

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, 13 December 2023

PRESENT: Councillor M J Burke – Chair.

Councillors B S Banks, M L Beuttell, A Blackwell, E R Butler, S Bywater, S Cawley, J Clarke, S J Conboy, S J Criswell, L Davenport-Ray, S W Ferguson, I D Gardener, C M Gleadow, J A Gray, K P Gulson, J E Harvey, 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, B M Pitt, T D Sanderson, D J Shaw, R A Slade, S L Taylor, I P Taylor, 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, R J Brereton, S J Corney, A E Costello, D B Dew, M A Hassall and J E Kerr.

38 THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

A 'Thought for the Day' was presented by Ms Samantha Thomas from the Memory Lane Singing Club.

39 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 11th October 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

40 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors R Martin and S Bywater declared non-registerable interests under Minute No. 23/46 as local Ward Members.

41 CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR'S ENGAGEMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair referred to the recent death of former District Council Chairman John Rignall who had served as District Councillor for Bury for 22 years from 1982 until 2004. During which time he served as a long-standing member of both the Environmental Services and the Planning Committee, both of which he had Chaired for a time. He was later appointed Vice-Chairman of the Council in 1994 before being elected Chairman in 1996. Following tributes from Councillors J A

Gray and T D Sanderson, Members then observed a moments silence in memory of the former Councillor.

The Chair then went on to report that a response had recently been received from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State to the Council's letter requesting further work to address issues relating to the abuse and intimidation of elected members. A copy of which had been circulated to all Members.

Subject to two corrections, 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).

Finally, the Chair reminded the Council of the details of his Community Carol Concert which would be taking place on Monday 18 December 2023 at 6pm at St Mary's Church Huntingdon to which all Members were welcome to attend.

42 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.

43 QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

Following a request for further information from Councillor S Bywater regarding any contingency plans that the Council had established for the storage of electric vehicles, the Executive Leader undertook to circulate a written response to all members after the meeting. Details of any specific training or other risk mitigation strategies for high voltage handling were also requested.

With reference to the resident concerns regarding the recent felling of willow trees in Coneygear Park in Eynesbury, Councillor A Jennings sought clarification from the Executive Councillor for Climate and the Environment Councillor L Davenport-Ray as to the permissions which had been granted and how this had been monitored. In response to which, Councillor L Davenport-Ray undertook to establish further details and respond in writing.

Following a request for an update from Councillor M L Beuttell as to the reasons for the delay for the planning application at Hinchbrooke Park, the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene Councillor S L Taylor explained that the timescale for delay was likely to be in the region of a year. Members were informed that the application would need to comply with biodiversity net gain planning legislation and the application would be re-presented with this information as soon as possible. An update would be provided to Overview and Scrutiny in March 2024 and further information on the cost of the delay and the cost of the consultants would be provided directly to Councillor Beuttell in writing.

In response to a question from Councillor C Gleadow regarding the uptake for the Early Bird Offer for Green Bins, the Executive Leader reported that the latest figures suggested that since the launch of the initiative on 5th December 2023, a total of 3,436 households had signed up thus far which represented 4% of households within Huntingdonshire.

In response to comments made by Councillor D J Shaw regarding delays to planning applications relating to tree works, the Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor T D Sanderson explained that there although there had been an increase in applications in recent weeks, the staffing issues had now resolved and the backlog was starting to clear.

With reference to the development at the Loves Farm in St Neots, Councillor M Pickering sought an assurance from the Executive Councillor for Planning that the District Council were committed to learning lessons from previous developments and to ensuring that the planning for new developments included a financially sustainable model for the maintenance of public spaces. In response to which, the Executive Councillor for Planning Councillor T D Sanderson explained that whilst he could not comment upon specific planning applications which had already been approved, he did understand the problems regarding commuted sums where developments were handed over. He undertook to investigate the matter regarding Loves Farm further and respond to Councillor Pickering directly in writing as soon as possible.

