

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER / STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 16 July 2025.

PRESENT: Councillor R A Slade – Chair.

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

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors R J Brereton, L Davenport-Ray, C H Tevlin and N Wells.

12. THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Reverend Nicholas Witham, Minister of St Ives Methodist Church opened the meeting with a prayer.

13. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 15th May 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

14. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor S J Corney declared a non-statutory disclosable interest under Minute No. 25/20 by virtue of the nature of his business. Councillor Corney vacated the room during the discussion and vote on this item.

Councillor P J Hodgson-Jones declared a non-statutory disclosable interest under Minute No. 25/25 by virtue of being a member of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority's Audit and Governance Committee. The interest was declared for transparency purposes.

Councillor J Neish declared a non-statutory disclosable interest under Minute No. 25/25 by virtue of being a member of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The interest was declared for transparency purposes.

The Chair welcomed Anita O'Malley, the new Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer, to the Chamber and thanked Tom Lewis, the previous Monitoring Officer, for his help and support over the years.

15. CHAIR'S ENGAGEMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

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).

16. NOTICE OF MOTION

Councillor N J Hunt moved, and it was duly seconded by Councillor J E Harvey that

This Council notes:

1. that the Ask for Angela scheme that began in 2016 and helps anyone feeling unsafe while in a bar, pub, or club to get the support they need – by saying the code word 'Angela' to staff in participating licensed venues to indicate they are feeling vulnerable; and
2. that HDC is due to review its licensing policy later in 2025.

This Council believes:

1. that everyone in Huntingdonshire deserves to be safe wherever they are - including in bars, pubs, and clubs; and
2. that women are disproportionately more likely to feel unsafe in bars, pubs, and clubs.

This Council RESOLVES to:

1. As part of the licensing review later in 2025, commit to exploring how the council can support the proper

operation of the Ask for Angela scheme as 'best practice' for licenced venues in Huntingdonshire and encourage all licensed venues in Huntingdonshire to operate the scheme, including relevant training for venue staff;

2. Commit to exploring how the council can support wider adoption and better operation of the Ask for Angela scheme as part of the review of HDC's licensing policy later this year - including potentially updating the policy to achieve this;
3. Use the council's communication channels to raise awareness of the Ask for Angela scheme so local residents know how to discreetly ask for help when feeling unsafe in a licensed premise; and
4. Engage with neighbouring councils where the scheme is more widespread to pick up best practice about how this council can support further uptake and better operation of the scheme.

In presenting the proposed motion, Councillor Hunt explained that he believed that this was an area where the Council could make a difference and that every resident had the right to feel safe when frequenting a licensable premise. He stated that in his experience this was not the case, and that lack of feeling safe in licensable premises would affect the local evening economy. It was stated that there was an opportunity for the Council to improve the experience for Huntingdonshire residents via their Licensing Policy and supporting the Ask for Angela scheme through this. He observed that from the many venues in the district operating the scheme, many did support it well however some did not.

The Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance, Councillor S W Ferguson, stated that he was in full support of the motion. He felt that scheme was a simple but effective tool for residents to seek help when they felt unsafe. In his opinion it empowered individuals to take control of their situation and minimise risk of harm thus making public spaces safer. The proposed embedding into the Licensing Policy would come into effect within the year with the support of the Chamber with further support for venues and also in raising public awareness of the scheme with both with residents and staff in venues. He also noted that the scheme would be drawn to the attention of any new licensing applicants prior to the implementation of the revised Licensing Policy.

The motion was supported by Councillor S Cawley who echoed the need to keep residents safe and felt that the

motion allowed the Council a clear path to provide support in helping to make the evening economy safer. He raised concerns of increased officer workload and administrative costs to the Council and would like to see a plan in place to fully resource the support of the scheme. He was also concerned about the risk of misuse of the scheme with cases being given where it had been used to avoid paying a bill, therefore the Councillor suggested working with local venues to make sure it was only use in genuine cases. The implementation of the scheme needed to be meaningful in order to genuinely improve safety, with measures in place to ensure correct implementation and success. He also agreed that it was crucial for the Council to raise awareness through their communication channels.

Councillor S Bywater also gave his full support to the motion and in addressing the chamber, drew from his experience in having previously worked as a Police Officer in seeing first hand the importance of this scheme and that it gives people a tool to ask for support in managing their safety.

Councillor Harvey stated that she was proud to second the motion and felt that it was important to empower individuals to take control of their personal safety. She noted that mystery shoppers could be used to test the scheme to ensure that it is correctly implemented and would like to introduce that here if possible. She felt that the adoption of the motion would be the right thing to do to keep residents safe.

In concluding the debate, Councillor Hunt was pleased to hear support from across the chamber and thanked Councillors for their comments and support.

Having been put to the vote, the Motion was declared to be CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

17. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10.1, the following Public Questions were presented to the Council –

In relation to St Neots Market Square Redevelopment.

Why is the loading bay not where the restaurants and businesses are that need it? The loading bays should be where the businesses need them not completely the other side of the Market Square.

The Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration and Housing, Councillor S Wakeford, responded to the question by

advising that there were practical and principal elements to the question. He advised that the redevelopment scheme was inherited with the scope set and that the reviewing and moving of the loading bays were not part of the project. It was noted that the bays need to serve all current and future businesses of the area and not the needs of the current individual businesses around the Square. He advised that additional consultation and development opportunities had been shared with local businesses and that suggestions were received from businesses around the Square, following which further improvements to the scheme were able to be made. It was noted that Floored by Ian had suggested improvements to loading bays, and that an opportunity had been taken to swap a bay and the taxi rank allowing for one closer to this businesses location on the Square. The Council were advised that there were known issues of misuse of the loading bays through illegal parking which exasperated the availability for businesses but that he was confident this issue would be addressed through the implementation of Civil Parking Enforcement.

Would the Leader, Councillor Sarah Conboy, consider joining the leaders of other councils in asking the culture secretary, Lisa Nandy, to consider changes to the Gambling Act 2005 to make it easier for local authorities to decline applications for gambling establishments.

The Executive Leader Councillor S J Conboy responded that the Gambling Act of 2005 was generally well regulated. The Chamber heard that current applications would lean in favour of approval unless objections were raised to undermine this decision. It was noted that the Statutory Consultation, as part of the application determination process, allowed for objections and issues to be raised. It was observed that there were a small amount of these establishments in Huntingdonshire with only two relevant applications in the last five years. The Leader stated that she would not be writing to the Minister as this would need to be decided as Council, however she would be happy to look into local concerns if raised and for Officers to take appropriate action should that be applicable.

18. STATE OF THE DISTRICT

The Chair invited the Executive Leader, Councillor S J Conboy to address the Council on the State of the District and to open the debate which was scheduled to follow. The Chair noted that Councillor Conboy's speech was longer than the allotted time and therefore proposed to suspend normal Council procedure to allow for the speech to be given in full. There be no objections to this, the item proceeded.

Councillor Conboy opened her address by reflecting on the previous three years and the formation of the Joint

Administration and wished to reflect upon the journey taken as well as the changes made to both the Council and residents lives.

She emphasised the transformation, measurable progress and the resident focused outcomes made over the previous three years.

The Leader expressed pride in the introduction of the Huntingdonshire Futures Strategy and highlighted its five key aims:

- Health Embedded
- Inclusive Economy
- Travel Transformed
- Environmental Innovation
- Pride in Place

It was noted that the strategy had been developed in partnership with the districts communities, businesses and stakeholders. It represents the golden thread that runs through everything that the Council does — providing a clear, consistent line of ambition that connects the Council's vision to real-world outcomes.

From that vision, the Corporate Plan to 2028 was developed, which outlines how the Council's goals will be delivered and success evaluated. It sets out the Council's ambition not only to maintain essential services, but to achieve more: to be a Council that does, that enables, and that influences.

It was stated that this was about partnership. With residents, with businesses, and with the community. The joint-administration are building a Huntingdonshire where everyone can live well, feel supported, and take pride in the place they call home. The importance of resident's well-being and happiness was stressed in order to allow all residents the opportunity to thrive.

Since 2022, the Huntingdonshire Futures grant scheme has awarded over £80,000 to local businesses and community initiatives — from heritage and culture to local enterprise and wellbeing. These investments bring 'journeys' to life and create a deep sense of local pride. Whether it's funding new activities for young people to get involved with, or offering new local events that bring people together or helping to enhance and preserve our local heritage, communities have come forward to identify what matters to them, and the Council has sought to support them.

The WorkWell programme, a model not previously available to residents and one of only 15 national trailblazers, has been integrated into the Residents Advice and Information Team at

Pathfinder House, offering tailored support for people with health challenges to stay in or return to work. Each month, over 40 residents are helped along their path to employment, and the good news is that the Government have just announced the scheme will be extended for three more years. It was noted that the Council has embedded WorkWell into its frontline advice service, enabling joined-up support tailored to the district's needs.

Investment in the Council's Active Lifestyles programmes was discussed with the Leader advising of the aim to increase physical activity throughout the district, and noting that attendance in classes has surged by over 121% since 2022. There has also been the introduction a variety of new and specialised classes, including the ESCAPE-pain management program and Active for Health initiatives. The Leader advised that more than £2 million has also been invested in the Council's One Leisure Centres, a significant uplift from minimal investment in leisure facilities pre-2022.

Over the coming year, further investment is planned to enable the restoration of Sawtry Swimming Pool, this is being funded thanks to contributions from the Council, the Community Infrastructure Levy and Sawtry Village Academy.

The importance of early intervention in times of crisis for residents was stressed with it being noted that all frontline Council staff had received new training in the past year, ensuring that early signs of crisis are not missed. These efforts earned the Council full accreditation from the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance, recognising their dedication to supporting survivors.

The relocation of the Citizens Advice Bureau to Pathfinder House was noted, and this level of service integration was felt to have improved accessibility and enabled deeper partnership working across the district. The Council continues to deepen their working relationship with the North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust (NWAFT) and wider health partners, as well as those at Cambridgeshire County Council, to support public services.

There had been a refresh of the Community Safety Partnership Action Plan which secured £44,000 in partnership funding and will help the Council to work more closely with the police to tackle violent crime using data and early intervention. The enhancement of the Council Tax Support Scheme to provide more targeted assistance to those who need it most was discussed and it was noted that as a result, an additional 2,500 households now receive 100% support for their Council Tax. The scheme had also been simplified to make it easier to understand and access, while significantly reducing waiting times for residents.

Since 2022, the average processing time for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support claims has fallen by more than three days, despite rising demand. Changes in residents' circumstances are now processed in just 3.1 days on average - half the time it took three years ago in some cases. Over the same period, the Council also improved collection performance, achieving the highest in-year Council Tax collection rate in five years during 2024/25.

