

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 19 December 2018.

PRESENT: Councillor R J West – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, T D Alban,
B S Banks, R E Bellamy, G J Bull,
S M Burton, E R Butler, S Bywater,
J R Clarke, Mrs S Conboy, S J Corney,
S J Criswell, J W Davies, D B Dew,
Ms A Diaz, Mrs A Dickinson,
Dr P L R Gaskin, J A Gray, M S Grice,
M J Humphrey, Dr N Johnson,
Mrs P A Jordan, P Kadewere, D N Keane,
C J Maslen, H V Masson, L W McGuire,
J P Morris, J M Palmer, K I Prentice,
T D Sanderson, Mrs P E Shrapnel,
Mrs S Smith, Mrs J Tavener, D Terry,
R G Tuplin, D M Tysoe, D R Underwood,
S Wakeford, D J Wells and J E White.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs M L Beuttell, J C Cooper-Marsh, R Fuller, D A Giles, Mrs S A Giles, D J Mead and J Neish.

46. PRAYER

The Reverend D Busk of Godmanchester and Hilton opened the meeting with prayer.

47. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 17th October 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

48. MEMBERS INTERESTS'

No declarations were received.

49. CHAIRMAN'S ENGAGEMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Council noted those engagements attended by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman since the last meeting (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), subject to the amendment of the wording of "flag raising" to "wreath laying" under the engagements for 11th November 2018 and attendance by the Vice-Chairman rather than the Chairman at the Reception at RAF Alconbury on 3rd December 2018.

The Chairman welcomed Lieutenant Colonel Tamilyn Dismukes, USAAF Commander of 423rd Force Support Squadron at RAF Alconbury and RAF Molesworth to the meeting and the Executive

Leader referred to the strength of bond that existed between this District and the USAAF.

50. INTRODUCTION BY NEW CHIEF CONSTABLE OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE & PETERBOROUGH CONSTABULARY

The Chairman welcomed Mr N Dean, Chief Constable of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Constabulary who had been invited to address the Council. Mr Dean thanked Members for the invite and began his presentation by drawing Members attention to the issue of austerity facing all Police forces nationally. Mr Dean reported upon the changing nature of crime since he had joined the Police 26 years ago, using new digital technology to detect offenders and criminals going forward, whilst making effective use of resources.

Since joining Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Mr Dean outlined to Members that he had taken the opportunity to go out and listen to the community to gain a greater understanding of the challenges in order to respond to the issues. Members noted that the demand on his services remained high as demonstrated by an increase of 6.3% of 999 calls over the past year to 350K per annum.

Members were appraised of the good working relationship with other forces across the Eastern Region and collaborative working with Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire to tackle the counter terrorism threat and high end crime. In noting that there had been an increase in localised crime, such as burglaries across the area, that had directly affected the quality of life of those that the crime had been committed against, Mr Dean reported that this had led to the integration of a Mental Health Team in the Control Room that had seen an increase from 3.5 to 5% in demand.

In referring to the reduction in budgets and pressures on front line policing, Members noted that the direct approach of continuing to work with communities had continued to evolve through PCSOs, community speed watch groups and neighbourhood watch schemes. Mr Dean reported that they had been working in conjunction with the District Council and other authorities across the area to set priorities for the organisation with the Police and Crime Commissioner to meet the challenges going forward to safeguard the vulnerable and engage with those that had been victims of crime, whilst not losing sight of the primary role of the tackling prevention and detection of crime.

Arising from a question from Councillor P L R Gaskin regarding targeted resources to tackle recent incidents of commercial van break-ins and increase in knife crime, Mr Dean reported that in relation to the latter there had been an influx across county lines that had been exploiting the young and vulnerable, specifically in relation to an increase in the population of St Neots and a reported daily increase of 5½ regular crimes per day to 7 per day over the past year and this increase had also been reflected across the county but still remained low. With this in mind, it was reported that they had been proactively working with young people through schools, colleges and youth leaders to educate about the dangers of knife crime.

