

# 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, 11 October 2023

PRESENT: Councillor M J Burke – Chair.

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, 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, Dr M Pickering, B M Pitt, T D Sanderson, D J Shaw, S L Taylor, I P Taylor, 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 E R Butler, S J Criswell, D B Dew, C M Gleadow, J Neish, R A Slade and D Terry.

Prior to the start of the official business, the Chair began by welcoming Mrs Michelle Sacks the Council's newly appointed Chief Executive to her first meeting of the Council. She had been in post since 11th September 2023.

The Executive Leader then took the opportunity to extend on behalf of the Council her own welcome to the newly appointed Chief Executive and to publicly thank Mr Oliver Morley for his service as Interim Chief Executive during the intervening period. These sentiments were echoed by Councillor J A Gray on behalf of the Conservative Group.

## **28 THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

A 'Thought for the Day' was presented by Councillor L Davenport-Ray.

## **29 MINUTES**

Subject to the correction of the title of the Executive Councillor for Waste, Street Scene and Open Spaces to Leisure, Waste and Street Scene, the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 19th July 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## **30 MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

No declarations were received.

### **31 CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR'S ENGAGEMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair referred to the recent death of former District Councillor David Underwood who had served three years as a District Councillor for the Godmanchester and then the Godmanchester and Hemingford Abbots Ward from 2016 and 2019. During which time he served as a member of the Overview and Scrutiny, Licensing and Protection, Corporate Governance and Development Management Committees. Following a personal tribute from Councillor Conboy, Members then observed a moments silence in memory of the former Councillor.

The Chair then reminded the Council of the Development Management training which had been arranged for 30th October and 6th November 2023 for all town and parish councils. Members were urged to encourage those in their ward areas to attend. It was also reported that the Chair's Community Carol Concert would be taking place on Monday 18th December 2023 at 6pm to which all Members were welcome to attend.

The Council then noted those engagements attended by the Chair and Vice-Chair since the last meeting (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book).

### **32 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

The Chair reported that there had not been any public questions received by the deadline for consideration by the Council.

### **33 CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY**

The Chair welcomed Mr Rob Bridge, Chief Executive of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority who had been invited to talk about the Combined Authority Improvement Agenda.

With the assistance of a Power-point Presentation (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Mr Bridge introduced himself to the Council and outlined the background to his appointment as Chief Executive.

As part of his presentation the Council were reminded that the previous nine months had been a challenge for the Combined Authority. A Best Value Notice had been issued in January 2023 identifying a range of themes for improvement including Governance and Decision Making, Project Plans and Delivery, Procurement, Partnership Working and Culture, Capacity and Confidence. Highlights of the concerns which were raised in these areas were then reported to the Council.

Mr Bridge then went on to report on work which had been undertaken to address these concerns since May 2023. These included the recruitment of a new permanent Corporate Management Team who were seeking to drive change and embed new ways of working. Work was also ongoing to look at the core governance and related activities which needed to be in place as well as looking to the future and the deepening of devolution opportunities. The Authority was also working on the development of behaviours, values and people policies within the organisation which was now beginning to pay dividends. Whilst there

was still further engagement to be undertaken, positive change was now being recognised.

Mr Bridge then talked through each of the themes identified within the Improvement Notice in turn. In doing so, he highlighted the outcomes and improvements which had been delivered to date and those which were scheduled for delivery between October and January 2024 when the notice was expected to expire.

Finally, and in talking about the future aspirations for the organisation, Mr Bridge explained that these included a continuing focus on improving partnership working and building an organisational culture. Developing an organisation which was clear on direction, and which was ready for deeper and further devolution opportunities and one in which there was confidence and assurance at both a national and a regional level. It was hoped that the CPCA would come be seen as a trusted partner and ally to constituent councils and partners and thus demonstrate their important role within the complex local government environment within Cambs and Peterborough.

Arising from the presentation, Councillor S L Taylor enquired about the timescale for the commencement of the adult education project in St Neots and it was agreed that an answer would be provided outside of the meeting. In more general terms, reference was made to the Single Assurance Framework and the need to improve project delivery and the communication of timescales.

In response to questions regarding local government reorganisation and specifically whether he considered there to be too many layers of local government in Cambridgeshire, Mr Bridge explained that local government reorganisation was not a straightforward process and came with several challenges. As to whether it was better for local Council's to seek re-organisation themselves or to have it forced upon them, Mr Bridge explained that this would always be dependent upon the circumstances. Inevitably it may be easier if all local councils agreed, but securing agreement was more difficult than people realised.