With reference to the Workforce report which was considered at the November meeting of the Employment Committee, Councillor S Cawley drew attention to the underspend on employee pay costs and the overspend on contractor and agency staff which had result in an overall net over spend of £285,500. Clarification was requested as to which of the services were causing this overspend and what plans were in place to bring these budgets back on track. Having agreed to provide a detailed response in writing, the Executive Leader Councillor S Conboy explained that inevitably there would always be times when consultants would be required within an organisation however, she also took the opportunity to draw Members attention to the development of the Workforce Strategy which was being developed to look at how the Council attracts new employees and rewards and retains existing employees within the organisation.

In response to a request for from Councillor J Neish, the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene Councillor S L Taylor acknowledged that there would be a delay to the implementation of Civil Parking Enforcement within the District, due to factors beyond the Council's control. A comprehensive report was scheduled to be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) Panel in January 2024. Having reiterated her continuing support for the initiative, Councillor Taylor confirmed that as far as she was aware it was still running to budget and was unable to comment on South Cambridgeshire being ahead of Huntingdonshire within the programme.

In response to a request for an update on District Council support to Community Hubs and Health Inequalities work, the Executive Councillor for Community, and Health, Councillor B Pitt reminded the Council that Huntingdonshire had adopted a different approach to the delivery of Warm Hubs to other parts of the County. This had enabled funding from the Integrated Care Scheme to be utilised for other schemes. Going forward, the Council would continue to support Community Hubs through the Community Chest Grants scheme and work was ongoing to develop a Community Spaces Handbook, to revamp the We Are Huntingdonshire website as a source of support to attendees and to offer Making Every Contact Count training to attendees.

44 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2024/25

With the assistance of a report by the Revenues and Benefits Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Executive Councillor for Customer Services, Councillor S Ferguson outlined a proposal to introduce a new income-banded Council Tax Support Scheme for working age applications.

By way of introduction, Councillor Ferguson explained that:

- ❖ Council Tax Benefit is a means tested benefit which reduces the amount of Council Tax payable by residents on the very lowest incomes.
- ❖ Although Pensioners on low incomes could currently receive a 100% discount in their Council Tax payments, the current scheme for working aged people in Huntingdonshire was less generous and had not been updated in over 10 years.
- ❖ With the benefit of a detailed example, Council was informed that Huntingdonshire currently had the least generous approach to Council Tax Support across the County, with working aged people on the same levels of benefits entitled to different levels of discounts depending upon the District in which they live.
- ❖ Any fluctuations in income, currently trigger a change in the Council Tax support which is offered which reduces the ability of Huntingdonshire recipients to budget and financially plan and leads to the District Council Benefits team processing over 32,000 changes in Council Tax support per year.
- ❖ The proposal being presented was to adopt a new banding approach to Council Tax Support which would allow the most economically disadvantaged residents to receive up to a 100% reduction in their Council Tax Bill and would provide for more financial security by offering a fixed amount of support.
- ❖ It was estimated that 96% of current recipients would receive either the same or additional support and it was intended to provide an additional hardship fund to mitigate the impact in the first year for those who were expected to receive a reduced level of assistance.
- ❖ 46% of all Families on Universal Credit are in Poverty and for these people, a change in Council Tax Support will make a huge difference.
- ❖ The cost to the Council would be the lost collection of Council Tax in the region of £1M - £70,000 to the District Council and £700,000 to the County Council. However, given the difficulties in collecting these monies, this could be seen as an investment in keeping people out of crisis, which is an order of magnitude less expensive than a rescue from crisis.

In responding to a question from Councillor K Gulson, the Assistant Deputy Leader explained that the Administration would be implementing the proposal regardless of the introduction of the Green Bin subscription charge to fulfil the Corporate Aim of helping people in crisis. The Executive Councillor for Customer Services also explained that that eligible recipients would benefit to a greater extent financially from the scheme than they would from having to pay for a green bin.

