

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, 20 July 2022

PRESENT: Councillor M J Burke – Chairman.

Councillors B S Banks, M L Beuttell, A M Blackwell, R J Brereton, E R Butler, S Bywater, S Cawley, J Clarke, S J Conboy, S J Corney, A E Costello, S J Criswell, L Davenport-Ray, D B Dew, S W Ferguson, I D Gardener, C M Gleadow, J A Gray, K P Gulson, J E Harvey, M A Hassall, P J Hodgson-Jones, S A Howell, N J Hunt, A R Jennings, P A Jordan, M Kadewere, P Kadewere, D N Keane, J E Kerr, C Lowe, R Martin, S R McAdam, B A Mickelburgh, D L Mickelburgh, S Mokbul, J Neish, Dr M Pickering, B M Pitt, T D Sanderson, D J Shaw, R A Slade, D Terry, C H Tevlin, S Wakeford, N Wells, G J Welton and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors T Alban, S L Taylor and I P Taylor.

15 THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

A 'Thought for the Day' was presented by Councillor B A Mickelburgh.

16 MINUTES

Subject to the replacement of Councillor R J West with Councillor K P Gulson and replacement of Councillor K P Gulson with Councillor R J West in Minute Nos. 22/01 and 22/04 and replacement of the membership listed for the Licensing and Protection Panel with the membership listed for the Licensing Committee in Minute No. 22/10(a), the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 18th May 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

17 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

18 CHAIR'S ENGAGEMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair reported upon former Councillor Mike Newman who sadly passed away in March 2022, who served as a District Councillor that represented the Warboys Ward from 1993 to 2004, largely elected unopposed, and Somersham Ward to May 2011. Members paused briefly for reflection in silent tribute to their former Member.

The Council noted those engagements attended by the Chair and Vice-Chair since the last meeting (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). The Chair also reported upon his chosen charities for the year, namely Memory Lane Singing Café in St Ives, Young People's Counselling Service in Yaxley and The Arthur Rank Hospice Charity: Cambridgeshire Hospice at Home North Team.

19 STATE OF THE DISTRICT AND CORPORATE PLAN 2022-23

The Chair invited the Executive Leader, Councillor S J Conboy to address the Council on the State of the District and Corporate Plan 2022-23 and to open the debate which was scheduled to follow.

Councillor Conboy opened her address by placing on record her sincere appreciation to Officers and Members who had supported everything that had been delivered in the past year. She also acknowledged the work of the previous administration over the last four years and in particular the response to the pandemic as well as, more recently Homes for Ukraine and Energy Bill rebate initiative.

Members' attention was then drawn to looking ahead and setting a new strategic direction for the Council to ensure the Medium Term Financial Strategy remained sustainable. Reference was made to the previous administration commitment to ambitious savings for the ensuing financial year and £805k that had been removed from the budget for 2023/24, but the inherited budget showed £2.48m from reserves must be spent to achieve this. Based on this information, Councillor Conboy explained that the initial challenge for the new administration was to understand the detail to determine the savings impact on operational and strategic activities.

Members were advised of the transitional Corporate Plan for 2022/23 that would focus on the priorities of the Joint Administration for the remainder of the financial year, with a focus on supporting the needs of the residents. The response would also build on the network with the community and utilise external funding to extend the residents advice and information team with a focus on supporting residents through the cost-of-living crisis.

The Executive Leader explained that a major communication campaign was under development to assist residents involving the establishment of a financial vulnerability programme, delivery of a £250k project funded by the Clinical Commissioning Group aimed at boosting physical activity, development of a £300k community-based skills programme, closer working with Public Health and expanding the community network.

Attention was drawn to the climate crisis and Councillor Conboy referenced the previous administrations failure to seize the opportunity to address the Climate Emergency and with the recent extreme weather conditions that had been experienced there would be a commitment to addressing the impact, through public awareness, Council policies to enable the cutting of emissions, as well as active travel, local jobs and greener homes.

Members noted the continued focus on the delivery of the Market Towns Programme, including the St Neots Future High Streets Fund and accelerated

delivery projects with master planning in Huntingdon, Ramsey and St Ives. There was also further commitment to creating opportunities to join up services, improving digital access, improving the housing situation, strengthening community work with partner organisations and delivering a Place Strategy designed to shape the District and priorities of the Council.

