

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Burgess Hall, Westwood Road, St Ives PE27 6WU on Tuesday, 7 December 2021

PRESENT: Councillor L W McGuire – Chairman.

Councillors B S Banks, Mrs M L Beuttell, G J Bull,
E R Butler, S Bywater, J R Clarke, Mrs S Conboy,
S J Corney, S J Criswell, R D'Souza, D B Dew,
Mrs A Dickinson, R Fuller, Dr P L R Gaskin, M Haines,
M J Humphrey, Mrs P A Jordan, Mrs M Kadewere,
C J Maslen, H V Masson, D J Mead, J P Morris, J Neish,
J M Palmer, B M Pitt, K I Prentice, A Roberts,
T D Sanderson, Shellens, C Smith, D Terry, R G Tuplin,
S Wakeford and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors T D Alban, S M Burton, B S Chapman, J C Cooper-Marsh, I D Gardener, D A Giles, Mrs S A Giles, J A Gray, M S Grice, K P Gulson, P Kadewere, D N Keane, Mrs S Smith, D M Tysoe and Mrs S R Wilson.

43 PRAYER

The Executive Leader opened the meeting with a prayer.

44 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 22nd September 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

45 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

46 BY-ELECTION HUNTINGDON EAST WARD

The Returning Officer reported that following a by-election in the Huntingdon East Ward on 4th November 2021, Councillor Mike Shellens had been elected to the District Council. The Chairman welcomed back Councillor Shellens to the meeting of the Council.

47 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).

The Chairman referred to the recent resignation of former Councillor David Wells who served as a Ward Councillor for St Neots East Ward since 2018. Members placed on record their appreciation of his valuable contribution as a Member of the District Council during his term of office. Members also noted that as this vacancy had occurred within six months of the scheduled election in May 2022 this vacancy in St Neots East Ward would be held over until then.

48 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

In accordance with the Council Procedure Rules, notification was received of a question from a member of the public and the Chairman permitted this to allow Ms L Davenport-Ray to address the Council.

Accordingly, the question addressed to the Council referred to the Environmental Principles for Huntingdonshire document (Minute No. 21/51 post refers) and whether the timescale for a draft Environmental Strategy in Autumn 2022 reflected the urgency of tackling the crisis of climate change, together with the suggestion of allowing for the implementation of high impact and low cost solutions being brought to the Council as soon as they are identified in advance of an updated Strategy to avoid further delay.

In response, the Executive Leader, Councillor R Fuller, thanked Ms Davenport-Ray for her question and provided a reply. In addressing the inaccuracies to the dates and timescales quoted, the Executive Leader reported that the timescales and targets outlined in the Environmental Principles for Huntingdonshire document were pragmatic, realistic and achievable but could not be equated to the Council response to the COVID crisis as the Government had made available £millions to respond to this crisis and the same amount of funding was not available to address the climate crisis. He further explained that the Strategy would formalise the principles behind the approach for the Council to improve and work towards climate reduction methods.

49 EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR PRESENTATION

The Chairman invited Councillor S Bywater, Executive Councillor for Community Resilience and Well-Being to present on the Community Transition Strategy for Huntingdonshire 2021-2023. Councillor Bywater was also accompanied by Julie Farrow, Chief Executive of the Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations. A copy of Councillor Bywater's PowerPoint presentation is appended in the Minute Book.

By way of introduction, Councillor Bywater informed Members that the Strategy had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Customers and Partnerships) and approved by the Cabinet, together with an Action Plan. The full document was available on the Council's website. He reflected on the past 18 months and work that had been undertaken by the Council with the biggest change in working more with voluntary and community groups and a number of schemes coming forward to meet the needs of residents and communities.

Member's attention was drawn to the 15 local areas around the District and the COVID-19 organisations who had supported the residents of Huntingdonshire during the pandemic. Councillor Bywater further highlighted the other key support activities that had been delivered during this period that included the re-direction of £50k of Community Chest funding, direct support to over 1.5k

households and the creation of 'wearehuntingdonshire' website that assisted in providing useful information and guidance and links to local services.

Members were informed of the other key support activities that had been delivered since April 2021, that included the establishment of six community-led job clubs, creation of a new Resident Advice Team and further projects delivered with Huntingdonshire Food Network partners.

Councillor Bywater stressed that the strong coalition of the Council working with community groups and voluntary organisations had built a good foundation but did not want to become complacent about the return to business as usual and was keen to ensure that local capacity and resilience was being built and developed to ensure that a culture existed of being able to ask for help and support. In referring to an issue raised by Councillor Criswell at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Customers and Partnerships), in relation to the importance of engagement with Town and Parish Councils, Councillor Bywater welcomed their support as a crucial element, as well as other external partners, with regard to leveraging funding to support community service delivery.