Councillor N J Hunt outlined his support for the proposals which would make a life changing difference to vulnerable residents in his ward and across Huntingdonshire District and urged other Members to offer their support. In doing

so, he also drew attention to the 75% approval rate within the public consultation and urged all Members to offer their support.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor S Cawley as to whether any response had been received from Cambridgeshire County Council regarding the impact on the Council Tax collection rates, the Executive Councillor explained that although they had not responded during the consultation, subsequent correspondence has indicated that whilst not happy to be losing funding it did meet with their corporate objectives, so they had not raised any objections. In addition, a precedent had already been set in Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire.

With reference to the discussions which had taken place at Overview and Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnerships), Councillor Cawley also sought clarification on the impact on Parish Councils. In response to which, the Executive Councillor for Customer Services explained that the Council Tax Base for Huntingdonshire was currently 65,795 Band D Households. The Council Tax Support Scheme being suggested would result in a reduction of 470 Band D equivalent properties, which would be 0.7% in percentage terms. On which basis the impact will be incalculable. The Deputy Executive Leader, Councillor T D Sanderson took the opportunity to remind Members that all Town, Parishes and Precepting Authorities were consulted on the proposals and the draft scheme.

Councillor D Mickelburgh also outlined her support for the proposals, given the ongoing difficulties being experienced due to the cost-of-living crisis. She also referred to a recent survey by the Mental Health Foundation in which 61% of adults had expressed concern about paying their household bills.

In response to a question from Councillor S A Howell as to whether the proposals would be available in addition to other available discounts, i.e. Single Persons Discount, the Executive Councillor undertook to liaise with the Revenues and Benefits Team and report back to her directly.

Although not raising any objections to the proposals, Councillor J A Gray outlined his objection to the process given that he did not recall its inclusion within the budget at the beginning of the year. Clarification was sought and provided from the Chief Executive who explained that in terms of implementation it was a matter for next year's budget, hence the decision would fall into the budget preparations for 2024/25.

Councillor Gray went on to some express reservations regarding the explanation provided by the Executive Councillor with regards to levying parish and town precepts arising from the implementation of these proposals. He also suggested that a number of Town and Parish Councils were unclear with regards to the operation of the scheme.

The Executive Councillor for Community and Health, Councillor B Pitt welcomed the widespread support for the Policy which had been demonstrated across the Council Chamber. He reiterated that in his own Portfolio, work was ongoing to offer support to those most in need and these objectives would be embedded into the new Corporate Plan as it emerged.

In drawing the debate to a close, the Executive Councillor for Customer Services paid tribute by name to the individuals who had been involved within the project,

one which he thought at the start had been near impossible in the time available and in advance of the 2024/25 Budget.

Councillor Wakeford also expressed his own pride that the Council was seeking to change the existing cap for working age claimants. The Cross-Party support for doing so reflected positively upon the Council and would have a significant impact on those who it effects.

Whereupon it was moved by Councillor S Ferguson, duly seconded by Councillor S Wakeford and

RESOLVED

that the introduction of a new income-banded Council Tax Support Scheme for working age applications be approved with effect from 1st April 2024.

45 REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

With the aid of a report prepared by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Executive Councillor for Corporate and Shared Services presented a draft Risk Management Strategy for approval.

By way of introduction and having explained why Risk Management was important, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources explained that the draft document sought to address three key questions:

- ❖ How do we improve risk management within the existing culture of the council?
- ❖ What sort of risk culture should we be aspiring to enable us to be more successful?
- ❖ How do we drive change to the existing culture to make risk management more relevant and effective and what does this change involve?

