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, 15 July 2026.

PRESENT: Councillor S W Ferguson – Chair.

Councillors A Blackwell, A Bulat, M J Burke, S Bywater, S Cawley, S Claffey, S J Conboy, R Coogan, L Davenport-Ray, L Dewey-Beckett, J Francis, P Gammons, I D Gardener, J E Harvey, M A Hassall, D Henly, A Hunt, J Hunt, N J Hunt, C Innes, R Ioannides, D N Keane, J E Kerr, S Lancaster, C Lowe, R Martin, D McIlwain, B A Mickelburgh, D L Mickelburgh, S Mokbul, T D Sanderson, N Sarkies, G Seeff, L M Simpson, P Simpson, H Tobias, T Tomlinson, N Wells, A Wood and M Young.

APOLOGY(IES): Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors T Alban, L Ascroft, M L Beuttell, J A Gray, P J Hodgson-Jones, S Hodgson-Jones, K Maheshwari, J Neish, S Smith and W Smith.

18. THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Councillor B Mickelburgh opened the meeting with a thought for the day.

19. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the the 21st May 2026 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

20. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor S Ferguson declared an other registerable interest in Minute No. 26/22 under Motion 5B by virtue of being the Chair but had been granted special dispensation to enter into the debate but will be unable to vote. He also declared an other registerable interest in Minute No. 26/22 under Motion 5C by virtue of being a Member of a small Political Group. Special dispensation had been granted that he could enter into the debate and vote on the Motion.

Councillor S Mokbul declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 26/22 by virtue of being a Member of a small Political Group. Special dispensation had been granted that he could enter into the debate and vote on the Motion.

Councillor L Davenport-Ray declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 26/22 by virtue of being a Member of a small Political Group. Special dispensation had been granted that he could enter into the debate and vote on the Motion.

Councillor J Kerr declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 26/22 by virtue of being a Member of a small Political Group. Special dispensation had been granted that he could enter into the debate and vote on the Motion.

21. 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).

The Council noted and acknowledged with sadness the passing of former Councillors Doug Terry, Mike Grice and Shaun Burton. A minute's silence was observed in their memory.

22. NOTICES OF MOTION

Councillor D Keane moved, and it was duly seconded by Councillor A Bulat that

This Council notes:

Huntingdonshire District Council is preparing a new Local Plan to guide development across the district to 2046. Since work commenced on the Local Plan, national planning policy and housing targets have changed, with significant implications for future housing requirements across Huntingdonshire.

While no local authority has formally launched a judicial review, multiple councils, led by different political parties, have strongly pushed back on the revised housing targets. Some councils are seeking longer timescales, additional infrastructure funding, and adjustments to the local plan process.

To date, Huntingdonshire District Council has not publicly set out what flexibility, infrastructure support, transitional arrangements, or timetable adjustments it may seek in response to the revised national housing targets.

The emerging Local Plan must be supported by relevant, proportionate, and up-to-date evidence, including evidence on infrastructure, transport, viability, flood risk, water management, health, education, utilities, and community facilities.

Work remains underway to assess the transport implications of future growth, including through the A141 and St Ives Improvements Study, the Strategic Transport Assessment, and related transport evidence.

The Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan, Infrastructure Delivery Study, and associated infrastructure schedules identify substantial requirements for highways, public transport, active travel, education, health services, utilities, flood mitigation, water management, community facilities, green infrastructure, and environmental infrastructure.

The Independent Review into bus franchising was published by the CPCA in June 2026, confirming a phased approach to bus franchising from 2027–2030

The Local Plan relies on the assumption of expanding sustainable transport; therefore, this revised timeframe and scope of delivery should be accounted for.

Residents across Huntingdonshire consistently raise concerns regarding the cumulative impact of development on roads, schools, healthcare provision, drainage, flood risk, public transport, and local services.

