderson reported that the Planning Inspector was in the District Council's favour when discussing the Council's No Amendment's Policy. He also reported on a number of positive developments within the planning service which included the clearing of the backlog and the success of the pre-application service. He was pleased to report that targets for determination of major applications and householder applications in June 2023 had been 100% and 95% respectively.

Finally, and having endorsed the comments of the Executive Leader, Councillor S Wakeford reiterated his thanks to the District Council staff and volunteers who had worked exceptionally hard to make the achievements of the past year possible. However, he reminded the Council that there was still much to do within the District over the remaining two years of the current administration and beyond. Once the new National Government begins its programme of work, he looked forward to working with colleagues across the Chamber to take best advantage of the opportunities the new Government may enable for District Council. Having commended the tone and the spirit of the comments made by the Opposition Leader, Councillor Wakeford also took the opportunity, with reference to the No Amendments Policy, to outline the benefits which this had had upon the enormous backlog in cases which whilst not unique, had been inherited from the previous Administration which had had an impact on costs in terms of delayed decision making.

21 QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

With reference to the Chair's list of engagements, Councillor J Neish expressed his disappointment that as the District's Armed Forces Champion he had not been made aware of the District Council's Flag raising on Armed Forces Day. He requested that this be publicised in advance on future occasions as he was aware of several veterans and residents who may have wished to attend. In thanking Councillor Neish for his comments, the Chair indicated that he had already discussed the issue of the future promotion of civic ceremonies with Officers.

Councillor I Taylor commented on the problems he had experienced over the course of the previous two years in seeking to get defibrillators installed on two buildings owned by the District Council in Eynesbury, St Neots. He questioned whether a streamlined policy or process could be introduced. In response to which, Councillor B Mickelburgh explained that the complexity of some of the tenancy agreements meant that it was not possible to provide a generic answer however he agreed it was a positive idea and he would take it away for further consideration as to how it might fit into future contracts.

In response to a request from Councillor M J Burke for specific data regarding the use and financial performance of One Leisure across the District, the Executive Councillor for Communities, Health and Leisure, Councillor B Pitt, provided an update for the Council. In doing so, the Council noted that Direct Debit membership was now at all time high of 8,400 members and the One Leisure swim school has seen an increase of 14% in the last two years. Active

health sessions had also increased by over 50% in one year and the Active Health Team were now working closely with 15 care homes across the District. In terms of income, the Executive Councillor reported that total income for One Leisure was up 10% in 12 months and costs have gone up by 3.7% which meant that the deficit position had almost halved. With regards to future developments, the Council were informed that £700,000 had been secured from Sport England in March 2023 to install a solar canopy at the car park in St Ives and also triple glazing for the swimming pool. Consideration was also being given to investment in other opportunities for solar PV in an attempt to further drive down operating costs.

With reference to the organisation of the recent election of the Member of Parliament for the Huntingdon Constituency, Councillor J A Gray questioned the Executive Leader as to whether she agreed that the organisation of the election had been exceptionally well run, both by Officers and the candidates, their various counting agents and supporters at the Count. In indicating her wholehearted agreement to this comment, the Executive Leader took the opportunity to thank the staff and volunteers that had contributed to the success of the day and the evening, together with the weeks of preparation. She also took the opportunity to inform the Council that the newly elected Members of Parliament had been invited to come and meet with District Councillors and attend a future meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor C H Tevlin regarding planning performance and progress with the development of the new Local Plan, the Executive Councillor for Planning provided an update for the Council. In doing so, Members noted that major applications for June 2024 had been 100% on target, with household applications processed within 16 weeks at 95%. He was also pleased to report that the backlog had reduced to 80 cases (from 180 in April 2023). With regards to the Local Plan, it was reported that a report on further issues and options would be presented to Overview and Scrutiny in September 2024 and Members were encouraged to attend and participate.

With reference to an ongoing issue with a planning enforcement case within her ward, Councillor C Lowe questioned performance levels within the Planning Enforcement Team. In response to which, the Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor T D Sanderson, reported that planning enforcement were making good progress and meeting targets. He undertook to speak directly with Councillor Lowe regarding the specific issue to which she was referring.

Having congratulated the Electoral Services Team for their efforts given the numbers of elections in recent months, Councillor R Martin then questioned the Executive Leader on the use of the Special Urgency Powers to bring forward an item for discussion and determination at Cabinet the previous evening and queried whether there was a better future mechanism or future to enable other Members to have an informal input. In response to which, the Executive Leader explained that the Special Urgency Provisions had been used as an exception on this occasion. She reiterated that there would be further opportunities to shape the project as it progressed, it would be a long-term project which affected the entire District area. As the Executive Councillor with responsibility for the report, Councillor Wakeford went on to explain that the Cabinet had not agreed the content of a consultation response but merely to take the authority to produce and submit one and agreed that cross party engagement would form part of this

work. He reiterated that the opportunity needed to be taken to allow the Council the legal ability to give a voice to the concerns of all Members.

