

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, 12 October 2022

PRESENT: Councillor M J Burke – Chairman.

Councillors T Alban, B S Banks, M L Beuttell, A M Blackwell, R J Brereton, S Bywater, S Cawley, J Clarke, S J Conboy, S J Corney, A E Costello, L Davenport-Ray, 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, C Lowe, R Martin, S R McAdam, B A Mickelburgh, D L Mickelburgh, S Mokbul, J Neish, Dr M Pickering, T D Sanderson, D J Shaw, R A Slade, 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 E R Butler, S J Criswell, D B Dew, J E Kerr, B M Pitt, G J Welton and R J West.

29 THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

A 'Thought for the Day' was presented by Vanessa Corbishley, Humanist Celebrant.

30 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Council held on the 20th July 2022 were approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

31 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

32 MEMORIAL - HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

The Chair reported upon this being the first meeting of the full Council since the sad passing of Her Majesty the Queen and asked Members to reflect upon and remember the life and reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Members stood and observed a minute's silence in her memory.

33 CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR'S ENGAGEMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Council noted those engagements attended by the Chair and Vice-Chair since the last meeting, as well as an updated version (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book).

The Chair reported upon the recent passing of former Councillor Andrew Hansard, who retired as a District Councillor in May 2016 having served as Councillor for the St Neots Eynesbury Ward for seventeen years. Councillor A R Jennings paid tribute to former Councillor Hansard and referred to him also serving as a Cabinet Member for six years as well as Mayor and Member of St Neots Town Council. He reflected on former Councillor Hansard being kind, calm and measured with a wealth of local knowledge that he had found invaluable when he was first elected in 2011. The Council passed on their condolences to his wife, son and family.

34 MOTIONS ON NOTICE

a) Pets as Prizes

Councillor S Bywater moved and it was duly seconded by Councillor R Martin that

This Council

- is concerned about the number of cases reported to the RSPCA each year, regarding pets given as prizes via fairgrounds, social media and other channels in England and notes the issue predominantly concerns goldfish.
- is concerned for the welfare of those animals that are being given as prizes.
- recognises that many cases of pets being given as prizes may go unreported each year.
- suggests a move to ban the giving of live animals as prizes, in any form, on HDC Land.

The Council therefore RESOLVES

- (a) That an outright ban of the giving of live animals as prizes, in any form, on Huntingdonshire District Council owned land is implemented.
- (b) That the Council writes to the UK Government requesting an outright ban of live animals as prizes on both public and private land.
- (c) That the Council carries out a review of the current policies and the terms of the licences and hire of Council owned land and premise to ensure that they reflect the Council's position as regards giving of live animals (e.g. Goldfish etc.) as prizes.
- (d) That the Council will seek to work with our Town and Parish Councils and other partners to raise awareness and encourage them to adopt a similar policy on their land.

Following debate, response from the Executive Councillor for Customer Services and having been put to the vote, the Motion was declared to be CARRIED.

b) Cost of Living and Climate Crisis

Councillor L Davenport-Ray moved and it was duly seconded by Councillor T D Sanderson that

This Council notes that

- We are experiencing the highest inflation in 40 years. Energy is costing more, directly threatening household budgets and the viability of local businesses.
- Historical evidence suggests that increases in food poverty and fuel poverty will lead directly to increased health problems and winter deaths.
- Poor insulation, inefficient heating and the effects of climate change are intensifying the impact of energy prices, increasing pressures on families and businesses.
- As the cost of living increases, people and businesses are less able to finance adaptations to improve energy efficiency and to prepare for extreme weather events.
- More families are in need of help. Yet steeply increasing inflation means this Council's ability to mitigate impacts and provide essential services is increasingly challenging.
- As the cost of living increases and the effects of climate change take hold, our residents also face the potential loss of local bus routes. Many families are now challenged with finding alternative transport to work and school. This places added strain on family finances, increases carbon emissions and drives up air pollution.

An amendment to 6. (e) of the motion as set out below was moved by Councillor P J Hodgson-Jones and duly seconded by Councillor J A Gray that –

6. (e) A strategic plan that delivers UK energy security from renewable, nuclear, green hydrogen and other alternative energy generation programmes which, together with insulation schemes, is partly funded by taxation policies that disincentivise the use of fossil fuels.

Following debate, the amendment on being put to the vote was declared to be LOST.

The Council therefore RESOLVES to

1. Recognise that the Cost of Living and Climate Crisis are interlinked and jointly require attention to ensure the wellbeing of local people and businesses.
2. Make decisions on investment and delivery that, wherever possible, contribute to environmental and social benefits across Huntingdonshire.
3. Adopt a Climate Strategy that acknowledges the personal and financial impact that climate change has on our most disadvantaged residents.
4. Advocate for more robust, affordable public transport that connects employees with work, links students to education and reduces carbon emissions.