He went on to explain that:

- ❖ The Risk Management Strategy was a critical part of the Council's Governance arrangements which sought to define the Council's tolerance to risk and managing outcomes and would sit alongside the Code of Governance and Code of Finance.
- ❖ The draft document was based on the Orange Book: Management of Risk – Principles and Concepts published by Central Government.
- ❖ The Orange Book aligns with the Council's goals as it encourages a positive risk management culture where the discipline is integral to decision making and integrated into overall management processes.
- ❖ It also recommends a structured and systematic approach to risk management, including identifying assessing and managing risks. It emphasises the importance of clearly defined ownership and accountability all levels within the organisation.

- ❖ A programme of activities to embed the new Strategy with the organisation was planned to commence in line with best practice and will incorporate staff at all levels.

In opening the debate, Councillor P Hodgson-Jones expressed his concern that the draft Strategy did not go far enough in creating a fully comprehensive risk management framework for the Council. He commented specifically with regards to the high number of risks contained within the Risk Framework and the absence of any distinction between those which were strategic and operational, comments which had been previously made at the Corporate Governance Committee. He also expressed his disappointment that there had been no changes to the report through its progression through the Committee cycle to Council and at the absence of any clearly defined role for the Corporate Governance Committee. He concluded his remarks by suggesting that there was further work to be done on the development of a consistent risk management structure and suggested that this should be led by the Corporate Governance Committee going forward.

In response to which, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources explained that although he was not the Portfolio Holder, he could not disagree with the points which had been made. With regards to the absence of any distinction between operational and strategic risks within the Risk Register it was explained that this document predated elements of the new Strategy and was being modified as a result. Although not in a position to make assurances, he was confident that the Chief Executive would make sure that Councillor Hodgson-Jones' comments were taken on board and reiterated that expertise was welcome from all sides of the Chamber.

In commenting on the appetite to risk which had been taken within the draft Strategy, Councillor S Cawley remarked upon the blanket approach which appeared to have been taken. It was suggested that as part of the ongoing work consideration ought to be given to working out where that appetite ought to sit.

On behalf of Councillor M A Hassall the Executive Councillor for Corporate and Shared Services, Councillor S Wakeford reported that this was not a document to be set in stone and that working to develop and improve risk management would continue to remain a priority for his portfolio. He was confident that when the next iteration was prepared, the comments from around the Chamber would be reflected upon.

Having acknowledged the responsibility of the Council for monitoring risk, Councillor A Jennings queried whether there was any way to make the Risk Register more user friendly for backbench councillors, to ensure they could obtain best value from the document.

Finally, and having noted the apparent agreement to many of the comments which had been made during the meeting from officers and the Administration, Councillor J A Gray sought assurances that actions would be taken to take these forwards. In response to which the Chief Executive explained that it had been agreed at the Corporate Governance Committee that the development of the Risk Register was an evolutionary process and would continue to develop and improve.

Whereupon, it was moved by Councillor B Mickleburgh, duly seconded by Councillor Sanderson and

RESOLVED

that the Risk Management Strategy as attached to the report now submitted at Appendix A be approved.

46 SAWTRY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Having regard to a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the referendum of the Sawtry Village Neighbourhood Plan held on 9th November 2023, the Executive Councillor for Planning acquainted Members with the results of the referendum with 88.4% voting in favour of supporting the Neighbourhood Plan. As this exceeded the required threshold of 50% of votes cast the Council was required to formally 'make' the Sawtry Village Neighbourhood Plan 2022-2036.

In introducing the report, Councillor T D Sanderson paid tribute to the work undertaken by Sawtry Parish Council in their preparation of the Plan, and to local District Councillors S Bywater and R Martin for their engagement within the process.

In opening the debate and having remarked upon the long process involved within the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans, local Members Councillors S Bywater and R Martin outlined their support for the Plan and thanked those who had been involved. Members were advised that the Plan was supported by a huge number of Sawtry residents and attention was drawn to the success of efforts which had been made to gather the views of young people within the village in the Plan process.