In response to a request for an update from Councillor N Wells on the current situation with the District Council's Internal Audit Team and recruitment to the post of Internal Audit Manager, the Executive Councillor for Governance and Democratic Services, Councillor J Harvey, reported that a new Internal Audit Manager, Yasir Khan, had recently started in post.

In response to questions from Councillor J Neish regarding firstly the potential to ease the restrictions on amendments to applications and secondly seeking clarification that the increased fees were being ring fenced for the service, the Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor T D Sanderson undertook to respond in seeking further clarification on both points and respond in writing.

22 HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL WORKFORCE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

With the assistance of a report by the Strategic HR Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Council were invited to consider the approval of a new Workforce Strategy for the District Council.

By way of introduction, the Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce, Councillor L Davenport-Ray, outlined the importance of the Council's workforce in contributing to the aims and objectives of the Council and explained that the draft Strategy had been developed to support their hopes and aspirations.

In terms of the development of the Strategy, Councillor Davenport-Ray explained that it had been the culmination of a significant level of staff engagement. It was reported that over 73% of staff, which equated to 472 employees had participated in engagement sessions to form the recommendations and attention was drawn to their feedback which was set out in detail with the draft document

Council was informed that the Strategy had been broken down into three key areas or 'pillars' that covered the core areas that needed to be focused on. These were attraction and retention, engagement and well-being. Should Council choose to adopt the Strategy, Members attention was drawn to the proposed next steps which were set out in detail at the end of the document and would include continued communication, investment in the Action Plan, the use of relevant governance procedures to report on progress and the monitoring of its impact.

Councillor Davenport-Ray went on to explain that the development of the Strategy had been closely monitored by the Council's Employment Committee, who at their last meeting had suggested that the Strategy should be adopted separately from its Action Plan. This would enable further time for refinement of the Action Plan and input from Members. In this regard she urged Members who had any comments to provide these to their Employment Committee representatives. It was also reported that positive feedback had been received from Union, employee representatives and Council staff. Councillor Davenport-Ray concluded her remarks by reiterating that the aim of the Strategy was to

build a workforce where there were opportunities for development and growth and where every staff member felt valued, included and appropriately rewarded.

Councillor S Cawley outlined his support for the Strategy and the decision to adopt the Strategy separately from the Action Plan. However, he urged the Joint Administration to ensure that they responded to and implemented recommendations at pace given that staff expectations had been raised. Comment was also made regarding the concerns raised by the Peer Review at the likely financial impact of the pay and remuneration review, and he urged the Joint Administration to consider this as part of the budgeting process.

In response to a comment from Councillor J A Gray regarding where responsibility for Council employees lies democratically, the Executive Councillor for Climate Transformation and Workforce explained that in her view there was a distinction between policy and operation. Operational responsibility sat with the Head of Paid Services but setting the strategic direction was the responsibility of Cabinet members and in that regard, it would have been remiss of her to have developed a Workforce Strategy without seeking the views of Council employees. However, it was her view that all Members had a responsibility to some extent for Council staff. In response to other comments regarding the potential for an annual staff survey, the Executive Councillor explained that this was certainly one of the issues being considered, including whether surveys should be undertaken more frequently so it could be gauged whether there were issues to be addressed.

In taking his opportunity to address the Council, Councillor R Martin welcomed the development of the Strategy. He went on to refer to the new Employment Rights Bill that had been referenced within the Kings Speech earlier in the week. Whilst it was not yet known what this would contain, Councillor Martin suggested that it would be beneficial for the Strategy to return to full Council for further discussion. He reiterated the comments that had been made regarding the importance of Council staff to the District of Huntingdonshire and the need to consider the management of expectations. Councillor Martin also commented on the remarks made by the Peer Review team regarding the need for the recommendations to be implemented at pace and his hope that extra resources could be obtained to prioritise this. In terms of the Action Plan itself, comment was made regarding the length of time a number of the actions might take and a suggestion was made regarding the need to prioritise a number of these. The Employee Value Proposition being given as an example.

The Executive Leader Councillor S J Conboy outlined her appreciation to the number of staff that had taken the time to engage with the development of the Strategy and the positive feedback that had been received. Whilst welcoming the comments by Members which had been made regarding the desire and will to move at pace and the need for investment in the Council's staff, she reiterated that one of the challenges would be to recognise and manage this within the Council's current financial position.