5. Work with social landlords operating in Huntingdonshire to review the energy efficiency of their housing stock, recognising that poor insulation and inefficient heating are key factors in the rising cost of living.
6. Request that Leadership write to the Prime Minister, our local MPs and the relevant government ministers to call for:
 - (a) Increased financial support for residents, with most support provided to low-income households.
 - (b) More funding for small and medium local businesses, helping them manage the challenge of increasing energy costs and rising inflation.
 - (c) A more ambitious nationwide commitment to fund improvements in the energy efficiency of homes, resulting in energy bill reductions and environmental benefits.
 - (d) Increased grant opportunities for community groups, housing providers and public sector partners to improve energy efficiency in their buildings.
 - (e) Insulation schemes and renewable energy generation programmes funded by fossil fuel profits.

Following further debate, response from the Executive Leader and having been put to the vote, the Motion was declared to be CARRIED.

35 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. In the absence of the member of the public to present the question the Executive Councillor for Customer Services undertook to provide a written response to the question of whether the Council had any justification for increasing evening Hackney Carriage and Private Hire fares by 150% and why the consultation was not publicised to members of the public. A full response would also be provided to all Members.

36 QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

Councillor S Bywater drew attention to the declining availability of public transport in Sawtry and the impact of the recent announcement by Meridian Trust to close Sawtry swimming pool in December 2022 leaving children and families with limited means to access such facilities elsewhere to learn to swim and questioned the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Streetscene as to what action she taking with Meridian Trust to ensure the swimming pool remained open as the District Council had invested heavily in the infrastructure over the years. In response, Councillor S L Taylor provided a background to the history of the transfer of the leisure facility from the District Council to Meridian Trust in December 2019 with the business identified as a going concern. The District Council had also funded £80k to help facilitate the ongoing operational and maintenance running costs to ensure the asset remained open and available. She confirmed that the District Council had met with Meridian Trust,

owners of the asset, to see how the District Council could support operationally, but at the present time the District Council did not have the financial means to support due to rising increasing operational costs associated with One Leisure as a result of the pandemic and increase in energy costs. She further urged the residents of Sawtry to communicate with Meridian Trust outlining their concerns.

Councillor J Neish referred to the limited numbers of applications being considered by the Development Management Committee and cancellation of meetings and raised a question in relation to the number of planning applications in the backlog and number not determined within legislative timeframes within last six months. He further asked what directive had been issued by the Executive Councillor for Planning to assist with this, as well as the estimated number of applications dealt with during the 10-day temporary closedown of the Department and what efficiency drives would be put in place for the ongoing effective running of the Department for residents and developers to see an improvement in determination rates, as substantial budget had been set aside by the previous administration to address such issues. In response Councillor T D Sanderson explained that the Planning Department had undergone major changes recently and the pre-application advice service launched today would avoid additional amendments being submitted during application process and income would be maximised. Until recently there was not a clear method to fix the system, nor clear metrics to measure rates of successes. He reported that 681 cases had been dealt with since May 2022 that were over 12 weeks old and around 110 applications of these applications had been for strategic sites coming forward. With a new Management Team in the service keen to deliver, the Executive Councillor was confident that the public would be seeing a stronger and more robust service going forward.

Arising from a question from Councillor C Lowe on who had funded the £10 voucher scheme for attendees at the recent Climate Change Strategy Engagement Focus Groups, Councillor L Davenport-Ray, Executive Councillor for Climate and Environment, undertook to investigate and provide a written response to the councillor.

Councillor P Kadewere requested a recap by the Executive Councillor for Customer Services of the measures the District Council had put in place in the District to assist residents in tackling the cost of living crisis. Councillor S Ferguson referred to the financial support pages on the District Council's website, promotion of Warmer Spaces through community groups, support through Household Support fund supporting 400 residents in Quarter 1, the award of £56k in discretionary housing payments to residents on low incomes, low levels of homelessness in the District supported by an excellent Housing Team, support for voluntary sector and other community groups in need and the facilitation of awarding £9.4m to 64k residents in the District as part of the energy rebate scheme and thanked Officers involved.

Following the cancellation of Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Customers and Partnerships), Development Management Committee, Corporate Governance Committee, Employment Committee and Climate Change Strategy Working Group meetings, Councillor T Alban questioned whether residents should be concerned about the lack of available business for such meetings and whether there was a democratic deficit in the District. In response, the Executive Leader, Councillor S J Conboy, assured residents that there was not a democratic deficit as the opposition would be aware of the work streams coming through from the

previous administration and should also appreciate that delays do occur. She further drew attention to the work that had been undertaken with many Members recently looking at the work programme for Overview and Scrutiny and looked forward to full Agendas going forward.

Councillor M L Beuttell raised a question in relation to an update of Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE), specifically where the Council was with the Cambridgeshire County Council Agreement and Department for Transport, as all information has been removed from the website, as well as an update for residents on when CPE will be delivered. The Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene, Councillor S L Taylor, reported that the Council was still in talks with the County Council and undertook to provide a full written response to Members following an update from Officers.