The Housing Needs team has supported more than 1,400 individuals to avoid homelessness, and over 2,400 households to find homes via the Housing Register and Home-Link. Since 2022, the district has welcomed 571 Ukrainian guests, representing a scale of support far exceeding what was in place before 2022, and supported others fleeing war and persecution, including Afghan and Hong Kong BN(O) arrivals. The Council's wraparound model — focused on independence and strong community links — has been recognised by both the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence.

The Leader advised that the launch of the newly created WeAreHuntingdonshire platform provided a central hub offering support for finances, health, food, volunteering and employment for residents.

Out of more than 85,000 homes across the district, only a small fraction of households — just over 4,000 since 2022 — have required temporary accommodation. Thanks to the Council's strong focus on prevention and rapid support, these numbers continue to fall each month and are now below the national average.

Following the 2023 review of the Council's Housing Strategy, there had been a re-alignment of the Council's housing work with their wider Corporate Plan and a new Housing Strategy for 2025—2030, informed by up-to-date needs assessments, was being developed.

Since 2022, 1,423 affordable homes have been delivered in the district, helping more residents onto the housing ladder. The Council's Affordable Housing Note, published in December 2024, gives more explicit guidance to developers. And through surplus council land, like the Amplius/Longhurst Project, more homes are being built where they're most needed. These homes aren't just numbers—they're opportunities for young families, key workers, and older residents to stay rooted in the communities they love. The delivery of homes where need is most significant has been prioritized and the Council continue to work with partners to drive quality, not just quantity.

Improvements have been made to existing housing provision

through the Council's Tenancy Strategy, adopted in July 2023, which provides clear guidelines for managing tenancies in the area. There are also continued efforts to develop a Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy will give the Council the tools to hold landlords accountable when standards are not met. Through strong partnerships with registered providers and housing groups, the Council are unlocking exciting regeneration opportunities across the district.

There had been an increase in enforcement against poor standards in the private rented sector with the Council engaging with landlords and taking firm action where needed. The Council's developing Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy will give more tools to hold property owners accountable and protect tenants.

Through partnerships with housing associations and Homes England, regeneration opportunities across the district are being unlocked. This is expected to include new supported housing for older people, regeneration of outdated stock, and homes prioritised for key workers and young families.

The refreshed Housing Strategy for 2025—2030 was mentioned which will be shaped by updated needs assessments and will give the Council a clear roadmap to meet the district's housing needs with quality, sustainability, and fairness. Developments to the updated Local Plan continue, which will guide the Council on the growth of the district over the next 20 years. A key milestone will be the Preferred Options Local Plan consultation, currently scheduled for autumn 2025. This process started early, putting progress significantly ahead of neighbouring authorities and comparator districts and helping Huntingdonshire to be the best in class. The aim of this is to shape development, not react to it and by starting this process early and consulting widely, the Council is able to create a plan that reflects local priorities, protects green spaces, and ensures infrastructure keeps pace with growth.

The district's connectivity, since 2022 has seen an increase in gigabit broadband to 88%, and 5G signal availability to 92% which in turns helps to connect communities and supporting businesses. The Council also continues to advocate for better rural bus connectivity and will continue to do this to support residents.

Investment in the district's economy through growth in towns and communities has continued to support the future of the district and regeneration is taking shape, particularly in the districts market towns. The completed improvements to St Neots Market Square, transforming it into a vibrant and welcoming space for both residents and visitors were particularly noted. With its enhanced appearance and a

calendar of regular events and activities, the Square will continue to play a key role in the ongoing success of the town centre and is positioning St Neots to be a beneficiary of the economic growth we anticipate from the Universal Studios theme park and the new town development across the border in Bedfordshire.

Since 2022, the Council has supported 218 businesses through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural England Prosperity Fund, safeguarding 26 jobs and creating 30 new ones. The Council's Economic Development Team and Invest in Huntingdonshire brand are putting the district on the map. Over £800,000 has been secured for high street revitalisation and will be used to improve shop fronts, boost footfall and to create welcoming spaces. The Council attended UKREiiF in May, connecting with industry leaders and showcasing Huntingdonshire's vision for economic growth. From unlocking new housing to driving high-value employment space, Huntingdonshire is full of opportunities for investors. Moving forward, the recently completed Economic Growth Strategy will help shape a fairer, more ambitious local economy, rooted in place and community.

While parking can play a role in supporting town centre vitality, free parking is not a panacea. In many cases, it brings only short-term increases in footfall while contributing to congestion, space hoarding, and lost council revenue. The Council is focusing on a balanced approach which will improve access to town centres by all modes of transport, ensuring fair and consistent enforcement through forthcoming Civil Parking Enforcement, and developing a data-led parking strategy. That's why the new Parking Strategy will focus on ensuring parking supports lasting economic benefit by keeping prime spaces turning over, improving access for all, and designing policies that deliver genuine community benefit rather than less impactful short-term footfall gains or political point-scoring. There has been over £800,000 of revitalisation funding in the district's market towns and the Council will continue to investigate opportunities which will create a lasting impact for both residents and businesses.