Finally, Councillor P Hodgson-Jones commented on the need to involve and empower staff to bring forward their own ideas on how things could be done differently and where improvements could be made for the better of the organisation. In response to which the Executive Councillor agreed with this sentiment and explained that she had already been impressed with the ideas and

ingenuity of many of the officers she interacted with. In this regard she explained that the motto – ‘Do, Enable, Influence’ had been suggested by a member of the Open Spaces Team. She agreed to take these comments on board further.

Whereupon and having been proposed and duly seconded, it was

RESOLVED

that the Workforce Strategy as set out in Appendix 1 to the report now submitted be approved.

23 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION - CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

With the assistance of a report by the Chief Executive (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Council considered the findings of the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge and the recommendations of the Peer Challenge Team.

By way of introduction, the Chief Executive explained that an Action Plan would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) in October 2024 and thereafter on a quarterly basis. However, work had already started on the delivery of many of the recommendations.

With reference to the Workforce Strategy, the Chief Executive reiterated that given the level of engagement from employees and the overall positivity received, she did not wish to lose momentum with this project. With this in mind, discussions had taken place regarding the acceleration of resources to demonstrate to the workforce the intention to deliver against the recommendations. She also outlined her thanks to Council Members for their appreciative comments regarding the Councils’ employees delivering the Council’s aspirations and she would be conveying this to all staff within her weekly newsletter.

Turning to the Peer Review, the Council were advised that the recommendations would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) and accountability would be provided by allocating a Cabinet Member and Member of the Senior Leadership Team to oversee each recommendation. Those members with an interest in benchmarking were encouraged to look at the reports for other Councils on the Local Government Association Website. Members were also advised that a new framework for review had been introduced which was considered to be more challenging than the previous regime.

In terms of the recommendations within the report, Members were also advised that in addition to the key recommendations there were a number of additional actions that would also be implemented. The Chief Executive also reported that the Peer Team had commented on how welcoming and transparent those that they had met as part of the process had been and she had been keen to ensure that all parts of the organisation had felt part of the review. Feedback from staff had been good and tours had included Eastfield House and One Leisure, including the workshop.

In responding to the report, the Executive Leader, Councillor S J Conboy expressed her appreciation to the Peer Review team and indicated that she was looking forward to working with Members across the Council to reflect on the suggestions and recommendations within the report.

Having expressed his appreciation to the Peer Team and commented on the thorough and honest process he had experienced, the Leader of the Opposition Group Councillor R Martin commented on a number of aspects of the report. Firstly, the need to address issues arising from a number of departments feeling as though they were working in silos and the need to monitor trends in the delivery of affordable housing to ensure that any reduction in numbers was not a continuing trend year on year. Councillor Martin also commented on the need to develop a scrutiny work programme and he had already discussed with the Chief Executive the need for more member led engagement at these meetings. He took the opportunity to encourage all backbenchers to engage in the process and bring forward ideas and policies. Finally, Councillor Martin indicated that he looked forward to the Action Plan being brought forward to the next round of Overview and Scrutiny for further discussion and again on a regular basis.

Councillor J Neish commented that the Peer Team had found the District Council to be a well-resourced Council with the ability to make choices about how they delivered services. He commented that the review was a positive thing which would help the Council understand where some of the areas of challenge might be and those that needed further consideration.

Councillor S Wakeford expressed his appreciation to the Peer Review team for the review and the resulting report. He indicated that the resulting report was helpful, and that work had already begun to address some of the recommendations. In response to the comments made by Councillor Martin concerning affordable housing, Councillor Wakeford commented that success in this area was the result of a number of factors. However, the reason the review team had commented so positively was because in many authorities' delivery had gone down, whereas in Huntingdonshire it had increased in the current year.

RESOLVED

that the Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback report as set out at Appendix 1 be received and the recommendations of the Peer team noted

24 ADJOURNMENT

At 8.57 pm it was

RESOLVED

that the meeting stand adjourned

Upon the decision to adjourn the meeting Councillors E R Butler and A E Costello left the meeting and did not return.

Upon resumption at 9.02 pm

25 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE 2023/24

Councillor M J Burke, Chair of the Corporate Governance Committee presented the Annual Report of the Committee for 2023/24 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which summarised the Committees activities and the issues that arose within the financial year.

In presenting the report, the Chair was pleased to report that all 17 recommendations from the Local Government Association Audit Peer Challenge had now been implemented, including those that related to the Committee's activities. A further five actions had been identified for the forthcoming year and the Chair indicated his appreciation to Council Officers and the new Internal Audit Manager for their support in this regard.