Arising from a question as to his thoughts on the development of a second devolution deal, Mr Bridge explained that the Secretary of State had outlined his intention at the Local Government Authority conference in July to achieve further devolution by giving all mayoral combined authorities the same access to powers and devolution powers. Indications from Government suggested that they wished Authority areas to develop a singular framework to enable the subsequent selection of what is right for a particular area. Work was now starting to see what that might look like for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

In response to a request from Councillor T D Sanderson, Mr Bridge undertook to circulate a structure chart of key contacts at the CPCA and their contact details.

Councillor C H Tevlin expressed her disappointment that she did not feel adequately briefed by the CPCA on the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) and bus franchising and requested further information on the timeline and the plans to engage with Huntingdonshire going forward. In response to which, the Council had already been informed that the LTCP had not been

approved at the September Board meeting and there was further work now to be undertaken.

In terms of franchising and bus reforms, Members were advised that there had been no decision taken at this stage. An outline case was currently being put through an audit process to establish whether such a model makes sense. A process would then need to be undertaken to understand what could be delivered in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Mr Bridge undertook to take away the comments about the need to engage with wider constituent council members as part of this review. An update on discussions as part of the Network Review was also provided and Members noted that there 51 routes being reprocured, with 18 being reviewed.

In response to a question regarding the difficulties of reconciling the varying views and ambitions of all the towns and cities into a vision for Cambridgeshire and the areas where there might be some emerging agreement, the Council were advised that the vision for the region would build upon the visions and the corporate plans for each of the Constituent Authorities. However, there were some common threads which had already been identified around adult education, a single transport pot, business productivity and inward investment. Mr Bridge was confident that the Authority would be able to find some common themes with subsets underneath each one which recognise each area, something which Government was also keen to see. Discussions were also ongoing with the mayor about those areas which received little attention.

Referring to the fact that many members of the public did not understand the functions of the CPCA, Mr Bridge was asked to explain why the Combined Authority should matter to the average resident in Huntingdonshire. In so doing, he explained that residents should see from the CPCA improved transport, improved infrastructure, investment, the right skills opportunities etc. However, residents should not need to worry about which layer of government delivers services, they should just be seeing improved public services and infrastructure.

## **34 CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY - UPDATE**

With the assistance of a PowerPoint Presentation (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Executive Leader Councillor S J Conboy presented an update of the activities of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA).

In doing so, Members of the Council were advised to read the monthly highlight report which summarised the activities of the Combined Authority and was available on the CPCA website, alongside their online recordings. Attention was also drawn to the new members of the Board and the new Chair of the Business Board – Mr Al Kingsley.

The CPCA were currently going through the Budget setting process and would for the first time align with the new Corporate Plan and the MTFS.

Councillor Conboy was pleased to report that progress on the Improvement Plan was now green overall and reiterated the need for this to have improved sufficiently to access any new devolution deal.

The Council were advised that the new Single Assurance Framework comprised a set of systems and processes which had been designed to provide confidence that the Combined Authority had the right infrastructure to make sound decisions.

In addition, a review of the Constitution had also included matters such as procurement, access to information, the co-option of members and independent persons which was designed to improve decision making processes and clarity.

The Executive Leader then turned to the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan. Unfortunately, the Plan has not been agreed at Board level, which reflected the difficulties in Leaders agreeing collectively on some of the detail. Members were urged to watch the recording of the live stream to get further information if they required.

Turning to the issue of devolution, the Executive Leader explained that whilst it was known to be coming, all details currently remained speculative. However, having looked at the M10 group of which Cambridgeshire remained part, the Leader remained optimistic that the area might get some good things out of devolution that would be beneficial for delivery. Work needed to continue on meeting the improvements set out within the Improvement Plan and the CPCA remained committed to doing this. Inevitably it would involve politicians working together.

Councillor Conboy went on to report that following a recent allocation of responsibilities to all Leaders on the CPCA, she had been given responsibility for devolution, a role which she was excited to take forward, involving councillors in Huntingdonshire.

Finally, Councillor Conboy drew attention to the current committee and panel structure within the Combined Authority and those Members representing Huntingdonshire. She urged members to address concerns to Combined Authority Committee Members as appropriate.