The forthcoming Energy Strategy, a first for the Council, will help the Council reduce emissions and adopt cleaner energy sources. The installation of solar panels at leisure sites are producing up to a third of the site's energy, and are supporting both environmental and financial sustainability. Following £1.3 million biodiversity grant, the Council has rewilded and improved habitats at sites including Hill Rise, Priory Park and Spring Common. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy and investing in natural flood defence schemes through CPCA funding are also noted as in development.

Following a successful trial, it was advised that the Council's operations fleet will switch to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil with a Fleet Decarbonisation Plan in development.

The day-to-day nature of the Council's work was noted along with the importance of doing this well in order to build trust. It was noted that 80% of the Council's function is the day-to-day tasks.

Since 2022, over 2,200 food safety inspections have been carried out safeguarding the health of our residents. The majority of Licensing Act licenses have been processed within the required seven-day window. And the Council's taxi licensing process has also seen major improvements, consistently exceeding its monthly targets every single month since September 2022.

It was advised that waste collection and street cleansing expectations were being exceeded. Since 2022, 98% of the areas tested have been found to be clean of litter, flyposting, weeds, detritus, and graffiti. This is due to sustained effort, pride in work, and a team that genuinely cares about the environment of the district. It was further noted that the street cleansing team achieved their best performance in three years, passing over 99% of spot checks last year.

The Council's missed bin collection rate stands at just 0.051%, compared to a national average of 0.076%, which reflects the consistently high standard of service provided by the Council. Since 2022, 18 million bins have been collected, and only 9,207 bins have been missed. It was advised that APSE, the leading benchmarking authority for operational services, have recognised HDC as one of the top performers in the country for both refuse collection and street cleansing in the last financial year.

The Leader discussed the decision to introduce green bin charges, and clarified that this was not a reduction in service but was a reform in order to protect services. The collection remains available to all residents, with a fair and transparent charge for those who choose to use it. This is a discretionary service, and it was believed to be fairer that those who want to use it help to fund it, rather than charging those who neither want nor need it. It was noted that HDC were one of the last Councils in the country to make this change. By aligning with what was already the national norm, the Council is able to protect essential services elsewhere without relying on reserves or making deeper cuts. The Leader stated that this was about fairness, sustainability, and financial responsibility.

The budget principles of the joint-administration had been to set balanced budgets, without depletion of reserves, involving all 52

councillors and listening to residents. Every investment made has been evidence-based, with assessed and measured results. By focusing on strengthening of the Council's commercial performance and protecting vital services, the Council was able to focus on delivering confident and stable results for the benefit of residents.

Protected services include waste collection, housing support, planning, and wellbeing programmes. By taking early action, firm choices, and disciplined financial management the Council remains in a strong financial position. It was noted that, in particular, the Council's Section 151 Officer played a critical role in protecting the Council's long-term stability. By exercising caution about speculative financial strategies, such as borrowing to invest or taking risks on interest rates, prudence, transparency and resilience remained the Council's guiding principles. By focusing on targeting spending where it makes the most significant difference, and protecting services, the Council is future proofing its position in a time of growing national uncertainty. This is not austerity, it's resilience in action, ensuring Huntingdonshire can meet today's challenges while preparing for tomorrow's.

By building solid financial foundations, The Council has been enhanced in line with the things that matter most to people. Thus building a future based around outcomes and the protection of Council services for the most vulnerable residents. The Leader advised that the joint-administration had taken the bold step of inviting external scrutiny, including a full Planning Peer Review and a Corporate Peer Challenge. This had allowed for identification of areas to be strengthened, and an action plan to address this. Audit findings are part of an evolving picture, and it was noted that the Council now had clear financial governance, with strong officer-member relationships, early decision-making, and more consistent risk oversight than ever before. Our Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer are central to all key decisions—and that's by design. This is not a council running from scrutiny—it's a council inviting it, learning from it, and acting on it.

It was noted that financial responsibility remained a top priority in the budget setting for 2026/27, and that the Council's finances had been stabilised since 2022. The Leader stated that she was proud that HDC were able to deliver on their promise of long-term financial sustainability, whilst acknowledging that some decisions had not been universally popular, they had been prudent and ensured longevity for the Council in providing services and support for residents.

Following the 2024 Planning Peer Review, the Council were committed to making the changes needed to improve service delivery, support growth, and plan for the future. It was advised

that the Planning services performance in the past year was it's best performance post pandemic. With around 95% of household extension requests, 88% of major planning requests, and 90% of minor planning requests all being completed on time, there was also a significant cut to the backlog of cases.

A new Workforce Strategy was introduced over the past year, focusing on wellbeing, recruitment and development, and the Council had sought to address the lack of recognition and pay that has kept pace with the rising cost of living. The Council were ensuring recognition for the staff who deliver for residents every day of the week and it was noted that the staff awards recognise those outstanding contributions.

Following the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge, the Joint Administration were implementing best-practice reforms to improve transparency, performance, and public trust. It was stated that through national recognition, record performance, and resident-focused investment the momentum to stabilize the Council was achieved.

The Leader further stated that by opening the Council up to external scrutiny, including a full Planning Peer Review and a Corporate Peer Challenge, areas of improvement were identified along with a clear plan to strengthen those services. Audit findings were stated to be part of an evolving picture, and some reflected early transitional periods, not the current systems. There was now clearer financial governance, stronger officer-member relationships, earlier decision-making, and more consistent risk oversight than ever before. The Council's Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer were central to all key decisions which demonstrates a Council keen to evolve and strengthen its position.

