

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Extraordinary Meeting of the CABINET held in the CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER/STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 19 March 2025

PRESENT: Councillor S J Conboy – Chair.

Councillors L Davenport-Ray, S W Ferguson, J E Harvey, S A Howell, B A Mickelburgh, T D Sanderson, S L Taylor and S Wakeford.

75 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

Advice however was sought from the Monitoring Officer with regards to Councillors S Ferguson and T D Sanderson who were both County Council Members. A debate on Local Government Reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough had already been had at Cambridgeshire County Council on 18th March 2025 and clarity was sought on predetermination. The advice received was that if both were able to maintain an open mind then they were able to contribute to the Cabinet's discussions. Councillors S Ferguson and T D Sanderson confirmed they were able to remain open minded and remained in the room for discussion and deliberation on this item.

76 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH

A report by the Chief Executive was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) providing Members with background information regarding the extensive reforms to the local government framework across England set out in the White Paper on English Devolution published on 16th December 2024. The report intended to provide Members with an update on progress with Local Government Reorganisation for the Peterborough and Cambridgeshire area and to consider the content of a proposed letter for submission to the Government by 21st March 2025 which had been drafted in conjunction with other authorities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough following discussions between the Councils Leaders and Chief Executives.

By way of introduction, the Executive Leader reported that this would be an opportunity for Cabinet Members to reflect back on the debate which had just been held at the Extraordinary Meeting of the Council prior to taking a decision on the matter.

The Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Waste and Street Scene commented that the concerns which had been raised at the Extraordinary Council meeting echoed her own concerns and that ultimately any decision to be made should be right for the District's residents. Whilst little time had been given for the letter to be produced, it was imperative that discussions continue over the next 7-8

months with the other Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Leaders and Chief Executive Officers.

The Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources then took the opportunity to state that the District were not in the devolution priority programme and that any elements of angst in this respect should be set aside. He then went on to express his view that the letter intended to portray to the Government that Huntingdonshire wished to be in charge of its own destiny and to be mindful that other authorities were in different positions and therefore responding as appropriate to the Government. The example referred to at the meeting was Lincolnshire. Finally, he made comment upon the risk associated with unitary authorities which would see the dilution of local representation within communities and that efforts should be made over the next few months to prevent that from happening.

In concurring with the comments which had already been made, the Executive Councillor for Planning highlighted the potential risk of being too remote if the unitary authority covered a large area. He then expressed his contentment with the content of the proposed letter.

Having reflected upon the debate at the Extraordinary Meeting of Council, the Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration and Housing expressed his view that a full and helpful discussion had been held. Points which had been raised at that meeting related to the complexities around reorganisation, challenges to the Government's approach which were outside of the Council's control, the differences in local responses across the country and recognition that the proposed approach across the Peterborough and Cambridgeshire area was deemed appropriate for Huntingdonshire. He then went on to commend the Executive Leader for her diligent work on briefing all cross-party groups on the proposals as they developed and for her personal efforts in working with all Leaders across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance echoed these views and thanked the Executive Leader for her hard work and efforts to date.

The Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance then commented upon the contradictions made at the Extraordinary Meeting of the Council regarding the pace of the proposals. Views had been expressed that matters were either moving too fast or that the Council should be at the forefront of the proposals. He also concurred with the comments already made in respect of the potential loss of local representation in unitary authorities but was hopeful that innovative solutions would emerge over the coming months once the relevant data/evidence was available. He then expressed his personal view to support the content of the proposed letter.

The Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce reported that the debate at the Extraordinary Meeting of Council reflected her own concerns which demonstrated that the Council was moving in the right direction. She did however comment that there would be some merit in slowing down the momentum for the reorganisation but nevertheless accepted the current position.

Other points that were raised by Executive Members included a suggestion to communicate and engage with local residents on the proposals as they developed, concerns around a potential lack of diversity in the unitary authority

and the unique position Huntingdonshire and all other Cambridgeshire authorities found itself in with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

The Executive Leader stated that she had been impressed by how much thought had gone into the proposals given the short timescales given. This included the high levels of engagement and understanding of the numerous complexities surrounding the proposals. Having expressed her wish to continue engaging with all Members and in acknowledging the challenge which remained to find the best solution for Huntingdonshire, the Executive Leader then placed on record her thanks to Officers for their forbearance.

Whereupon, the Cabinet unanimously

RESOLVED

- a) to consider the background to the English Devolution White Paper and its implications for residents of the District and Huntingdonshire District Council; and
- b) to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Leader of the Council, to finalise the proposed letter to Government along with other Council Leaders, as the interim submission, to indicate our commitment to work towards achieving a consensus proposal by November 2025. It should be noted, it is the Executive Leader of the Council who will sign this letter.

The meeting concluded at 9:32pm.

Chair