Councillor A R Jennings raised a question on when the District Council would be moving forward with the consultations on St Neots Future High Street Fund and town centre regeneration and committing the spending, as the money that had been secured needed to be spent and every month delay was eroding the pot on transport projects, together with the £16.2m secured by previous administration of Community Infrastructure Levy funding had been reduced by approximately £0.5m. In response, Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy and Housing, Councillor S Wakeford, referred to an update that had been provided on the Market Towns Programme at the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) on 7th September 2022 and in respect of the transport elements, a further date was scheduled with St Neots Town Council in a fortnight and Ward Members would be invited. A full programme of engagement events would take place in the final week of November 2022 inviting key stakeholders and a further report being submitted to the Cabinet for consideration in the coming months on The Old Falcon Hotel. By reference to the funding question, Councillor Wakeford explained that they had been more scrupulous in terms of how the money had been accounted for and would seek Officer advice as to providing a fuller response to Councillor Jennings.

37 CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY - UPDATE

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

Councillor Conboy drew attention to the Green Homes Grant and Local Authority Delivery (LAD2) scheme and disappointment that part of the funding had been returned and not utilised to support low income and low energy rated households due to the scale of the task and practicalities of delivery and had made it clear that lessons needed to be learnt for future delivery of such projects. Similarly, the sustainable warmth project had not been delivered on time and was disappointed with progress.

Councillor Conboy reflected positively on the Changing Futures Programme that had been funded for the past three years, helping those in communities with the support of a Trusted Person. Reference was made to approval of the business case for the Huntingdon Biodiversity for All Project which was good news for

Huntingdon to take forward climate commitment and the Shared Prosperity Fun Investment Plan and confirmed the Huntingdonshire projects that had been submitted for approval.

Attention was drawn to the Councillor Conboy's concern for the inefficiency of the Board and the impact of delaying the delivery of projects on Huntingdonshire, but was reassured by the appointment of the new Interim Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team and the emergence of an Improvement Plan to address ongoing issues and future work programme. She also reported upon the successful release of funding for the A141 St Ives business case and challenges of withdrawal of services by Stagecoach, with the outcome of the tender process by the Combined Authority to replace those services yet to be confirmed. Councillor Conboy encouraged Members to access the link to the Greater Cambridge Partnership City Access Scheme and drew attention to its relevance to the bus network and active travel in Huntingdonshire encouraging feedback to the consultation once live.

In response to a question raised by Councillor I D Gardener on the lack of bus service provision in the proposed bus network to the west and north of Huntingdonshire, whereby Councillor Conboy assured Members that the concern would be raised to ensure that any network covered the whole of Huntingdonshire, including the rural areas.

Arising from a question from Councillor J Neish on the potential for Huntingdonshire in future projects Councillor Conboy confirmed that with the new management structure in place she was confident of seeing an improvement and also reported that the focus should be wider to think about other partnerships that the District Council could join in Cambridgeshire, opening up wider opportunities for collaboration.

In welcoming the feedback from the Executive Leader, Councillor J A Gray referenced the investigations at the Combined Authority and expectation of moving beyond the current situation, whereby Councillor Conboy expressed her similar concerns and reported that she had been assured that matters would be resolved soon and was equally keen to have a determination to move forward. Councillor Gray further referenced recent statements from the Interim Chief Executive and the non-existence of basic elements of governance and Councillor Conboy reassured Members that she would do all she could to ensure that any progress on this was timely and effective to ensure that the Combined Authority could be held to account.

Councillor M A Hassall provided an update from the July 2022 meeting of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He reported that the largest focus of the meeting was surrounding the Improvement Plan and attendance by the Interim Chief Executive to address the risk that the Government could bring in commissioners to run the Combined Authority and drew attention to the significant issue of vacant posts at the Combined Authority that had been delayed by the governance arrangements and the changes made to recruit without Board approval to avoid any further delays in recruitment. He was reassured that the Interim Management Structure was taking the right steps forward in its improvement journey.

Members were provided with an update on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Audit and Governance Committee by Councillor S J Corney and

he referred to the recent meeting with attendance by the Interim Chief Executive and Ernst and Young Auditors. In particular concerns with the red actions highlighted on the Corporate Risk Register but was reassured by action proposed to manage the risks. He further reported that the Committee had requested attendance by representatives of the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities but this invitation had been declined at the present time to allow for the establishment of the improvement measures that had been put in place.

38 OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council held on 20th July 2022 is appended in the Minute Book and Members were advised that any issues or questions could be raised in relation to these meetings.

Arising from a question raised by Councillor J Neish to the Chair of Development Management Committee on the number of applications being submitted to the Committee for determination and what the Chair had done to ensure that no further meetings would be cancelled owing to insufficient business, as well the content of more meaningful agendas including strategic applications, Councillor D L Mickelburgh undertook to provide a full written response in explanation.

Councillor T Alban addressed a question to the Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny (Customers and Partnerships), in the absence of the Chair, on his gratitude for the support to reinstate the Climate Change Strategy Working Group and asked for reassurance that the Working Group continued to operate as cross-party, independent, backbench led with Members free to determine their own terms of reference. Councillor N J Hunt undertook to convey this request to the Chair and a response would be provided.

39 VARIATIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

There were no changes to report.

The meeting ended at 8.56pm.

Chairman