Councillor Bywater invited Julie Farrow to provide an independent view, whereby she provided a reflection of the amazing work that had been undertaken by the voluntary sector over the past 18 months and the impact that COVID had demonstrated what the voluntary organisations and community groups could achieve. Members were acquainted with details of the work undertaken by recognised groups, including Town and Parish Councils and community groups, in reacting to the demands of the pandemic that included the delivery of PPE, hot meals, food parcels and mental health support, as well as keeping residents connected.

Ms Farrow reflected on the positive impact of the pandemic that had improved the ownership and credibility with the District Council, County Council and NHS that some organisations had not experienced before. In supporting the Huntingdonshire Community Transition Strategy, it would also act as a mechanism to continue to work and support the community groups as well as building trust in the voluntary sector with the better connections to support and continue to learn from this experience and the impact longer term going forward.

In thanking Councillor Bywater and Ms Farrow for their presentations and work that has ensued, Councillor T D Sanderson raised an issue with regard to the difficulties with sharing of data between public bodies that had been experienced during the pandemic. In response, Councillor Bywater confirmed that historically data sharing had not been as positive as it could have been and had been working to ensure that the appropriate signposting was in place going forward to identify and encourage those individuals that may need further help and support. Ms Farrow also confirmed that difficulties that the voluntary sector had experienced in the sharing of data and the impact of the pandemic had meant that some of these barriers had been removed in the accessibility of the data, but she had already started to see the re-trenching of these barriers again.

Councillor Mrs S J Conboy asked for a message to convey and for Members not to forget in the consideration of this Strategy, whereby Ms Farrow explained that the voluntary sector was not always thought of first and encouraged Members to

spread the message to talk to them early to ensure that they are there at the start of any process as some issues could be resolved quicker.

50 QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

In the absence of Councillor P Kadewere, Councillor Mrs M Kadewere asked a question to Councillor S Bywater, Executive Councillor for Community Resilience and Well-Being, on community work being undertaken with cross party support that included the school uniform hub, job club, Oxmoor Community Fridge and Hygiene Bank and close work with Godmanchester Foodbank and specifically whether the District Council would continue to support such initiatives. Councillor Bywater referred to the great work that had been taking place locally and confirmed that the District Council would continue to support and thanked Councillor Kadewere for highlighting these successes in his ward and around the District.

Arising from a question from Councillor S Wakeford on his disappointment with the removal of proposals not to redevelop the Huntingdon Station area into a gateway to Huntingdon and thanked the Executive Leader for lobbying Government and enquired as to further updates. In response the Executive Leader, Councillor R Fuller, reported that discussions at Government level had reached a stalemate situation and as soon as information could be shared as to discussions with the Secretary of State and Minister of State for Transport he would endeavour to do so.

In response to a question raised by Councillor Wakeford in relation to when the Council's Planning Service would be back to business as usual in terms of timelines for applicants and the return to pre-application advice in January 2022 as advertised, Councillor J Neish, Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning, explained that the service had been operating to business as usual but there still existed problems with the availability of a lack of trained Planning Officers across the country and across the public sector. Councillor Neish acquainted Members with the Quarterly Performance report latest information to date, specifically that the percentage of major planning applications processed on target had been above the overall 86% target but the percentage of household extension planning applications had been slightly higher than the 81% overall target but we could do better.

Councillor Neish confirmed that despite the staffing challenges the Council had secured a further Interim Planning Services Manager and had recruited an experienced Senior Planning Officer that was due to commence employment mid-February 2022. He further confirmed that the Council had not ceased pre-application advice, but as an additional service the concentration had been on the statutory service provision and it was hoped that the pre-application advice would resume fully in the New Year.

In response to a question from Councillor R J West on an award to the Operations Team, Councillor Ms M L Beuttell, Executive Councillor for Operations and Environment, confirmed that the Waste Team had received an APSE award and had conveyed congratulations to all involved.

51 ENVIRONMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Consideration was given to a report by the Managing Director, Assistant Director (Recovery) and Strategic Growth Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the Council's environmental principles and key considerations to support the renewal of Huntingdonshire's Strategy for the Environment. The Executive Leader drew Member's attention to the consideration of the item that had been discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Customers and Partnerships) and the Cabinet, and although not required to be formally approved by the Council as the content and issues were likely to cross party lines it was hoped that a consensus could be reached.

In discussing the background and basis of the report, the Executive Leader highlighted how the Council had been forward thinking and ahead of its time following their approval of an Environment Strategy in April 2008. Over the ensuing years since the adoption of this Strategy the Council continued with a programme of projects to address climate change including taking pride in its environment, which has been reflected in communities through the cleanliness of the environment, access to parks and open spaces that has been maintained and also the building of the new Council headquarters with carbon reduction measures installed.