Having welcomed the preparation of the Plan and having acknowledged her own involvement in the early stages, the Executive Leader reiterated that whilst it may be a long process, she hope the continued approval of Plans such as Sawtry would provide confidence to other towns and parishes that it was a journey worth taking.

Whereupon and it having been duly proposed and seconded it was

RESOLVED

that the Sawtry Village Neighbourhood Plan 2022-2036 as attached at Appendix 1 to the report now submitted be adopted to become part of the Statutory Development Plan for Huntingdonshire with immediate effect.

47 TREASURY MANAGEMENT SIX MONTH PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report by the Council's Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (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 2023.

By way of background, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources reminded the Council that the 2023/24 Treasury Management Strategy was approved on the 22nd February 2023. He explained that Treasury Management was the management of the local authority's borrowing, investments and cash flows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities and the pursuit of optimum performance.

Members were then acquainted with the detail of each of the Statements and Appendices within the Treasury Management 6 Month Review report in turn. These included the Council's Balance Sheet Summary, the Borrowing and Investment Summary, the Council's Loan Borrowing Schedule, the Treasury Investment Position and details of the Spread of the Council's investments.

The Executive Councillor reported that discussions had previously taken place regarding the consideration of Environmental, Social and Governance factors in the investment decision making process. However, the ESG market has been rather inconsistent and as a result the Council has adopted the UN Principles for Responsible Investments to provide possible actions for incorporating ESG issues into investment practices.

In terms of the Commercial Property fund, the Executive Councillor reported that his had been suffering due to the downturn in the market since Covid. However, some of the downward movement is covered by the increase in the interest rate return on the Council's cash balances. It was intended that a broader briefing on this area would be provided to Overview and Scrutiny when Treasury Management was next due to report.

Finally, the Executive Councillor reported that plans to draft a new Commercial Investment Strategy have been postponed until the new financial year as a result of fluctuations in interest rates and changes in market conditions during the summer period.

Following a request for further clarification on the position with the preparation of a new Commercial Investment Strategy from Councillor J A Gray, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources explained that it was hoped to commission this work in April 2024 when the Bank of England had indicated their expectations that inflation would start to steady and interest rates would be more consistent. In response to which, Councillor Gray encouraged the administration to start work on reviewing the Strategy as soon as possible to ensure that the District Council were best looking after the assets and estate it had built up over the previous fifty years.

In response to a request for clarification from Councillor P Hodgson Jones regarding the way long term borrowing is being applied to capital assets and how short-term investment is driven by cash reserves, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources provided an explanation of the operation of Public Works Boards Loans secured for the Commercial Investment Strategy. With regards to short-term investment within the Treasury Management Strategy, the Executive Councillor explained that the Council's cash reserves were as such that and with interest rates being at a higher level than they have for some time the need for short-term borrowing was not currently required.

48 CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY - UPDATE

In conjunction with the decision summaries of the recent meetings of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and a PowerPoint Presentation (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book), the Executive Leader Councillor S J Conboy presented an update on the activities of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA).

As part of the presentation, Councillor Conboy reported that:

- ◆ Councillor Farooq had been appointed to the Board as the new Leader of Peterborough City Council.
- ◆ The Board had discussed the outcome of the Code of Conduct Investigation into the Mayor of the CPCA who had had been found to be found in breach of two parts of the Code. Details of the sanctions imposed were outlined to the Council, with recommendations forming part of the CPCA Improvement Plan.
- ◆ Progress on the Improvement Plan was now green, and the Board had been contacted by the Independent Improvement Board ahead of their discussions on the outcome of the Code of Conduct investigation to remind all leaders of their expectations relating to conduct and working together for the greater good.
- ◆ A Single Assurance Framework had now been approved by Government, as required by the Best Value Improvement Notice together with revisions to the Constitution and a new Scheme of Delegation.
- ◆ Work would be undertaken to develop a 20–30-year vision for the Authority, to unite and benefit all Constituent Partners.
- ◆ Consultation was due to start on the Combined Authority Budget for 2024/25, outlining a potential significant increase to the Mayoral precept to fund reduced bus fares for the under 25s. Further details were available on the Combined Authority Website.
- ◆ The Local Transport and Connectivity Plan had now been approved. All Members were encouraged to review the approved document, specifically the sections relating to Huntingdonshire. Councillor Wakeford and Davenport Ray continued to advocate for additional services within Huntingdonshire and specifically the rural communities.
- ◆ That the needs of those leaving care was now being recognised as a protected characteristic, which the Mayor of the Combined Authority was now recognising within all CPCA policies.