Council believes that:

a) Sustainable development requires housing growth, employment growth, and infrastructure delivery to be planned together.
b) Public confidence in the Local Plan process depends upon decisions being informed by the most complete, current, and transparent evidence available.
c) The cumulative impact of development across Huntingdonshire should be properly understood before strategic decisions are taken on the scale and distribution of future growth.
d) Infrastructure capacity, funding, timing, and deliverability are central to whether proposed growth can be considered sustainable.
e) A Local Plan that is not supported by clear evidence on infrastructure delivery risks being less effective, less credible, and less capable of commanding public confidence.
f) Effective infrastructure planning requires close engagement with infrastructure providers, neighbouring authorities, the Combined Authority, and relevant government agencies.

This Council therefore resolves to:

1. Request Cabinet to bring forward a consolidated infrastructure readiness report, drawing on existing and emerging evidence relevant to the Local Plan, including transport, education, health, utilities, flood risk, water management, community infrastructure, green infrastructure, and environmental infrastructure.
2. Request that this report identifies, so far as the evidence allows, infrastructure requirements, delivery assumptions, funding sources, delivery responsibilities, key risks, material gaps, funding constraints, phasing issues, and delivery dependencies which may affect the preparation, soundness, viability, or deliverability of the emerging Local Plan.
3. Request that the report includes consideration of cumulative

infrastructure impacts across Huntingdonshire, including the interaction between major site allocations, market town growth, village allocations, employment sites, and existing infrastructure pressures.

4. Request that the report be brought to Full Council before the Local Plan proceeds to its next formal stage, or, if that is not practicable, that Cabinet provides Full Council with a written explanation of how infrastructure risks will be addressed within the Local Plan timetable.
5. Reaffirm that Huntingdonshire's Local Plan should be prepared on the basis that housing, employment, infrastructure, and community services are planned together, with clear evidence of how growth will be supported, funded, phased, and delivered.

In presenting the proposed motion, Councillor Keane stated that its purpose was to review the infrastructure and supporting evidence underpinning work on the Local Plan. He noted the significant officer time and resources already invested, including briefings, checklists and other supporting documentation, and suggested that a thorough scrutiny of these elements would be a valuable exercise for the Council. Given the importance of the forthcoming meeting in September, he proposed that the review be undertaken.

The Chair invited the Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration and Housing, Councillor B Mickelburgh, to move an amendment. In doing so, Councillor B Mickelburgh stated that he broadly supported the principles of the substantive motion, including the need to plan housing, employment and infrastructure together, to base decisions on the best available evidence, and to take residents' concerns regarding infrastructure capacity seriously. He explained that the amendment sought to retain the substance of the motion while clarifying the requests being made of officers and ensuring consistency with the Council's governance processes.

The Elections and Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that to enable full participation in the debate, the amendment should be clearly set out by the proposer.

Councillor B Mickelburgh outlined the proposed amendments as follows:

Point 1: To clarify the request to officers by seeking a non-technical, plain English summary of infrastructure readiness, drawing on existing and emerging evidence relating to the Local Plan, including transport, education, health, utilities, flood risk, water management, community, green and environmental infrastructure. The document would be presented alongside other Local Plan documents through Overview and Scrutiny, Cabinet and Full Council.

Point 2: To remove the phrase "so far as the evidence allows" and refer consistently to a document rather than a report. The document would summarise infrastructure requirements, delivery assumptions, funding sources, responsibilities, risks, gaps, constraints, phasing issues and dependencies relevant to the preparation, soundness, viability and deliverability of the emerging Local Plan.

Point 3: To replace the word “report” with “document” for consistency. The document would consider cumulative infrastructure impacts across Huntingdonshire, including the interaction between major site allocations, market town growth, village allocations, employment sites and existing infrastructure pressures.

Point 4: To simplify the request by removing alternative actions and seeking that the document be considered by Overview and Scrutiny, Cabinet and Full Council alongside the Local Plan as it progresses to its next formal stage.