The Chair also took the opportunity to express his appreciation to the former Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee, Councillors N Wells and J E Harvey for their assistance in his transition to his new role. Although it was acknowledged that Councillor Harvey would continue to assist the Committee in her role as Executive Councillor with responsibility for Governance and Democratic Services.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the Annual Report 2023/24 of the Corporate Governance Committee be received and noted.

At 9.08pm Councillor S J Criswell left the meeting and did not return.

26 TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT 2023/24

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 Councillor B A Mickelburgh, Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources. The report provided an update on treasury management activity for the period 1 April to 31 March 2024, including investment and borrowing activity and treasury performance.

By way of introduction, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources proceeded to talk in detail through the following areas: economic review, the performance of Council funds, treasury risk management, non-treasury investments, compliance and treasury management indicators.

Having received a detailed explanation of the economic circumstances in which the UK Economy found itself during the 2023/24 financial year, Council's attention was drawn to the performance of Council funds. Attention was drawn to the Council's Capital Funding Requirement, which measures the Councils underlying need to borrow for capital purposes together with the Council's borrowing levels which were set out in tables 3 -6 of Appendix A. As at 31 March 2024, the Council held £34.27M of loans, however the Executive Councillor for

Finance and Resources assured Members that this was behind the Council's Commercial Property Investment estimated value of around £40M. There had been no additional borrowing undertaken within the reporting period. It was also reported that a large proportion of Council investments were made in the Government's Debt Management Office (DMO). Funds that were placed into the DMO are used to reduce the need for the government to borrow, therefore investing here helps to reduce costs for the public sector overall and stops external money market funds from making gains at the taxpayer's expense.

Members were also reminded that a review of the Council's Commercial Investment Strategy had previously been planned for June 2024. However, this had been delayed pending the arrival of the Council's new Section 151 Officer in the Autumn and it was envisaged that there may be new opportunities in place following the election of a new national Government.

In terms of Non-Treasury Investments, the Council were advised that the Council currently holds £70.8M of such investments in directly owned property (£70.7M) and shareholding in subsidiaries £0.1M). These investments generated £3.92m (2022/23 £5.36m) of investment income for the Authority for 2023/24, a decrease of 37% on 2022/23, as a result of reduced rents at Fareham, Stonehill and Rowley Arts Centre. Having received a brief update on the reasons for this, Members were advised that a further update would be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) in September 2024 in private session.

With regards to compliance, the Executive Councillor was pleased to report that the Council's Chief Finance Officer had reported that all treasury management activity undertaken during the financial year had complied fully with the CIPFA Code of Practice and the Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy. He also took the opportunity to draw attention to the Government's decision to extend the mandatory statutory override for local authorities to reverse out all unrealised fair value movements resulting from pooled investment funds to 31 March 2025. In the Council's case this would include funds invested within the CCLA property fund.

Finally in terms of treasury management indicators, the Executive Councillor reminded Members that the Council continues to measure and manage its exposure to treasury management risk using the indicators of security, liquidity, exposure to interest rate risk, structure of borrowing, maturing timing and long-term investments. In response to a comment which had been raised at Overview and Scrutiny regarding the Loan to Value ratio shown in Table 17 regarding Commercial Investment properties, the Executive Councillor indicated that they did not currently offer any cause for concern given there were no currently no plans to sell the properties.

In response to a question from Councillor P Hodgson-Jones, the Executive Councillor confirmed that revised data from the Office of National Statistics had confirmed that the United Kingdom had entered a technical recession in the final 6 months of the last year. He also suggested that the forthcoming work on the development of a new Commercial Investment Strategy would enable the Authority to give consideration to different levels of risk and risk profiles and encourage those that were interested to get involved within the development of that Strategy in the Autumn.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the Treasury Management Performance for 2023/24 be noted.

27 USE OF SPECIAL URGENCY PROVISIONS 2023/24

The Chair explained that Council's Constitution requires the Executive Leader to report annually on Executive Decisions taken under Special Urgency provisions during the Year. The Council noted that there had been no items to report in 2023/24.

28 CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY - QUESTIONS

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

There were no questions raised.

29 OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council held on 22nd May 2024 is appended in the Minute Book and Members were advised that any issues or questions could be raised in relation to these meetings.

There were no questions raised.

30 VARIATIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

On the recommendation of Councillor S J Conboy and R Martin, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that Councillor J E Harvey be appointed to the membership of the Constitution Review Working Group;
- (b) that Councillor C A Lowe be appointed to the vacant position on the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships); and
- (c) that Councillor J Clarke be appointed to the membership of the Licensing and Protection / Licensing Committee in place of Councillor S Bywater.

The meeting ended at 9.30pm.

Chair