The Executive Leader explained that pride of place has been at the heart of the Council's ethos and the profile had been raised in 2018 through the Corporate Plan. In addressing the ongoing issues of recovery in the District, Members noted that it was incumbent upon us to deliver greener recovery measures based around the environmental principles to be adopted for the Council and its activities that have been set out in the report now submitted.

In referring to the development of these environmental principles, the Executive Leader explained that they had been developed as part of the OxCam Arc as there were a number of other local authorities coming together to agree environmental principles to ensure that the infrastructure was available to support any form of housing growth across the geography of the area.

Attention was drawn to recent press articles on the proposal of target net zero carbon at District level by 2040 against the 2050 target set by Government, with the District's target being set at a level that was achievable and realistic. The Executive Leader assured Members that the principles could be delivered alongside achieving economic growth whilst cutting carbon emissions but would be a measured approach in accordance with the budget constraints of the Council. The Executive Leader moved the recommendations which were duly seconded by Councillor Ms M L Beuttell.

In welcoming the Executive Leader's comments on the proposals, Councillor J P Morris stressed the urgency of tackling climate change and in doing so moved and it was duly seconded by Councillor Mrs S J Conboy that the following addition be made to the recommendations of the report as follows –

to accelerate the production of an HDC Climate Action Plan in 2022.

Upon being put to the vote the Motion by Councillor Morris was declared to be LOST.

Councillor T D Sanderson referred to it being an ambitious report but one that could be achieved by 2040. He highlighted his concern with the incompatibility of economic growth against the green strategy and protection of green open spaces that was already widely accessible to all residents across the District and welcomed further detail emerging on how the resources would emerge to take this forward.

Councillor M F Shellens requested further detail on a draft Action Plan with dates and timescales included.

In agreeing with the suggested OxCam Arc environmental principles, Councillor S Wakeford suggested that this should not preclude the Council from going further. Specifically, with the expected development in the District, the Council should be an exemplar for sustainable development and go beyond the legislative legal minimum and whether there was scope to go for a higher standard.

Councillor Mrs S J Conboy indicated her support for the proposals but highlighted the general issue of great angst of the impact of climate change and the speed of reaction time to address this. It was felt that the Council should be ambitious in its approach around the planning process, with a District of growth being more sustainable around planning and water management.

In supporting the principles, Councillor B Pitt questioned whether the Council was going far enough with the net carbon zero 2040 target and drew attention to lack of reference to decarbonise its own buildings further, whilst acknowledging the recent decarbonisation works that have been undertaken at One Leisure Ramsey and Pathfinder House. He further highlighted his concerns with the level of resources deployed to take the action plan forward which he considered reflected the lack of urgency or ambition to take action locally. He used the comparator of the resources deployed to address the pandemic and addressing climate change was not necessarily finance driven, but the project required the necessary resources to take the actions forward.

Councillor R J West expressed his concern with the climate change crisis and urged the Government and businesses to prioritise this to provide a clearer understanding of the subject. He further conveyed his disappointment with the debate and drew attention to the environmental principles being proposed that clearly would not solve the issues immediately but demonstrated the Council's commitment to addressing the climate change crisis.

As one of the longest serving councillors, Councillor D B Dew stressed to Members the importance of getting things right and highlighted how well the Council had succeeded so far with its parks and open spaces, schemes for retrofitting homes with energy efficiency measures, greening the vehicle fleet and encouraged Members to support the proposals.

In drawing attention to the debate and concern expressed by some Members, Councillor A Roberts indicated that he had hoped Members would be coming together, cross party, to support the environmental principles that he deemed practical and achievable, albeit ambitious, but necessary to tackle climate change.

In thanking Members for their contribution to the debate, the Executive Leader addressed the Members responses to the debate and stressed that this Council was consistently delivering action and the ambition was there to achieve this. He further referred to the publication of information that ranked Huntingdonshire as 24th out of 314 local authority areas based upon seven environmental indicators that demonstrated that the Council had scored higher than the national average in a number of areas including renewable energy, recycling rates and efficiency of homes. The Executive Leader urged Members to support the environmental principles and reiterated his commitment to deliver the proposals. It having been previously moved and seconded, upon being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the aspiration of a net carbon zero Huntingdonshire by 2040 be adopted; and
- (b) that the OxCam Arc environmental principles as set out in the report now submitted be adopted.