In relation to a question raised by Councillor T D Alban on his gratitude for the Rural Crime Team and reassurances that this level of

support would continue, Mr Dean reported that he had actively been out with the Team and committed to maintaining engagement with the rural communities, this had been something that he had been tasked with in his previous role in Norfolk. He undertook to pass back the positive comments to the Team and reflected upon an approach that had been adopted in the southern area of Cambridgeshire to maintain communication on any such issues through social media.

Councillor S Bywater raised a question in relation to the issue raised previously by Mr Dean on protection of the young and vulnerable and it was explained that advances had been made in safeguarding these individuals and steps had been taken to secure partnership working with an ongoing commitment to tackle these issues.

In relation to a question from Councillor T D Sanderson on the financial pressures, Mr Dean explained that his priority was to make best use of the resources going forward through partnership working and use of new technology, as well as looking at innovative new ideas.

Councillor Mrs S J Conboy referred to the positive community support that had been provided by Police Officers and questioned how District Councillors could help Town and Parish Councils to support this approach, whereby Mr Dean referred to the low level crime and effect on the quality of life and explained that they were committed to neighbourhood policing and undertook to explore and enhance the intelligence gathering information that already existed through sharing with Town and Parish Councils and other community groups.

Arising from a question from Councillor D M Tysoe on utilisation of the tools of CCTV to prevent and detect crime, Mr Dean explained that when CCTV was first introduced it acted as a good mechanism to catch many offenders, but now although CCTV continued to provide extensive coverage across the area the deterrent aspect had diminished. Members were informed of the enhancements in the digital footprint of CCTV and Mr Dean referred to technologies being trialled elsewhere following a visit to South Wales Police where facial recognition had been developed, but had to be balanced against human rights and the holding of such data. CCTV was tightly governed by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, whereby local authorities had signed up to ensure safeguards were in place and it was an accepted part of society going forward.

In support of the previous Members comments, Councillor G J Bull reiterated the Council's support of the Police and in line with the issues raised previously surrounding the fear of crime, particularly amongst the vulnerable in communities, he questioned how the District Council could support. In response, Mr Dean explained that it was a balance between doing and sharing more, particularly with the celebrations of successes through social media that may have had a counter effect of feeding the fear of crime, but much of what was reacted to came direct from communities and this has helped reduce crime.

Arising from a question from Councillor Dr N Johnson on the problems associated with mental health and was keen to understand how the Police had dealt with such issues and audit of the challenges,

whereupon Mr Dean reported that there had been enhanced training for all Officers, including additional support in the Control Room to address the increase in mental health calls and was an acknowledgement that in society the stigma of mental health had been removed giving people the confidence to come forward. It was widely accepted that all agencies had restrictions on their budgets and it was necessary to work together to understand the needs of the vulnerable in society.

Councillor P Kadewere raised a question in relation to an increase in kids in the Huntingdon North Ward and had been working with Officers and PCSOs and the availability of resources to continue to support issues that had arisen in this area, whereby Mr Dean explained that although there had been a reduction in funding there had still been an uplift in Officers and had been in negotiation after the recent Central Government settlement as to how to provide the best services for Cambridgeshire in the most effective way, through developing a role for neighbourhood policing and involving parishes and community groups in this model. It was noted that it was not possible to determine whether specific wards would benefit from an increase in policing, but would be balanced against the complexity and volume of crimes and commitment to put resources in the right place.

51. BUDGET PRINCIPLES

Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources, addressed the Council on the budget principles and framework, together with focus on the future challenges faced by the Council. A copy of Councillor Gray's PowerPoint presentation is appended in the Minute Book.

Councillor Gray drew Members' attention to the preparations that had been undertaken for the draft budget and reminded all Members of their opportunity to attend the forthcoming Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) to respond and provide input into the draft budget.