The Executive Leader drew attention to the intention to communicate regularly with residents to enable full engagement, as well as working constructively with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Cambridgeshire County Council and colleagues in the health sector, Town and Parish Councils, as well as the wider business sector partners. With this in mind, Councillor Conboy was keen to maximise opportunities for inward investment and connectivity across the District and ultimately focussed on the working together as councillors representing the District and their communities.

In response, on behalf of the Conservative Group, Leader Councillor J A Gray thanked the Executive Leader for her presentation that clearly set out what the administration hoped to achieve and welcomed the broad principles, but drew attention to the financial difficulties that the authority faced and referred to the Treasury Management Outturn 2021/22 report that would be presented later in the meeting by the new Executive Councillor and had commenced in his role with a strong starting base. He broadly welcomed the principles of the Corporate Plan, but drew attention to the commitment made by the previous administration versus those authorities that had declared a Climate Emergency but had made little or no progress since making their declaration. However, welcomed working with Councillor L Davenport-Ray, Executive Councillor for Climate and Environment, particularly in light on recent weather conditions.

In accepting the refreshed Corporate Plan, Councillor Gray was interested to see how this would be taken forward and suggested that responsibility lay with all councillors to work collectively to take issues forward but urged the administration to avoid endless rounds of engagement in tackling key issues such as the climate emergency and cost of living increase to enable decisions to be taken in a timely manner.

Councillor R J West outlined his concern with taking responsibility for addressing the climate crisis and urged that Central Government should be more actively involved as it was impossible to solve climate change alone.

In conjunction with the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) held on 6th July 2022 and recommendation of the Cabinet in support of the refresh at their meeting on 19th July 2022, it was

RESOLVED

that the Corporate Plan for 2022/23 as attached as an Appendix to the report now submitted be approved.

20 QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

A question was raised by Councillor K P Gulson to the Executive Councillor for Customer Services on an update of the Energy Bill rebate scheme for bands A to D households and proposals for extension of the scheme to bands E to H

properties, whereby Councillor S W Ferguson reported that 52,645 payments had been made equating to £7.9m and outstanding eligible households had been contacted to remind them of the deadline to apply. In congratulating Officers involved in managing the process, he further reported that the Cabinet at their meeting held on 19th July 2022 had approved a discretionary Energy Bills Rebate – Local Scheme policy to provide financial support to households not eligible for assistance under the main scheme. Members were appraised further of the Local Scheme details that would provide rebates to four different household types.

In response to a question by Councillor S J Corney on the new administration's aspirations for social housing and involvement with the Local Plan refresh, Councillor T D Sanderson, Executive Councillor for Planning, reported that there would be no reason to deviate from proposed timetable for the refresh and welcomed his involvement.

Councillor S Cawley raised a question in relation to an update on the market town initiative to ensure that residents are fully briefed on the timeline, whereby Councillor S Wakeford, Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy and Housing, outlined plans for briefings covering the market towns of Huntingdon, Ramsey and St Ives focussing on District Councillors initially and Members representing the villages that had a community connection to these areas, there would then follow a similar brief to Town and parish Councils. He indicated that the Masterplan publication was scheduled by early August 2022 and the St Neots Masterplan had tighter timescales with the link to the Future High Streets Fund but a meeting was being held the following week and after this would be sharing further specific dates with Members.

Arising from a question by Councillor S Bywater to the Executive Leader on the reasons why there was no longer a District Council representative on the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership and stressed the importance of ensuring the community links remained with the Police, whereby Councillor S J Conboy undertook to establish the background and would provide a response direct to Councillor Bywater.

Following a question raised by Councillor J Neish on the new planning structure and measures that could be done to increase housing supply for affordable housing, the Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor T D Sanderson explained that with a permanent Planning Services Manager was addressing the backlog of applications and allowing Officers more time in managing the decision making and priorities and referred to the different working practices with collaboration through the Place Strategy and Environment Strategy that he hoped would improve the affordable housing offer.

21 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

No formal public questions were submitted for consideration at the meeting of the Council.

22 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE 2021/22

In conjunction with a report by the Internal Audit Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillor N Wells, Chair of the Corporate Governance Committee, presented the Annual Report for 2021/22 of the Corporate Governance Committee that outlined the work that had been undertaken by the Committee over the previous year. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Annual Report 2021/22 of the Corporate Governance Committee be received and noted.