The Executive Leader then moved upon to talk about the Devolution Technical Paper of Level 4 Devolution Framework which formed part of the Autumn Statement. The Council were informed that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority would not be able to access this until the Best Value Improvement Notice had expired.

With the assistance of a PowerPoint slide (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Executive Leader drew attention to what was on offer to eligible authorities which fell into eight categories – Finance, Skills and Employment, Housing and Land, Transport, Net Zero, Climate Change and Natural Capital, Innovation, Trade and Investment, Culture and Tourism and Health Services.

Having talked through each in turn, the Executive Leader reiterated that any future devolution deals provided a real challenge and opportunity for the District, however she emphasised the importance of this being a cross party piece of work both at District and CPCA Board level to benefit the residents of Huntingdonshire and the Combined Authority area as a whole.

In responding to a question from Councillor J Neish regarding the bus improvements which had been obtained from the increase in last year's precept, the Executive Leader explained she would need to defer to colleagues outside of the meeting for the specific detail. However, it had proved possible to save a number of at-risk services, the District had benefited from demand responsive services and the Authority have engaged for the first time in collective conversations with authorities and a range of bus operators on a regular basis. However, she acknowledged that the real challenge facing the Authority was the need to commission services which could not be undertaken with an increase of the precept at that level.

In responding to Councillor Neish's further comments relating to the cumulative impact of potential increases from a number of precepting authorities, the Executive Leader explained that indications were starting to emerge as to the budgetary discussions of all precepting authorities within the District. It was an almost impossible challenge facing all authorities to increasingly deliver services with less available resources.

At the suggestion of Councillor S Wakeford, the Executive Leader encouraged all Members within the Chamber to respond to the Mayor's consultation on the Authority's planned activities and spending plans. Reference was also made to the current consultation - The Road to Better Buses, which provided a mechanism and opportunity for Members to suggest potential future bus routes for consideration as part of the use of the Mayoral precept.

In response to comments from Councillor R J West regarding the outcomes achieved by the Combined Authority for Huntingdonshire residents, the Executive Leader explained that work was needed to develop a list of what Huntingdonshire wants but it was a difficult challenge to articulate the District's ask. The Council were reminded that Huntingdonshire were benefiting from work around the market towns and other work with the District. However, it was her future aspiration to be able to ask members what they had seen across the region that benefits their communities – whether it be economic growth, transport, skills or employment etc. She was pleased to report that Board Members were increasingly beginning to realise that they could achieve more collectively than individually.

With reference to bus services in the rural areas and as a councillor in one of these areas, Councillor Gardener expressed some disappointment that he had heard very little regarding work which was ongoing in these areas. In response to which, the Executive Leader explained that Bus Working Groups had been set up comprising representatives from all political groups and that it was anticipated that these would be a mechanism for all Members to bring forward issues for attention. She also encouraged all Members to feed any individual issues through either herself or other members of the Combined Authority without waiting for invitation. Members were also encouraged to read and digest the

approved Local Transport and Connectivity Plan which detailed lots of opportunity for engagement within the rural areas.

Councillor J A Gray commented on the Code of Conduct Investigation into the Mayor of the Combined Authority and the findings that the Mayor was found to have breached the Code regarding both Civility and Disrepute. In doing so he made specific reference to some of the investigator's findings and the sanctions imposed.