Members were reminded of the challenging budget environment that the Council faced, with a reduction and change in spending power over the past five years. Having noted the continuous line held for Council Tax at around £7.5m, many of the other funding streams had seen a reduction, including the Revenue Support Grant removal and cutting of the New Homes Bonus that had been invested over the past three years in the Council's Commercial Investment Strategy. A previous strong area of growth had been the retention of the Council's business rates, but this had also seen a reduction since the previous year's budget.

Whilst reflecting on the challenging year for Council services, Councillor Gray referred to criticisms of budgets previously holding a surplus and reported that future years' budgets would be reviewed to bring into line current variances. The reported projected overspend of £600k had been attributed to an increase in costs for waste collection, lower than expected income across One Leisure and an increase in the cost of homeless accommodation, however had been offset by in year savings of additional income in Development and lower costs

from elections, special responsibility allowances and lower capital financing costs.

Members noted the 2019/20 budget and funding proposals of financial self-sufficiency and Councillor Gray highlighted some of the principles to support this, including an increase in Council Tax and a reduction in the provisional settlement of the Council's grant for next year by £600k making it the fourth highest negatively impacted Council in England.

Councillor Gray reported that the draft 2019/20 budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) had planned to take into account the fair funding review, a new system of allocating funding to Councils that would likely see a reduction of funding away from the District, potentially resulting in budget cuts of over £3m per annum by the end of the MTFS. Having reported this, Members noted that the District could benefit by opportunities for strategic growth, including redevelopment of key sites across the Council area, with an aim of closing the current MTFS gap of £1.6m.

Councillor T D Sanderson reported that the Independent group would be submitting an alternative budget proposal to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) in January 2019 and questioned whether the draft budget was realistic, whereby Councillor Gray reported that the targets being set were at an achievable yet realistic level, rather than a target to meet desired outcomes at the end of the MTFS.

In commending Councillor Gray on the clarity of the presentation, Councillor Mrs S J Conboy questioned whether the draft budget represented a viable proposition and not at risk of being signed off by the Section 151 Officer. In response, Councillor Gray explained that the draft budget was not at risk and represented a sound proposal for the Council.

In response to a question from Councillor Dr N Johnson on whether the proposal to increase Council Tax had been contained in the Conservative's Manifesto, Councillor Gray explained that taxes had to increase in line with the cost of delivery of services but would not increase higher than the state pension increase and was lower than the average increase of earnings of 3%.

In conjunction with Councillor Gray's comments earlier, Councillor D B Dew reminded Members that the draft budget would be considered at the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) meetings in January and February 2019 and encouraged Members to participate in the robust challenge of the budget proposals.

52. QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

Further to Minute No.18/24 (b) and arising from a question from Councillor Ms S Smith on the target of 90% of calls being answered by the Call Centre falling below the expected level to 79% in Quarter One of the Integrated Performance Monitoring report, Councillor D Tysoe, Executive Councillor for Digital and Customer, explained that as a result of the Council introducing a new telephone answering system using a menu approach it had been established that some

calls had been lost but the since then the system had bedded down and he undertook to provide updated figures to Councillor Ms Smith outside of the meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor T D Sanderson to the Executive Leader, Councillor G J Bull, on car parking, it was anticipated that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) would be considering the item at their meeting in January 2019 outlining how the strategy would be delivered.

Following a question from Councillor C J Maslen on the commercialisation of the CCTV service and when St Neots Town Council was likely to see a reduction in costs through their subsidising of the service, Councillor Tysoe undertook to provide further information following the meeting due to the commercial sensitive nature of the content.

Arising from a question from Councillor J D Ablewhite that had been highlighted by the Labour Group in the Hunts Post relating to the increase in Members' Allowances, Councillor Bull confirmed that all Members of the Labour Group had taken the increase in their Allowances.