Projects for the coming months were mentioned, in particular, the redevelopment of Hinchbrook Country Park which is expected to be completed by Spring 2026. The implementation of food waste collections across the district was also mentioned which will reduce landfill waste, help households cut down on waste, and build on the Council's existing campaign to promote sustainable choices every day.

The Community Health and Wealth Building Strategy, supported by a £750,000 Delivery Fund, will be implemented with the launch of the first in a series of community-developed grant schemes. Shaped by conversations with residents about what a good life means in Huntingdonshire, the strategy is built on three key pillars: financial security, good health, and strong social connection, the foundations of wellbeing. The strategy outlines how we will work in partnership with communities and local organisations to make them a reality. While the initial funding has been provided by the Council, the Delivery Fund is

designed to grow through contributions from partners, expanding its capacity to benefit residents across the district.

This people-first approach ensures that resources are focused where they matter most. Through meaningful work, strong relationships, and active, healthy lives the Council can support communities to flourish.

The Leader moved on to discuss Local Government Review and the requirement to deliver this to be in place for 1st April 2028. The joint administration feel strongly that the Council advocate for a new unitary structure that works in practice, delivers for residents, and ensures sustainable local services and will not rush into premature conclusions, the process will be data-driven and will await the outcomes from the business cases to enable sound decision-making. Importance was given to ensuring that the Council considered residents' voices about what matters to them in terms of what a new authority could deliver. The government had not offered a referendum, and so it was proposed to demonstrate real leadership by weighing the evidence, understanding all perspectives, and delivering what works, and not being tempted to make changes for party political gain.

It was stated that through the process, the Council would engage widely, listen carefully, and be realistic about the complexity of the district's geography. Huntingdonshire has both north- and south-facing communities, and preferences may diverge between alignment with Cambridge or Peterborough. It was explained that there may not be a single preferred option and that the business case may demonstrate financially sustainable new unitary options for each. It will be incumbent on this Council to make the most of whichever option the government chooses and to ensure that delivery for residents remains at the forefront. This is not just about what works best for Huntingdonshire but about delivering financially sustainable and effective local government for the whole of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The Council has worked hard to do the best for Huntingdonshire and that effort won't stop until the transfer to a new unitary authority, as this is what will ensure residents are in the best place possible after these changes.

From the beginning of this Joint Administration, collaborative work across the chamber has been encouraged, recognising that political difference, when channelled constructively, can make decisions stronger. In this administration, it has been shown that ideas matter more than ideologies. It has been demonstrated that Joint Administrations can be highly effective, that cooperation isn't compromise rather it's a commitment to better outcomes.

After three years, the Leader was proud of all that has been

achieved together with staff and the 52 councillors. And I would like to extend my thanks to everyone. I promised that the joint administration would work together for the good of our residents, and that will continue with the with exciting times ahead. The Leader stated that local government reorganization, whilst not the direction the Council would have chosen, is an opportunity to do more at scale, to work better across all services for the benefit of residents.

The Leader closed her address by stating her pride in what the Council had achieved together, with improvements to services for the benefit of businesses and residents.

In response and on behalf of the Opposition Group the Conservatives, Councillor R Martin expressed his thanks to Council Staff who keep the business and services running throughout the year. He acknowledged the fantastic work of the Economic Development team and the work that they did to highlight the district and show that it is an area of growth and business development. He also acknowledged the work of the Emergency Planning team and the vastly improved response rates seen for residents over the past 12 months.

Councillor Martin went on to praise the impressive change that the Head of Service had achieved in turning the performance of One Leisure around, through his business mindset approach. In particular the reopening of Sawtry swimming pool fantastic, which bucked the national trend was good news for the district.

However, Councillor Martin expressed his concerns that he felt the joint administration needed to be clear on where improvements can be made and to set measurable achievements. He expressed particular concern that the Key Performance Indicators from the quarterly performance reports showed that many indicators had not improved over the last two years.

Councillor Martin also expressed concern that despite mention of strategies to be expected in the democratic cycle in the coming months, they were not yet on the forward plan, he noted that late addition of reports to the forward plan was a recurring issue.

Further concern was expressed that residents were being charged more but receiving reduced services, he claimed that £9 million had been put into earmarked reserves, due to cuts and underperformance. Councillor Martin stated that he was not against financial prudence however he question why the money was not being used to deliver results.

Councillor Martin also questioned the validity and quantifiability of the data being used to drive the 3 LGR options. He felt that

the Council should focus on its own district rather than outside. Councillor Martin also praised the work of volunteers across the district, especially those who champion rights and support for their communities. He felt it was right to recognise the work that residents do and to continue to support them with this.

Councillor T Alban expressed his thanks to the Chair of the Council Councillor D B Dew for his attendance at the Stilton Cheese Rolling Festival along with Councillors D N Keane and C A Lowe. Councillor Alban highlighted the approaching local elections in 2026, and observed that at the election in 2022, more residents had voted Conservative than any other one party and that a joint-administration formed of all other parties did not jointly reflected the views of residents. He went on to express concern relating to increased development along the A605 corridor, much of which in neighbouring authorities, however he was concerned that the infrastructure was not being supported or developed at the same pace.

In seeking to respond to the concerns raised, the Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor T Sanderson, responded that he was keen to work with Councillors in relation to concerns about development and related infrastructure. He echoed the comments from the Leader of the Opposition and paid tribute to all volunteers who contributed across the district. He also noted that the MPs for Huntingdon and St Neots were very proactive in promoting the district in the best interests of residents.

