

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in the CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER/STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 11 February 2025

PRESENT: Councillor S J Conboy – Vice-Chair.

Councillors L Davenport-Ray, S W Ferguson, J E Harvey, S A Howell, B A Mickelburgh, T D Sanderson, S L Taylor and S Wakeford.

APOLOGY: An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor S J Conboy.

58 EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR FOR COMMUNITIES, HEALTH AND LEISURE

The Vice-Chair welcomed Councillor S A Howell, Executive Councillor for Communities, Health and Leisure to her first meeting of the Cabinet.

59 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10th December 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chair.

60 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor S A Howell declared a disclosable pecuniary interest under Minute No. 24/62 by virtue of her organisation being in receipt of business rate relief and vacated the room during discussion on this item.

61 FINAL 2025/26 BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2026/27 TO 2029/30) INCLUDING THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME

With the aid of a report prepared by the Corporate Director – Finance and Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were apprised with details of the Final Budget 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (2026/27 to 2029/30).

By way of background, the Corporate Director – Finance and Resources reported that the final Government settlement figure had now been received and that this would not make a material difference to the overall budget proposals. Furthermore, it was reported that the Quarter 3 Finance Performance Report had also been included as an appendix to the report and that funding remained available within the Council's reserves in anticipation of work arising from the Government's White Paper proposals on Local Government Reorganisation. Reference was also made to the budget planning principles, the legal requirement for the Council to propose a balanced budget which had resulted in a small drawdown from earmarked reserves, the impact of National Insurance contribution changes and the statement made by the Corporate Director –

Finance and Resources as Section 151 Officer on the robustness of the proposed final budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy, including the Capital Programme.

The Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources then drew attention to the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth) where questions had been raised and responded to at the meeting relating to the Local Government Settlement, the Council's approach to budget setting, a property within the Commercial Investment Strategy, the proposed increase in parking fees after the expected implementation of Civil Parking Enforcement and wage growth proposals which had been included within the budget.

Referring to the comments made by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth) relating to proposed changes to car parking charges, the Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Waste and Street Scene stated that a holistic approach to this must be adopted once Civil Parking Enforcement was in place with a view to reviewing occupancy levels across each car parking site, options for introducing parcel lockers and reviewing the scale of fees at each site against its competitors. All of these factors should be considered as part of the Council's review of its car parking strategy. The Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources responded that it would be timely to review the Council's car parking strategy now that the timeframes for Civil Parking Enforcement were known. He also reminded the Cabinet that the car parks were also subject to business rates and expressed the view that the strategy would need to balance outcomes for residents.

In concurring with the comments which had been raised in respect of the Council's approach to reviewing car parking charges, the Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce commented upon the need for the Council to focus its efforts on reducing overall net expenditure. Having commended Officers for their hard work in producing a balanced budget in 2025/26 and for their efforts with the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Capital Programme, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet recommend to Council the approval of the overall Final Budget 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 to 2029/30 as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report now submitted which included the Revenue Budget at Section 2 and the Capital Programme at Section 3.

62 TREASURY MANAGEMENT CAPITAL AND INVESTMENT STRATEGIES

A report by the Corporate Director – Finance and Resources was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) providing strategic guidance on how the Council conducts its Treasury Management, Capital and Investment activity.

In introducing the report, the Corporate Director – Finance and Resources reminded the Cabinet of the requirements for Council to approve the various strategies and statements under the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice designed to protect the Council's cash and income.

The Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources presented the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth), drawing particular attention to the discussion which had been held in relation to the Bank of England's lending and investing rates. He advised that he had since had a discussion with the Council's Financial and Treasury Accountant and that a prudent approach had been adopted in this respect rather than being overly optimistic with these rates.

Following a question which had been raised by the Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce in relation to investing via Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) considerations, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources reported that investment options through the Debt Management Office were not only guaranteeing returns for the Council but this was also enabling financial support to the Council's peers and colleagues. It was however reported that once the budget setting process had been finalised, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources would be working with CIPFA to further review ESG considerations.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet recommend to Council the approval of the Treasury Management, Capital and Investment Strategies (as outlined in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 of the report now submitted) and the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement and the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy (as outlined in Appendices 4 and 5 of the report now submitted).

At 7:23pm, Councillor S A Howell vacated her seat and left the room during consideration of the next item.

63 BUSINESS RATES - DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY

See Members' Interests.

A report by the Council Tax and Business Rates Manager was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) setting out the provisions for Billing Authorities to determine a Business Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy to provide support to local businesses by reducing or removing Business Rates liability for certain periods of time. Legislative changes required the existing policy to be updated.

In his introductions, the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance reported that the new policy would seek to reduce the rate relief for businesses in the Retail and Hospitality sector from 70% to 40% as this was the maximum amount to be reclaimed from Government. Concerns had been expressed by Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) over small businesses affected by the change. Cabinet Members were advised that the Economic Development Team were proactively working to identify and contact affected businesses to make them aware of the impact of these changes. Whereupon, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) to adopt the Business Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy as outlined in Appendix A of the report now submitted to be effective from 1 April 2025; and
- (b) to delegate authority for approval of future changes to the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy, where such changes are the result of Government direction or are minor wording changes, to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance.

At 7:27pm Councillor S A Howell took back her seat at the meeting.