Arising from the presentation, Councillor R J West expressed his disappointment that the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan had not been approved. In addressing the Council, he urged all leaders on the CPCA Board not to think purely about their individual districts when decision making but to look at the longer-term plan and the county as a whole. In response to which the Executive Leader explained that she was always mindful that leaders would have their own challenges and accountabilities to their respective Councils, but she hoped it would be possible to find a way forward.

With the assistance of a PowerPoint presentation (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillor M A Hassall provided an update on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In so doing, the Council were informed that Councillor Hassall and Councillor Neish had volunteered to be rapporteurs for Environment and Transport respectively. The Council were also advised of concerns raised regarding the timetabling of overview and scrutiny meetings, which were only 2 days prior to Board meetings. There was concern that this did not enable the committee to be as effective in informing the Board of comments and issues.

In terms of the Improvement Framework, Councillor Hassall's slides provided an update on some of the initiative's which were now in place, and which could be utilised by other District Councils, for example the risk framework.

The Council were also informed that the Overview and Scrutiny had received an update on E-Scooter safety at a recent meeting and Members were advised that that most casualties involving e-scooters were in fact e-scooter users, which had been a surprising statistic.

Finally, Councillor Corney reported that he had been unable to attend the last meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee and therefore did not have an update to present. Members were advised that the Sub-Committee dealing with the Code of Conduct hearing would be meeting next week.

### **35 QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET**

With reference to a report considered at the September meeting of the Corporate Governance Committee on Local Government Ombudsmen complaints, the Executive Councillor for Planning Councillor T D Sanderson was asked to provide clarification as to when the three complaints relating to the planning service had been first raised. In so doing, the Council were informed that these complaints dated back to August and December 2021 and that Planning Services would reflect upon the learning opportunities that these had identified.

With reference to the current County Council's current policy on kerbside weedkilling, Councillor T D Alban asked about the implications for the workload and routine of the District Council's Street cleaning operatives and equipment. In response, the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene S L Taylor explained that it was proving difficult to sweep amongst the weeds, however she undertook to provide a detailed response and circulate it to all Members. The Council were also reminded that the County Council's policy on kerbside weedkilling was still only a trial and was due to be considered at their Highways and Transport Committee in December.

Following a request from Councillor N J Hunt, the Executive Councillor for Corporate and Shared Services Councillor M A Hassall updated the Council on the recent engagement with parish councils and local environmental community groups on the implementation of the garden waste subscription service. Members were advised that four sessions had been held to-date, all of which had been well attended. Feedback had for the most part been positive, although there was a certain degree of unhappiness regarding the proposed charge. An online survey had also been put in place and would continue to gather views until 27th October 2023.

In response to a request for an update from Councillor J E Kerr on Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Governance and Section 106 monies, the Executive Councillor for Planning Councillor T D Sanderson reported that the Council had now gone out to tender for an external organisation to conduct a review into CIL governance. A timetable for which would be sent out to all Members shortly. Councillor Sanderson was also pleased to report that funding had also become available for several Section 106 projects.

Following a request from Councillor M L Beutell, the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene, Councillor S L Taylor updated the Council on the status of Civic Parking Enforcement within the District. As part of which the Council were advised that whilst running to budget, the implementation date had been reviewed by the County Council based upon available resources and was expected to be October 2024. The Agency Agreement had not yet been signed.

In response to a request by Councillor S Cawley as to whether Town and Parish Councils could be routinely informed of forthcoming Licensing applications within their wards, the Council were informed that such arrangements had now been put in place. The Executive Councillor for Customer Services, Councillor S Ferguson indicated his support for this suggestion and the need to make sure that this continued going forward.

With reference to the written question that he had submitted under 9.5 of the Council's Procedure rules, Councillor A Jennings expressed his disappointment that a response had not been made available prior to the meeting. Arising from which, the Chair explained that the question had been received and a list of the non-statutory services delivered by the Council would be circulated to all Members in response.

Following a request from Councillor A Jennings, the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene, Councillor S L Taylor updated the Council on the status on the delivery of cycling / pathway improvements in the Riverside Park in St Neots. In doing so, she reported that Planning Permission had been received in April and the Council were currently engaged within the procurement process. However, construction would be weather dependent because of the site's location within the flood plain.

Councillor R Martin queried why the Shared Services Annual Report was no longer submitted through the democratic process, given the significance of the Council's expenditure in this area. Arising from which, It was agreed that further consideration would be given to this matter.