Councillor J A Gray acknowledged the demanding role of the Executive Leader and that it was one which she fulfilled with a great deal of skill and elegance. He disputed some of the Leader's claims in relation to the Council's finances over the past years and wished to clarify that the Conservatives never relied on reserves whilst in the administration. He complimented the Section 151 Officer in the work which she had done to turn around the accounts following the auditors concerns relating to 2023/24 spending. He also wished to record that, in his opinion, the introduction of subscriptions for green bins had been the biggest reduction in service ever to be delivered to the district and did not feel that this had been properly scrutinised. He also expressed his dismay at the cancellation of the Saturday freighters, particularly noting that residents on the edges of the district often had to travel a substantial distance to visit a refuse centre, he further stated that a further development and roll out of the community bin propositions would be welcomed. Councillor Gray concluded by commenting that it was telling that the Leader had talked about improving the district town by town in her address, and observed that with the vast majority of residents being in villages and did not feel that these improvements had been in their favour.

Councillor S R McAdam expressed his thanks to the Executive

Leader for her extraordinary dedication and care in the role. He noted that there would always be criticism but that collaboration across the chamber would always be in the best interest of residents. He further commented that he understood the need to introduce the green bin subscription charge but also noted the good work that the Council was able to introduce as a result of this such as the introduction of Council Tax relief for the districts most vulnerable residents. He expressed pride at all that had been achieved over the tenure of the joint administration to date.

In responding to concerns raised by Councillor Gray, Councillor S Wakeford claimed that a subscription service for green bins was under consideration by the Conservatives prior to the change in administration, he stated that he was content with the state of the Councils finances. He also gave his thanks to the Leader, the Cabinet and colleagues across the chamber for the work done on behalf of residents over the past 3 years.

Councillor A R Jennings believed that the joint administration had not wanted to mislead residents, and stated that he did not have a particular objection to the current administration depleting reserves as there had been a similar situation under the previous administration but wanted to clarify this as it had been portrayed in a different light.

In response, Councillor Conboy disagreed with the recollection of events and pledged to provide the papers to clarify. In summary, the Leader concluded that the spirit in which colleagues across the chamber disagreed was polite and respectful even though it was at times emotional. She thanks colleagues for their indulgence over the length of the address but observed that due to the planned local elections in 2026, this may be the joint administrations last chance to address the district in its current guise.

19. QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

In response to a question from Councillor S L Taylor, the Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene, Councillor J E Kerr, advised that Phase 1 of the Riverside project in St Neots had been completed but that work had been paused whilst the redevelopment of Hinchbrook Country Park was implemented. It was noted that once this project was in the delivery phase, focus would return to the Riverside project and further funding opportunities would be explored. In response Councillor Taylor expressed disappointment that the projects would not be running in conjunction and expressed concern about impending deadlines for the A428 funding, it was agreed to continue the conversation offline.

Councillor N J Hunt advised that a group of residents had approached both himself and Councillor J E Harvey relating to Huntingdon's Riverside Park and establishing a group similar to the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park. The Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene, Councillor J E Kerr, advised that this would be something which the Council would be happy to assist in forming and it was agreed to get this underway.

Dismay was expressed by Councillor T Alban in relation to the quantity of fly posters across the district which remained in place after events, in particular he noted those advertising circuses and fairs, he suggested introducing a deposit system for such organisers to be taken when event permission was sought, to encourage posters to be removed following events. The Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance, Councillor S W Ferguson concurred with the suggestion in principle and agreed to explore the potential implementation of this suggestion.

In response to a question from Councillor P Kadewere, the Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor T Sanderson, advised that the Planning Service continued to make great progress and improvements, in particular it was noted that enforcement figures were half of what they were in January 2024 and that the backlog of cases for June sat at 27.

Following a question from Councillor M L Beuttell, the Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene, Councillor J E Kerr, advised that Civil Parking Enforcement would be a district wide roll out but that it would initially focus on specific areas in order to measure successes and results. Following a further question from Councillor Beuttell, it was clarified that the specific areas had been set to establish best practice and that the areas would be expanded following this to further support parishes in reducing illegal parking.

In response to a query from Councillor R Martin, the Executive Leader Councillor S J Conboy, advised that she had only very recently been made aware that the MPs for North West Cambridgeshire and Peterborough had suggested an alternative option for LGR for a Greater Peterborough. It was noted that Peterborough City Council would consider this and the viability to develop it into a fourth business case, however it was also noted that all such business cases submitted to the Government for consideration must demonstrate financial sustainability, for all Councils involved. In response to a further question from Councillor Martin, the Leader advised that the Conservatives were welcome to put forward an alternative to the business models already being developed, however it was noted that resources to develop the models was already at capacity.

The Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene, Councillor J E Kerr, advised, in response to a question from Councillor J A Gray, that HDC were responsible for litter collection alongside the A14. The chamber heard that the Council's teams attended both the Brampton Hut and the next roundabout every 2 to 3 months and regularly collected over 150 bags of rubbish from each location. Following a further question from Councillor Gray relating to rubbish, in particular tyres and animal carcasses alongside the carriageway, the Executive Councillor advised that communication with National Highways for teams to access this area safely was ongoing and was also an issue acknowledged by Cambridgeshire County Council. In addition the state of Mill Common Car Park in Huntingdon was noted and would be investigated with the relevant team

In response to concerns raised by Councillor B S Chapman relating to the omission of notable St Neots residents of the past, in particular Richard Fitzgilbert, from the inscribed stones in the newly redeveloped St Neots Market Square the Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration and Housing, Councillor S Wakeford, advised that the names inscribed had been chosen in conjunction with local stakeholders, however he advised that St Neots Town Council could consider exploring further opportunities to honour historical St Neots residents.