Councillor Gray then went on to seek clarification from the Executive Leader as to whether she would be supporting the 200% increase being proposed in the Mayoral precept. In response to which, the Executive Leader explained that she would need to take into consideration the results of the public consultation, together with the views of members within the Chamber who have not yet had an opportunity to discuss the matter. Whilst she did wish to see changes in public bus services, she could not see an alternative mechanism for funding this. Councillor S J Conboy went on to encourage all Group Leaders to respond to the consultation on behalf of their groups, alongside all members of the public.

With reference to the previous comments regarding bus services in rural communities, Councillor Ferguson referred to his own difficult experiences trying to justify increases in precepts in those parishes that did receive any bus services. Whilst rural bus services were not commercially viable and had to be subsidised there needed to be some quid pro quo. Councillor Ferguson went on to outline his support for the precept provided that it started to deliver services for the communities that councillors represent.

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

In so doing, Members were informed that the Committee were being supported by officers in preparation for their scrutiny of the proposed CPCA budget for 2024/25. As part of their workload, the Committee had been undertaking a deep dive into issues relating to Confidence, Culture and Capacity within the organisation and it was reported that whilst the situation is now more positive, staffing was still fragile mainly due to high levels of previous staff turnover.

Councillor Neish reported on the Committee's discussions regarding the Bus Strategy and the difficulties when buses were not being effectively utilised and which had a high cost per journey. Reference was also made to the ongoing Ting Pilot and in response to which, Councillor S Wakeford reported that the Combined Authority had now been encouraged to improve the Pilot to focus specifically on journeys for rural residents not covered by scheduled bus services.

With reference to the report at the last meeting regarding the appointment of rapporteurs and in response to a question as to whether any feedback had been received from other committees, Councillor Neish reminded the Council that he was the rapporteur for transport and infrastructure and outlined his intention to gather feedback now that he had returned from his trip away.

Due to the absence of Councillor S Corney at short notice, Councillor M L Beuttell reported that she was unable to provide a report. Members were encouraged to read the full papers on the Combined Authority website.

Finally, in drawing this item to a close, the Chair reported that going forward an electronic link to decision summaries would be provided as opposed to the full decision summary document.

49 OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council held on 11th October 2023 is appended in the Minute Book and Members were advised that any issues or questions could be raised in relation to these meetings.

On behalf of Councillor T Alban, Councillor J A Gray outlined his disappointment regarding the brevity of Agenda items at the recent meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Community and Partnerships) and went on to question when members could expect to see an improvement in the quality of Overview and Scrutiny Agendas and work programmes. In responding to the comments which had been made, the Vice-Chair of the Panel Councillor N J Hunt reported on the reasons for the reduced number of Agenda items at the December meeting and provided details of items on the work programme for forthcoming meetings. These included the carbon impact of Council buildings, alternative land management, the Great Fen Project and the Electronic Vehicle Charging project. He reiterated that both he and the Chair were open to add issues to the work programme provided that the District Council was able to effectively take action, enable or influence these matters. The Chief Executive also provided an assurance that Overview and Scrutiny continued to provide a valuable function to the Council and a different approach would be evident in the New Year.

With reference to the recent discussion at their November meeting on the effectiveness of the Corporate Governance Committee, Councillor P Hodgson Jones reiterated the importance of corporate governance to the reputation and effectiveness of the Council. He suggested that this might mean that not only does consideration need to be given to improvements to the Corporate Governance Committee but consideration might also need to be given to the way the whole Council operates which might have implications for the Council Constitution including the structure and operation of committees.

50 VARIATIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

On the recommendation of Councillor J A Gray, it was

RESOLVED

that Councillor G Welton be appointed to the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) Panel in place of Councillor S Cawley.

that Councillor S Cawley be appointed to the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) Panel in place of Councillor G Welton.

The meeting ended at 21.38pm.

Chair.