

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

PRESENT: Councillor S J Conboy – Chair.

Councillors L Davenport-Ray, S W Ferguson, J E Harvey, J E Kerr, B A Mickelburgh and S Wakeford.

APOLOGY: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor S A Howell.

30 Minutes

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

31 Members' Interests

No declarations were received.

32 Paxton Pits Nature Reserve Extension of Leases

A report by the Head of Leisure, Health & Environment was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which sought approval to allow delegated authority to Senior Officer's to fully execute the leases for the land adjacent to the current nature reserve allowing for an extension of Paxton Pits Nature Reserve following the completion of gravel extraction operations and agreed restoration works.

The report also set out the current legal position as supplied by 3C Legal Shared Services and provided the full confidence in which full approval for this scheme and delegated authority could be given to Senior Officers to proceed with this matter.

Furthermore, the report sought to gain approval for the Head of Leisure, Health & Environment and associated teams in principle to explore wider opportunities to develop existing and new sites across the Council's parks and open spaces to support wildlife and conservation, health and wellbeing, physical activity and commercial sustainability opportunities.

The Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene set out the report, with the aid of the Head of Leisure, Health & Environment - Gregg Holland, and the Parks & Countryside Development Coordinator - Kiersten Drew, who delivered a presentation.

The Head of Leisure, Health & Environment - Gregg Holland, in response to questions from the Cabinet, explained that the lease incorporated the conditions between all three parties. As the site was Special Scientific Interest it needed to

be managed in accordance to a specific site management plan. At the conclusion of the lease, whoever had ownership would have to manage the site in the same way.

The Cabinet noted that the reserve was a fantastic facility and a great asset to Little Paxton. It also had excellent link-up benefits to other Towns and had been a long time coming. The comments from the Overview & Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) Panel were noted, particularly around the ongoing cost to the Council, which were comprehensively answered to the satisfaction of the Scrutiny Panel.

The Head of Health, Leisure & Environment – Gregg Holland, advised that financially officers were comfortable with what was set out in the report. In terms of highway management, the Council would work with the appropriate other authorities to develop the site and ensure the highways were accessible for all and safe for visitors attending the site.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet

- (1) approved and gave delegated authority to fully execute the leases for the land adjacent to the current nature reserve allowing for an extension of Paxton Pits Nature Reserve following the completion of gravel extraction operations and agreed restoration works;
- (2) agreed and approved the feedback from 3C Legal Shared Services outlined in Section 10 which provided confidence and clarity to the Council in moving forward with the extension of leases; and
- (3) supported the principle of officers engaging in efforts to acquire land and buildings in connection with the principle of exploring wider opportunities to not only develop existing sites across the Council's parks and open spaces but also new sites and spaces to support wildlife and conservation, health and wellbeing, physical activity and commercial sustainability opportunities.

33 Commercial Investment Strategy

A report by the Corporate Director – Finance and Resources was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which presented a revised Commercial Investment Strategy for approval and subsequent adoption for implementation.

The Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources – Councillor Mickelburgh, set out the report, noting the comments from the Overview & Scrutiny (Performance & Growth) Panel which was generally supportive. Questions had been raised regarding risk and that the Strategy ought to follow the same guidelines across the rest of the organisation, and the significant reliance on the S151 officer which he felt was not any more onerous in this iteration than was present previously. Such concerns would be mitigated by putting together a good

quality team together who could take the majority of actions and leave the S151 officer to hold their key part within the process. Furthermore, this iteration had given a broader scope that put the Council in a strong position.

The Cabinet noted that the strategy was a sensible, prudent approach and was a helpful reference point which enshrined commercial income as a critical part. It also achieved secondary benefits beyond pure revenue generation, maximising the value the District got from the Council's investment.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet approved the Revised Commercial Investment Strategy.

34 Building Energy Strategy

A report by the Facilities Manager was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which sought formal approval to proceed with the implementation of the Building Energy Strategy and identify opportunities for renewable energy installations delivering both environmental and financial benefits primarily at the sites below:

- Pathfinder House.
- Eastfield House.
- One Leisure Huntingdon Dry.
- One Leisure Huntingdon Wet.
- One Leisure Ramsey.
- One Leisure St Ives Indoor.
- One Leisure St Ives Outdoor.
- One Leisure St Neots.

The Leader – Councillor Conboy, set out the report, making reference to the engaged debate at the Overview & Scrutiny (Environment, Communities & Partnerships), noting the discussion around taking advantage of Green Tariffs and the energy efficiency of Pathfinder House.

The Cabinet thanked the Facilities Manager and officers for their work, and reflected on comments from the Overview & Scrutiny (Environment, Communities & Partnerships) Panel, particularly around the different definitions/interpretations of “Green” when it came to energy tariffs. The Cabinet recognised such concerns, and it was right and proper to bear them in mind as part of the decision around selecting energy tariffs, but there was a concern around the specific language of the additional recommendation from the Overview & Scrutiny (Environment, Communities & Partnerships) Panel.

The Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce, Councillor Davenport-Ray also noted the concerns around green energy tariffs that were discussed by the Overview & Scrutiny (Environment, Communities & Partnerships) Panel and felt that some of the wording suggested in its additional recommendation should be considered. Accordingly, she proposed the following additional recommendation, which was seconded by the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance Councillor Ferguson:

“To approve that consideration be given to the relative merits of a variety of different green energy tariffs, given that the expression “100% green energy” is interpreted differently by different people, when the Council’s energy tariff is next procured”.

The Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce – Councillor Davenport-Ray, further commented that recommendation 2 in the report was something the Council did as a matter of course, so it did not need to be explicitly stated and was therefore not necessary.

Furthermore, she noted that recommendation 1 in the report needed to have a conjunction within its wording, as follows:

“To approve the building energy strategy with a view to complete feasibility studies on the buildings identified, and allow HDC to make informed decisions on future energy and carbon savings”.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40pm to allow time for copies of the proposed amendments to be printed and circulated to the Cabinet and officers present. The meeting resumed at 7:55pm.

The Cabinet was of the opinion that the proposed amended wording to recommendation 1 was a helpful clarificatory amendment. Accordingly, the Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce – Councillor Davenport-Ray proposed the amended recommendation, which was seconded by the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance - Councillor Ferguson. When put to a vote, the amendment was carried.

In relation to the comments regarding the necessity of recommendation 2, the Monitoring Officer and Head of Democratic Services suggested that the most efficient approach would be that the recommendation as set out in the report, be put to a vote so that Cabinet had the opportunity to vote for, against, or to abstain.

The Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce – Councillor Davenport-Ray proposed the following wording to the additional recommendation, which was seconded by the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance - Councillor Ferguson:

““To approve that consideration be given to the relative merits of a variety of different green energy tariffs, given that the expression “100% green energy” is interpreted differently by different people, when the Council’s energy tariff is next procured”.

The Executive Councillor for Finance & Resources – Councillor Mickelburgh, noted that the proposed additional recommendation did not help boundary what “100% green energy” interpretation was, and would not provide any help with that regard when it came to procurement. Further comments from Cabinet similarly shared the view that the proposed wording was not necessarily needed in order to be procuring as green energy as possible.

When put to a vote, the Cabinet were not in favour of adding the additional recommendation to the report.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet

- (1) approved the Building Energy Strategy with a view to complete feasibility studies on the buildings identified, and allow HDC to make informed decisions on future energy and carbon savings; and
- (2) delegated to the Corporate Director - Finance & Resources (S151) in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Finances & Resources to make any consequential amendments to budgets and release of necessary funds to deliver the projects.

35 Corporate Performance Report 2025/26 (Quarter 1)

A report by the Business Performance and Insights Team Leader, the Insights Coordinator, the Head of Policy, Performance & Emergency Planning and the Performance Coordinator was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which presented an update on the delivery of the Corporate Plan during Quarter 1 of 2025/26.

The Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance - Councillor Ferguson set out the report, noting the long discussion at the Overview & Scrutiny (Performance & Growth) Panel, where there were some questions around the methodology of street cleansing performance, which officers would come back and respond to. There were also concerns around a backlog in giving Council Tax Banding's to new properties, which could lead to a decline in revenue, and he commented that the Revenue & Benefits team were able to give estimated Council Tax Bandings. Further, there was also a concern from the Scrutiny Panel that if bandings changed it could cause undue financial stress, but he was able to reassure the Scrutiny Panel on that matter.

The Cabinet noted and welcomed the openness and frank way these reports were shared, and thanked the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance - Councillor Ferguson and the officers involved.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet

considered and commented on progress and performance during Quarter 1, as summarised in the Corporate Performance Report attached and detailed in Appendices A, B, C and D.

36 Finance Performance Report 2025/26 (Quarter 1)

A report by the Corporate Director – Finance & Resources was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which presented an update on the delivery of the Finance Performance Report during Quarter 1 of 2025/26.

The Executive Councillor for Finance & Resources set out the report, and stated that the report did not go through the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth) anymore, but he and the Chief Executive – Michelle Sacks, and the Corporate Director – Finance & Resources – Suzanne Jones, briefed a key opposition member to make sure they were up to speed, ask any questions and they could talk to the Scrutiny Panel Chair if there was something deemed important enough to present to the Scrutiny Panel.

In response to a question regarding the underspend of CIL grants, the Corporate Director – Finance & Resources – Suzanne Jones, advised that this was not wilful; there were some hurdles beyond delivery control which could not be overcome at this point, however this was under regular review and scrutiny by officers. The intention was to try and spend the money as planned and programmed, and further work would be done on how to maximise the use of CIL.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet

- (1) considered and commented on the revenue financial performance for the financial year 2025/26 quarter 1, as detailed in Appendix 1 and summarised in paragraph 3.2;
- (2) considered and commented on the capital financial performance for 2025/26 quarter 1, as detailed in Appendix 2 and summarised in paragraph 3.3; and
- (3) considered and commented on the treasury management activity for 2025/26 quarter 1, as detailed in Appendix 3.

37 Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group

The Cabinet has received and noted the Minutes of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group meeting held on 18 July 2025.

Chair