Following a question from Councillor M L Beuttell, the Executive Councillor for Planning advised that the forthcoming report on the Preferred Options for the Local Plan would be expected into the democratic cycle in the Autumn following the completion of the outcomes of the key evidence options.

20. ADJOURNMENT

At 9.03 pm it was

RESOLVED

that the meeting stand adjourned

Upon resumption at 9.13 pm

9:13pm Councillor S J Corney left the meeting.

21. DISCRETIONARY CHARGES IN PLANNING INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC PROTECTION

With the aid of a report and presentation by Head of Planning,

Infrastructure and Public Protection (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book) the Council considered a report seeking to review and enhance discretionary charges in Planning, Infrastructure and Public Protection, focusing on enhancing service deliver, covering rising operational costs, reacting to national government changes and ensuring the sustainability of the services.

By way of introduction, the Executive Councillor for Finance & Resources, Councillor B A Mickelburgh explained that the recent Planning Peer Review had identified missed opportunities to generate revenue. It was also noted that there was a desire to spend funding generated through both Commercial Infrastructure Levy and BioDiversity Net Gain (BNG) on projects within Huntingdonshire.

The process and impact of BNG was discussed highlighting the need for developers to deliver a 10% biodiversity net gain and that this be monitor for 30 years to ensure its success. This will have significant gains for biodiversity throughout the district however will come with long term responsibilities for the Council. By introducing a charge for monitoring fees, this work would remain cost-neutral and accounted for.

The Executive Councillor also drew attention to a request from the Overview and Scrutiny Panel and advised that Officers met with both the Executive Councillors for Planning and Finance along with the Shadow Executive Councillors for Planning and Finance to develop the fees as shown within Appendix 2 of the report.

Councillor K P Gulson expressed his support for the paper and agreed with the introduction of a discretionary charge for planning and agreed that it would be right to generate income and streamline throughput of these applications. However, he expressed concern due to the fact that BNG was new and a massive challenge with a long term monitoring requirement. He felt that by getting that process right from the implementation would help to ensure it's long term success.

The Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor T Sanderson acknowledged that the report had received thorough scrutiny through the Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) Panel. He acknowledged that income generation had been identified by the planning peer review and that the requirement for BNG would take up resource therefore it was right to introduce the discretionary charge alongside the recommendation from the peer review. He gave his support to the report and the recommendations contained within.

Councillor P J Hodgson-Jones enquired whether the mentioned habitat banks across Huntingdonshire could form an integral

part of the revised Local Plan in particular, he suggested that, their location could be used strategically to prevent urban sprawl, and to enhance biodiversity within the district. He felt that by fully integrating this into the planning process would ensure its future success. The Executive Councillor noted these points and hoped that they would be integrated where feasible.

Councillor R Martin echoed the comments of Councillor Gulson and stated that he believed that residents should not be paying for things that developers were doing.

Whereupon having been proposed and duly seconded, it was

RESOLVED

- a) that the review of Discretionary Charges within Planning, Infrastructure and Public Protection be endorsed, and to delegate authority to the Head of Planning, Infrastructure and Public Protection in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and Executive Councillor for Finance & Resources to implement changes for the current financial year (2025/26).
- b) that the following be delegated to the Head of Planning, Infrastructure and Public Protection in consultation with the Section 151 officer and Executive Councillor for Finance & Resources for the current financial year (2025/26):
 - i. Introduction of new fees;
 - ii. Modification of existing fees;
 - iii. Updating/adjusting of fees; and
 - iv. Waiving of fees

9:30pm Councillor S J Corney rejoined the meeting.

22. TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT 2024/25

With the aid of a report by the Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) presented by the Executive Councillor for Finance & Resources, Councillor B A Mickelburgh. The report provided an update on treasury management activity for the period 1 April to 31 March 2025, including investment and borrowing activity and treasury performance.

By way of introduction, Councillor Mickelburgh proceeded to talk in detail through the following areas: economic review, the performance of Council funds, treasury risk management, non-treasury investments, interest rates compliance and treasury management indicators. The diligent scrutiny provided by the Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) Panel was

noted along with note of member training for Scrutiny members in October 2024.

Attention was drawn to the Council's Commercial Investment Strategy which had generated £3.1 million for the Council in 2024/25 after taking account of direct costs. We remain alert to the risks of vacancies and fluctuating property values, we are continuing to review the strategy albeit this has experienced delays due to LGR. It was noted that inflation had fluctuated across the year, and that the Bank of England rate had fallen, it was further observed that global events continued to create uncertainty, with the pace of interest rate decreases remaining uncertain.

Councillor A R Jennings praised Officers for the comprehensive and well written reports which were produced for Councillors on a regular basis and observed that there were often few questions to raise on the matter as the report author had anticipated and answered them within the body of the report. He continued that he was content that the Council had complied with all Prudential indicators, and was reassured to know that internal borrowing was being used to finance the CFR, furthermore he was pleased that for third year, interest receipts had far exceeded what was in the budget.