64 HYDROTREATED VEGETABLE OIL (HVO) TRIAL

With the aid of a report by the Head of Operational Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were updated on the outcome of the trial of using Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil as an alternative to standard road diesel.

In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Waste and Street Scene reported that the trial had commenced in 2023 as a means of supporting and contributing towards the Council's Climate Strategy. Emergency response services were also invited to join the trial which included Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue and Cambridgeshire Constabulary. The Cabinet were encouraged to learn that the pilot had demonstrated operational efficiencies and contributed towards the Council's achievement of net zero carbon goals.

In acknowledging the benefits of the trial and having welcomed the positive outcomes achieved, the Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce reminded the Cabinet that the project was a stepping stone and that there was still some work to do given that the Council's fleet of vehicles used internal combustion engines.

A question was then raised by the Executive Councillor for Communities, Health and Leisure querying whether the income generated from green waste could be utilised to subsidise increased biofuel costs. The Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Waste and Street Scene reported that this had been built into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy going forward.

Much discussion then ensued on the four suggested recommendations arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships). Cabinet Members discussed their impact, the need to be cautious with some of the proposed recommendations in the event of there being a future UK based supplier, the scale of the proposal and extent of the work required relating to the creation of a cross partner steering group of relevant organisations and local producers within Cambridgeshire to develop the production of fuel within the District and the fact that elements of the recommendations were already being picked up by the Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Waste and Street Scene as business as usual. The Cabinet were also reminded by the Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce of the work already being undertaken by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to tackle some of these themes. It was further reported that the Council's Fleet Manager was proactively engaging with authorities within the

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area as well as the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to share the learning which had been achieved from the pilot. With the above in mind, the Cabinet agreed not to pursue the proposed recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) and noted them at the meeting. Whereupon, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) to adopt the use of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil across the Council's fleet based on the successful trial;
- (b) to delegate authority to the Corporate Director - Place and Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources and the Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Waste and Street Scene to take operational decisions regarding the implementation and ongoing management of the Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil initiative;
- (c) to authorise HDC Officers to engage with neighbouring authorities to explore the wider Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil adoption across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough;
- (d) to endorse continued collaboration with Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service and Cambridgeshire Constabulary on Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil usage and other partnership opportunities; and
- (e) to endorse HDC's engagement with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to explore potential funding for Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil implementation and ongoing usage and opportunities for wider Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil adoption among Cambridgeshire partners.

65 PROCUREMENT OF VEHICLES AND CONTAINERS FOR WEEKLY FOOD WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE

A report by the Head of Operational Services was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) seeking the Cabinet's approval to pursue the procurement of equipment and onward delivery of a separate weekly food waste collection service by April 2026.

The Cabinet were informed by the Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Waste and Street Scene of the legal requirement to introduce a separate weekly food waste collection from households by 31st March 2026. It was reported that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs were yet to provide any details on the level of funding for Council's to introduce the new initiative, but this funding would be utilised to purchase food waste caddies, bins and dedicated collection vehicles.

Attention was then drawn to the views and proposed additional recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships). These recommendations were discussed in detail with varying views from Cabinet Members. The Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce indicated her support for the proposed recommendation relating to the creation of a Food Waste Collection Service Working Group and suggested that alternative wording might be used for proposed recommendation 2 to the effect of "a future report being submitted to

the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) indicating updated revenue and operational information in advance of the commencement of the service". In terms of the former, the Cabinet were reminded by the Chief Executive that a Working Group could be established by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel without the need for Cabinet's approval. Having regard to the latter, the view was held that transparency on the funding for this initiative would emerge as a matter of course through in-year financial and budgetary monitoring and would be picked up by the Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Waste and Street Scene as part of her executive portfolio responsibilities.

The Chief Executive also took the opportunity to remind the Cabinet of their responsibilities around executive decision making and that it was not their duty to discuss detail such as future communication and engagement strategies at their meetings. Furthermore, comment was made about the need to think beyond the short term and to be mindful of what information might be forthcoming in respect of this project over the ensuing 6-month period.

Having now reached a consensus not to support the additional recommendations proposed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships), it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet delegate authority to the Corporate Director - Place and Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Waste and Street Scene and Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources, to pursue the procurement of equipment and onward delivery of the separate weekly food waste collections project to meet the Government mandated deadline of April 2026.

66 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME FEBRUARY 2025

Due to an imminent decision being required, an item of business was considered under the General Exception Provisions - Section 15 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules, as contained in the Council's Constitution.

A report by the Chief Planning Officer was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) setting out the purpose and content of the proposed replacement Local Development Scheme relating to preparation of the Local Plan update.

The Vice-Chair, as Executive Councillor for Planning advised that the report had been triggered by intended Government changes to the plan-making process and was the Government's response to the "proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system". All local planning authorities had therefore been requested to submit their updated Local Development Schemes to the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government no later than 6th March 2025.

In discussing the importance of communications on this matter as well as the additional risk to the Council of potential increases in planning consultancy fees, the Cabinet were informed by the Corporate Director – Finance and Resources

that the latter would be dealt with as an in-year variance and, if necessary, would be included in the budget going forward.

Whereupon, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) to approve the contents of the Local Development Scheme February 2025 and bring it into immediate effect following the Cabinet's meeting and the call-in period; and
- (b) to delegate further revisions of the Local Development Scheme for the Local Plan Update to the Chief Planning Officer in conjunction with the Executive Councillor for Planning.

The meeting concluded at 8:19pm.

Chair