23 TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT 2021/22

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, whereby Members were provided with a detailed overview of the Council's draft Statement of Accounts and an update in respect of treasury management activity for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022. Councillor J A Gray welcomed the presentation and drew Members' attention to the strong legacy of the Commercial Investment Strategy in supporting what the report had highlighted.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that that the Treasury Management Performance during the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 be noted.

24 CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY - UPDATE

In conjunction with the decision summaries of the recent meetings of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Councillor S J Conboy presented an update of their activities. Copies of the decision summaries are appended in the Minute Book. Reference was made to the ongoing challenges that faced the Combined Authority but Councillor Conboy remained positive that better things could be achieved for Huntingdonshire. She reported that a new Interim Chief Executive had been appointed, Gordon Mitchell, who had been appraised of the number of issues and matters that needed addressing.

Members' attention was drawn to the ongoing concerns surrounding the governance of the organisation, noting that there were proposals to strengthen this and Councillor Conboy also highlighted the notable decisions that had been recently approved. She further indicated that progress had clearly been made but there remained work to be done and the opportunities couldn't come soon enough.

Councillor J A Gray referred to the difficult start and was disappointed that the hard lobbying for a stand-alone Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority was now resulting in lost opportunities with funding being returned to Central Government that could have been used to deliver key projects that could also have been attributed to the significant number of unfilled posts. In response

Councillor Conboy shared the same frustration and indicated that she needed to understand the history to a number of issues but assured Members that her representation on the Board was to work for the residents of Huntingdonshire and committed to ensure that collaboration improved.

Councillors D B Dew and M A Hassall provided an update on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee, whereby Councillor Dew shared the concerns presented by Councillor Conboy, in particular referenced the fact that 35 staff were employed out of the 70 posts that existed and was a major concern to the non-delivery of key projects such as the retro fitting of homes funding that had been returned but had been successfully rolled out in other regions. Councillor Hassall also referred to the new work programme of the Committee that included governance, highways, housing and the green agenda and would report back follow further review.

Members were provided with an update on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Audit and Governance Committee by Councillor S J Corney and in particular drew attention to a question that was raised with the Auditors Ernst and Young on the status of the Combined Authority that suggested that it was the worst that they had dealt with.

25 APPOINTMENT OF SECTION 151 OFFICER

With the assistance of a report by the Managing Director (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding the legislative duty placed on the Council to appoint a Section 151 Officer, the Council were reminded that at their meeting on 18th May 2022 an interim appointment was made to the role pending the appointment of a new Director of Finance and Corporate Services.

Having regard to the need to formalise a more permanent arrangement for these duties to be undertaken now that the senior management reorganisation within the organisation had been completed, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that Karen Sutton be appointed permanently as the Council's Chief Finance Officer/Section 151 Officer; and
- (b) that the Council's Constitution be updated to reflect the changes that resulted from this appointment.

26 OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council held on 18th May 2022 is appended in the Minute Book and Members were advised that any issues or questions could be raised in relation to these meetings.

Councillor P J Hodgson-Jones referred to his attendance at the Corporate Governance Committee meeting held the previous week and requested that Members receive separate training on how the Council's accounts are presented to enable a full and clear understanding, whereby the Managing Director

reported that the Local Government Association had already been engaged on this topic with a view to facilitating a training package.

27 USE OF SPECIAL URGENCY PROVISIONS 2021/22

The Executive Leader informed Members that the use of special urgency provisions taken throughout the previous year had not been required and there were no items to report.

28 MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

On the recommendation of Councillors S J Conboy and J A Gray, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that Councillor M Hassall be appointed to the membership of the Employment Committee in place of Councillor S Taylor;
- (b) that Councillor S Ferguson be appointed to the membership of the Licensing and Protection Committee/Licensing Committee in place of Councillor B Pitt; and
- (c) that Councillor S J Corney be appointed to the membership of the Development Management Committee in place of Councillor C Lowe;

Following the announcement by the Leader of the Principal Opposition, Members noted the appointment of Councillors M Beuttell, S Bywater, S Cawley, D B Dew, J A Gray, K Gulson, A Jennings, D Keane and J Neish to the Shadow Cabinet.

The meeting ended at 8.56pm.

Chairman