(Councillor D J Mead left the meeting at 8.37pm)

52 GAMBLING ACT: STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES 2022-25

In accordance with Minute No.21/10 of the meeting of the Licensing Committee and Minute No.21/38 of the Cabinet, consideration was given to a report by the Operational Manager (People) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached a revised draft Statement of Principles 2021 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 2018/19.

Councillor L W McGuire, Chairman of the Licensing Committee, explained that the revised Statement of Principles had been subject to twelve weeks' public consultation and no responses were received as part of this process. Having noted that the revised policy remained largely unchanged, it was

RESOLVED

that the Gambling Act 2005 - Statement of Principles 2022-25, as appended to the report now submitted, be approved to come into effect on 31st January 2022 for a period of three years duration.

53 TREASURY MANAGEMENT SIX MONTH PERFORMANCE

Consideration was given to a report by the Council's Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) providing a six-month update in respect of treasury management activity for the period 1st April to 30th September 2021.

In response to questions by Councillor M F Shellens on the status of the empty units at the Rowley Arts Centre, St Neots, the implications of the asset sales under non-treasury investments and volatility in the market with interest rates uncertainty, Councillor R Fuller, Executive Leader, reassured Councillor Shellens in relation to non-treasury investments that the Council had adopted a more robust approach to these assets through the Treasury and Capital Management Group ensuring more control. He further confirmed that there were advanced discussions with the hospitality group in relation to taking on the lease at the Rowley Arts Centre and also drew attention to any sale of assets being placed into reserves and encouraged Councillor Shellens to see the further detail in consideration of the budget at their next meeting. The Executive Leader undertook to ensure that Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Strategic Finance, provided a response to his further question.

54 RESOLUTION TO EXTEND 6 MONTH RULE - SECTION 85 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT

The Managing Director presented a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) detailing a request to consider the extension of the six-month rule of non-attendance at meetings in relation to Councillor D A Giles on the grounds of his ill-health. Following an update provided by Councillor M F Shellens, the Council

RESOLVED

- (a) that Councillor D A Giles's non-attendance at meetings be approved until the 9th May 2022 in accordance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972; and
- (b) that the Council's best wishes be conveyed to Councillor Giles for continued improvement to his health.

55 CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY - UPDATE

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

The Executive Leader drew attention to the current items for discussion, specifically the budget setting and many different proposals with the new Mayor that were being considered alongside those that had been carried over from the previous administration. The focus has also been on climate change and whether the existing transport projects aligned with these priorities and it was anticipated that the budget proposals would be rolled over and given further consideration once the strategic direction of the new administration was determined.

Further attention was drawn to the Local Transport and Connectivity (LTCP) programme with the cancellation of proposals for the CAM and proposals for a refresh focussing on cycling and walking which was likely to be a challenge from Huntingdonshire's perspective and other rural districts, with particular concern around rural communities accessing the bus networks. Members noted the soft

launch consultation in November 2021, followed by further consultation in January 2022 on the LTCP programme.

In response to a question raised by Councillor S Wakeford on the Combined Authority's approach to climate change and assurance that the District Council would be working as constructively as possible with the Climate Working Group, the Executive Leader explained that he had written to the mayor recently highlighting the concerns with the timescales proposed but the Council was clearly committed to addressing the issues of climate change through working together, but also expressed his disappointment with the Combined Authority's lack of consultation and questioned their rationale for the very short notice period of four days to Council's to respond to the Climate Change report.

Councillors S Corney and D B Dew provided an update on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Councillor Corney reported upon the attendance of the Mayor at two of their meetings, but he had not provided any further direction as well as not providing detail on why the £100k homes project was pulled. He further highlighted his concern at the new approach to questions at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, whereby questions were being requested in advance with no ability to ask supplementary questions. This issue was further supported by Councillor Dew and highlighted his concern that the questions were heavily edited before being asked at the meeting. He further updated that he was hopeful with the transport agenda moving forward and fully supported the cycling and walking agendas being discussed.

56 OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council held on 22nd September 2021 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

On the recommendation of Councillors R Fuller and Mrs S J Conboy, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that Councillor M F Shellens be appointed to the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) in place of Councillor M S Grice;
- (b) that Councillor M S Grice be appointed to the membership of the Licensing and Protection Committee/Licensing Committee;
- (c) that Councillor A Roberts be appointed to the membership of the Employment Committee;
- (d) that Councillor I D Gardener be appointed to the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth);

- (e) that Councillor R J West be appointed to the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Customers and Partnerships) in place of Councillor S Criswell following his appointment to the Cabinet; and
- (f) that Councillor M Haines be appointed to the membership of the Licensing and Protection Committee/Licensing Committee in place of in place of Councillor S Criswell following his appointment to the Cabinet.

The meeting ended at 9.06pm.

Chairman