Councillor C M Gleadow echoed Councillor Jennings comments regarding the quality of the Treasury Management reports.

Councillor P J Hodgson-Jones reflected that the complexity of the reports made them challenging to understand which he was concerned may consequently reflect on the level of scrutiny. He also criticised the level of treasury investments that were short term, and expressed a desire to increase yield from cash to treasury, potentially through a move to longer dated investments with higher yields to give a larger return for the Council. He further suggested that land assets may be utilised to generate revenue to meet other needs of the Council although acknowledged that the impending LGR may pose difficulties

In response, the Executive Councillor, advised that longer term investment opportunities along with utilisation of assets were being investigated and that he would look to develop and exploit these opportunities in a timely manner in order to benefit both the Council and residents of Huntingdonshire.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the treasury management performance for 2024/25 be noted.

23. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2025/26

With the aid of a report by Head of Policy, Performance and Emergency Planning and the Insights Co-ordinator (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Council considered a report seeking approval of the proposed target and tolerances for the key performance indicators 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

By way of introduction, the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance, S W Ferguson clarified that it had been decided to bring the targets through the democratic cycle separately to the quarterly performance reports in order to ensure that they were sufficiently challenging whilst remaining achievable. It was noted that the comments of Scrutiny had been considered and as a result had reset the targets to ensure sufficient challenge. It was advised that there had been an increase to 35 Key Performance Indicators and that the targets for each had been reviewed and revised where appropriate. It was further noted that although challenging targets can increase performance, they needed to remain achievable and realistic. The Executive Councillor concluded by thanking the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for their robust and continued criticism.

Councillor R Martin thanked the Executive Councillor for taking on board the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel. He expressed his support for the report whilst acknowledging that it contained the Performance Indicators of the joint administration which they would need to deliver on.

Whereupon having been proposed and duly seconded, it was

RESOLVED

that the proposed target and tolerances for the key performance indicators 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be approved.

24. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

Councillor N J Hunt, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) Panel presented the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report on behalf of both Overview and Scrutiny Panels (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which summarised the Panels activities for the municipal year 2024/25.

In presenting the report, Councillor Hunt acknowledged that there had been a long road to develop and improve the Council's scrutiny function over the last three years, and that the Annual

report was a milestone to reflect on that journey. He felt that 3 years ago scrutiny was a rubber stamp exercise but thanks to the Officers who support the Panels, the overarching goal of our efforts is paying off through exploring topics and adding value. He also highlighted that changes had been made to when papers were considered by Panels allowing for earlier input, and that additional recommendations were being made to Cabinet.

Councillor Hunt acknowledged that the scrutiny process was still being developed but reflected on the substantial progress made to date to improve and develop.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report be received and noted.

25. CAMBRIDGE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY CHANGES TO MEMBERS ALLOWANCES

With the aid of a report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Council considered a report highlighting that the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority intended to pay members allowances directly for District Council members appointed to sit on their Overview and Scrutiny and Audit and Governance Committees.

In introducing the report, the Executive Leader Councillor S J Conboy explained that there would be an anticipated annual saving to the Council in excess of £3,000 and that as a result the relative Councillors members allowance scheme would be removed from the budget.

Whereupon having been proposed and duly seconded, it was

RESOLVED

that the removal of the allowances paid by the District Council to members appointed to sit on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny and Audit and Governance Committees be noted and that the Members' Allowances Scheme be updated accordingly.

26. CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY - UPDATE

In conjunction with the decision summaries of the recent

meetings of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, copies of the decision summaries are appended in the Minute Book.

In response to a question from Councillor R Martin, the chamber heard that clarification was being sought from the Mayor in relation to knock on effects in the reinstatement of the 31 bus service in Ramsey as it was understood that this may be at the detriment of other bus services.

Following a questions from Councillor S L Taylor, the Executive Leader advised that she was in communication with the Mayor in order to understand his aspirations in relation to free carparking in St Neots and whether there was opportunity to expand this across the district. Following a further question on the matter from Councillor B S Chapman, the Executive Leader confirmed that the Council would continue to look at options to create sustainable benefits for St Neots in line with the Council's Parking Strategy.

In response to a question from Councillor S R McAdam, the Executive Leader reiterated that carpark revenue was an integral part of the Councils current budget formula and any plans to introduce free parking would affect this. Once clarity had been obtained on the matter, the Council would be able to update accordingly.

Councillor N J Hunt expressed concern about proposed changes to the Under 25 Tiger bus pass, following which the Executive Leader reassured that the Council remained an advocate for this pass and were awaiting further details in relation to both the reduction of this scheme and impact on district bus services.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor M A Hassall, the Executive Leader concurred that it would be beneficial for either the Mayor or a CPCA representative to be available to answer members questions, opportunities to bring this to fruition would be investigated and developed further.

27. USE OF SPECIAL URGENCY PROVISIONS 2024/25

With the assistance of a report by the Executive Leader (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Council were acquainted with the details of one key decision which had been taken within the last year under the Council's special urgency provisions.

Having noted that it was a requirement within the Council's Constitution that executive decisions taken as a matter of

special urgency be reported annually to the Council by the Executive Leader, it was

RESOLVED

to note the contents of the report.

28. OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council held on 26th March 2025 is appended in the Minute Book and Members were advised that any issues or questions could be raised in relation to these meetings.

There were no questions raised.

29. VARIATIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

There were no changes to report.

The meeting ended at 10:09pm.

Chair