Following a request from Councillor D Shaw for an update on the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park planning application and specifically the car park element which he hoped would alleviate some of the car parking issues within his ward, the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene, Councillor S L Taylor provided an update for the Council. Members were informed that it was currently anticipated that application would be considered in November and subject to approval the tender process to appoint a contractor could be finalised by February 2024. Building works were expected to take place during 2024, with final landscaping and planting in 2025.

In response to a question from Councillor S J Corney, the Executive Councillor for Corporate and Shared Services, Councillor M A Hassall reported that at this stage it was envisaged than an update on the implementation on the garden waste subscription service would be provided to O&S in November, with a more formal report in December. He was confident that this would provide sufficient time to review and make any changes that might arise from the Overview and Scrutiny process.

Councillor R J West remarked on the success of the District Council in receiving a Green Flag Award for Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Paxton Pitts Nature Reserve and Priory Park for the sixth and seventh years in a row respectively. In so doing, he requested that the Council's appreciation be passed on to the Council's staff for their hard work and dedication in helping to resecure that award.

The Executive Leader, Councillor S J Conboy was asked by the Leader of the Opposition whether she felt that the agendas of the Council and the various committees, reflected the activities of the Council. In response to which, Councillor Conboy explained that whilst the administration would continue to look at what to bring forward, she welcomed ideas from members of all political groups particularly through the overview and scrutiny process. She was disappointed that none of these had been forthcoming at the meeting she attended the other evening.

In responding, Councillor J A Gray suggested that opposition members had raised several issues for consideration, however these had been slow in coming through the overview and scrutiny process. He urged the Executive Leader to encourage a greater reflection of the work that was being undertaken within the democratic process.

With regard to the comments which had been made by the Leader of the Opposition on the limited number of items appearing on agendas for Development Management Committee agendas, the Executive Councillor for Planning reminded the Council that the business for determination was dependent on a number of factors including the views of the Parish Councils and the speed of development. It was anticipated that there would be some very full agendas over the course of the next few meetings.

Councillor P Kadewere congratulated the Council on the success of its Health and Inequalities project which had improved the lives of vulnerable residents across District, including the Huntingdon North Ward. Arising from his question with regards to the future of the programme, the Executive Councillor for Community and Health, Councillor B Pitt explained that the criteria for the 2023/24 programme was slightly narrower with a focus on cardiovascular disease and frailty for eligible projects. He also took the opportunity to reiterate that he understood the difficulties in obtaining grants in the first instance, but that it was difficult to keep ongoing funding once this was started up.

With reference to the government's announcement regarding an updated timetable for the introduction of new biodiversity net gain legislation for planning, Councillor C H Tevlin questioned the impact that this might have on nature and diversity in Huntingdonshire. In response, the Executive Councillor for Climate and Environment explained that the delay in implementation meant that the legislation would now only apply to major developments from January and from small sites in April 2024. She expressed her concerns regarding this delay and also drew attention to the publication of the UK 2023 State of Nature report.

Finally, in drawing questions to a close and in response to a question from Councillor N Wells, the Executive Councillor for Climate and Environment, Councillor L Davenport-Ray provided an opinion on the impact that the



Government's decision to delay the requirement for builders to stop installing gas boilers in new homes in Huntingdonshire.

## **36 OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS**

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council held on 19th July 2023 is appended in the Minute Book and Members were advised that any issues or questions could be raised in relation to these meetings.

Pursuant to Minute No.35, Councillor T D Alban reported that several issues had been raised as potential agenda items at the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities & Partnership) which had received broad support from all political groups. Councillor J E Kerr also confirmed in her role as Chair, that this Panel was always open to look at ideas and that changes had recently been made to the structure of the work programme so that Members could more clearly see the work which was being undertaken and which was coming forward for consideration.

With reference to Corporate Governance Committee's recent discussions on the Risk Management Strategy, Councillor P Hodgson-Jones outlined several concerns he had with the proposed document. In response to his question as to whether the Leadership would put in place a structure which has a clear focus on risk management, that could be used to support and be consistent across the Council and which focused on key risks, the Executive Leader explained that the administration was keen to undertake this. She was supported by the Executive Councillor for Corporate Services who indicated that this was an area for improvement, and he would be happy to discuss the matter further outside of the meeting.

At this point of the meeting Councillor S Cawley sought and received clarification on a point of order. The Chair confirmed that this agenda item provided an opportunity for Members of the Council to raise issues and ask questions, they were not restricted to questions only.

## **37 VARIATIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS**

There were no changes to report.

The meeting ended at 9.00pm.

Chair.