53. GAMBLING ACT - STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES 2019

In accordance with Minute No.18/09 of the meeting of the Licensing Committee and Minute No.18/40 of the Cabinet, consideration was given to a report by the Head of Community (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached a revised draft Statement of Principles under the Gambling Act 2005. The Statement outlines the principles which the Council proposes to apply when exercising its functions under the Act. The Council is required to undertake a review of its Statement every three years, with the last review having taken place in 2015/16.

Councillor S J Criswell, Chairman of the Licensing Committee, explained that the revised Statement of Principles had been subject to nine weeks' public consultation and drew Members' attention to forthcoming changes in legislation to the maximum stake on fixed odds betting terminals. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Gambling Act 2005 - Statement of Principles 2019, as appended to the report now submitted, be approved to come into effect on 31st January 2019 for a period of three years duration; and
- (b) that the Head of Community, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Operations and Regulation, be authorised to make the necessary changes to the Gambling Act 2005 – Statement of Principles to implement the changes proposed by Government to the maximum stake for fixed odds betting terminals.

54. TREASURY MANAGEMENT 6-MONTH PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on a six-month update in respect of treasury management activity, including investment and borrowing activity and treasury performance. In so doing, Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources, placed on record his gratitude the Head of Resources and his staff for ensuring that treasury management procedures had been adhered to ensure that borrowing and investment transactions had been in accordance with best practice.

In noting that there had been little change economically over the previous six months, Councillor Gray also appraised Members of details of the performance of Council funds and Commercial Investment Strategy. In so doing, it was

RESOLVED

that the Treasury Management Performance over the period April to September 2018 be noted.

55. CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY - UPDATE

In conjunction with the decision summaries of the recent meetings of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Councillor G J Bull presented an update of their activities. Copies of the decision summaries are appended in the Minute Book.

In reporting upon potential concerns raised by Members with regard to progress at the Combined Authority, Councillor Bull reported that there had been a lot of activity including the commissioning of an Independent Remuneration Panel to review the Members' Allowance Scheme and had recommended a formal response to the recommendations of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review, as well as the release of funds to be allocated by the Business Board.

Members noted that the Mayor remained driven to deliver the Cambridge Autonomous Metro and Councillor Bull reported that there had been a lot of work undertaken to design and create funding to deliver the project.

It was further noted that they would be undertaking a strategic review of the bus services across the county, investigations were underway to develop a housing company to deliver 2K of affordable housing, consideration of the draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan and the considerable change in staffing at the Combined Authority with the recruitment exercise underway for a new Chief Executive and appointment of new Head of Finance.

In response to concerns raised previously by Councillor Mrs S J Conboy regarding her recent meeting with the Mayor and request for closer working and consultation with Town and Parish Councils it was suggested that this was the role of the District Councillor and Councillor Bull shared his concern regarding the lack of time that

Members had to appraise themselves fully with the papers arising from the Combined Authority and undertook to take this message back to discuss at a future meeting.

Councillors D B Dew and T D Sanderson provided an update on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in particular drew Members attention to a presentation that they had received from the former Chief Finance Officer that had raised concerns regarding how the projects to be commissioned by the Combined Authority would be commissioned. There was uncertainty expressed over the appointment of a new Chief Executive and concerns expressed regarding the lack of activity across the west of the Combined Authority area, with much focus on the East Cambridgeshire and Fenland District areas.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had shared their concerns regarding the turnover of senior officers at the Combined Authority and also the speed at which many projects had been established, without the thoroughness of the planning in place.

Members were provided with an update on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Audit and Governance Committee by Councillor L W McGuire and Members noted that they had received a presentation from the Mayor and reported that the Committee has requested that the procedure be reviewed for the termination of contracts of senior officers at the Combined Authority in light of the recent turnover of staff.

56. OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council held on 17th October 2018 is appended in the Minute Book and Members were advised that any issues or questions could be raised in relation to these meetings.

57. VARIATIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

There were no changes to report.

The meeting ended at 8.45pm.

Chairman