Point 5: No changes were proposed. The point would continue to reaffirm that the Local Plan should be prepared on the basis that housing, employment, infrastructure and community services are planned together, with clear evidence of how growth will be supported, funded, phased and delivered.

The amendment was seconded by Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor T Sanderson who reserved his right to speak.

Councillor R Martin raised a Point of Order under 14.3 of the Constitution, requesting written notice of the amended motion.

The Meeting adjourned at 7.23pm.
The Meeting resumed at 7.38pm.

Councillor R Martin reiterated that under 14.3 of the Constitution advises there should be a written copy of the amendment and that he could not see the wording that was displayed on the screen. The Chair proposed another adjournment in order for the amendment to be printed and circulated to Members.

The Meeting adjourned at 7.39pm.
The Meeting resumed at 7.46pm.

Speaking against the amendment, Councillor R Martin expressed concern about both the process leading to the debate and the purpose of the proposed changes. He stated that, in his view, the amendment did not clearly set out what it was intended to achieve and appeared to dilute the original motion rather than strengthen it. He suggested that the amendments were unnecessary and reflected an attempt to alter the motion without materially improving its objectives. Councillor R Martin advised that he would not support the amendment and looked forward to the continuation of the debate.

Responding to the amendment, Councillor D Keane thanked Councillor B Mickelburgh for engaging with the motion and for his broad support of its objectives. Whilst acknowledging that some of the proposed changes reflected governance and process considerations, he stressed that the motion was fundamentally about ensuring public confidence in the Local Plan rather than procedural matters. He stated that, in his view, the amendment altered the purpose of the motion by shifting the emphasis from enabling Members to satisfy themselves that the Local Plan was supported by deliverable, funded and appropriately phased infrastructure, towards the production of a plain English summary of existing and emerging evidence. He argued that Members would be required to make a significant planning decision in September and that residents would expect them to have scrutinised and challenged the evidence before reaching a conclusion. He also expressed concern that references to “existing and emerging evidence” could imply that evidence still under development was sufficient, and that a plain English summary might explain the evidence without necessarily assisting Members in testing its implications. He emphasised that the motion was not intended to generate additional documentation, nor to criticise the work undertaken by Officers, whose continuing efforts to develop the evidence base he welcomed. He concluded that Members needed to understand how the various strands of evidence, including transport, health, education, utilities, water, flood risk, viability and infrastructure funding, combined to support the Local Plan. He reiterated that the motion was not intended to delay or predetermine the Local Plan, but to provide assurance that the evidence had been properly examined. Whilst recognising the constructive intentions behind the amendment, he advised that he could not support it and urged Members to retain the original wording of the motion.

The Chair moved for a vote on Councillor B Mickelburgh’s amendment.

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

The amendment became a substantive motion.

Councillor T Sanderson thanked Councillors D Keane and A Bulat for bringing forward the motion and Councillor B Mickelburgh for his amendment. He also recognised the contributions of Members, Parish Councils and other stakeholders who had engaged with the Local Plan process. He noted that the Local Plan had been developed over three years, supported by extensive consultation and a substantial evidence base, including infrastructure and viability studies. He highlighted the significant work of the Local Plan team and the recent publication of further infrastructure evidence. He emphasised the importance of maintaining the Local Plan timetable, noting that Huntingdonshire faced increased housing targets and currently lacked a five-year housing land supply. He warned that delays could reduce the Council’s ability to control the location of future development and increase exposure to speculative planning applications and appeals. He also referred to ongoing work with partner organisations and infrastructure providers on transport, health, education and water infrastructure matters. Whilst acknowledging Members’ concerns regarding infrastructure provision, he expressed confidence in the robustness of the Local Plan process and supporting evidence base, and indicated his support for the substantive motion.

The Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce, Councillor L Davenport-Ray spoke from the perspective of representing a rapidly growing ward and highlighted the importance of ensuring that infrastructure kept pace with development. She noted that St Neots East had experienced significant growth and could see further expansion under the emerging Local Plan.
Referring to the publication of Stage 2 of the Infrastructure Delivery Study after the motion had been submitted, she asked Councillor D Keane whether, in light of the newly published evidence and updated

infrastructure information, he continued to support the original motion as proposed.

Councillor A Bulat thanked Councillor D Keane for bringing forward the motion and welcomed the constructive cross-party discussion on infrastructure and development. She emphasised the importance of ensuring that infrastructure planning kept pace with housing and employment growth, and that Members had access to up-to-date evidence ahead of key decisions on the Local Plan. She welcomed the constructive nature of the debate and stressed the need for strong political leadership in supporting planned growth. Referring to concerns raised by residents, she highlighted the importance of maintaining public confidence that the necessary infrastructure would be delivered alongside development. She drew particular attention to the A141, describing it as a key element in supporting strategic growth and noted the importance of continued engagement with partners on its development. She acknowledged progress made to date but recognised that some residents remained concerned about the pace of delivery and the uncertainty surrounding infrastructure provision. She concluded by emphasising that the motion was not intended to support or oppose the Local Plan, nor to predetermine future decisions, but rather to ensure that Members had the evidence needed to demonstrate that growth could be supported by appropriate infrastructure and to make a positive and informed case for the future development of the District.

In summing up, Councillor D Keane acknowledged the amendment to the motion, although he remained of the view that the original wording would have provided a stronger basis for scrutinising infrastructure readiness ahead of decisions on the Local Plan. He nevertheless confirmed his support for the amended motion. He emphasised that Members would ultimately be accountable for their decisions on the Local Plan and should be satisfied that the supporting evidence demonstrated that the necessary infrastructure could be delivered. Referring to issues raised by residents, he highlighted concerns relating to transport, wastewater, schools, healthcare, public transport, funding and phasing. He welcomed the work undertaken by officers and the publication of further evidence, expressing the hope that the information provided would give Members sufficient assurance on infrastructure requirements, delivery and associated risks. He concluded that Members had a responsibility to make decisions based on robust evidence and confirmed his support for the amended motion.

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

Councillor R Coogan moved, and it was duly seconded by Councillor H Tobias that

This Council notes:

The concerns raised regarding Cllr Stephen Ferguson's conduct in his capacity as Chair of Huntingdonshire District Council.

This Council believes that the Chair must command confidence across the whole Council and wider district, and must discharge the office with neutrality, impartiality, sound judgment, and respect for the Council's rules and legal obligations.

This Council therefore resolves:

1. That this Council has no confidence in Cllr Stephen Ferguson's continued ability to discharge the office of Chair in a neutral, impartial, lawful, and confidence-building manner.
2. That this Council calls on Cllr Stephen Ferguson to resign as Chair of Huntingdonshire District Council.

The Chair declared an interest in the item and reminded Members that he had been granted a dispensation to remain and participate in the debate. However, in the interests of impartiality, he vacated the Chair for the consideration of the item and invited the Vice-Chair to preside over that part of the meeting.

As Councillor R Coogan was invited to move the motion, a point of order was raised by Councillor H Tobias, seeking clarification on whether the Vice-Chair had a declarable interest in the item. The Vice-Chair advised that having been photographed with a Councillor at a Civic event did not constitute a declarable interest and he confirmed that no declaration would be made. Following a further challenge, the Vice-Chair reiterated that no declarable interest existed and the meeting proceeded.

In presenting the proposed motion, Councillor R Coogan set out the motion in the agenda, which expressed no confidence in Councillor S Ferguson's continued ability to discharge the office of Chair and called upon him to resign.

In speaking to the motion, Councillor R Coogan stated that the issue for Council was whether the Chair continued to command the confidence necessary to fulfil the role. He argued that the office of Chair required neutrality, impartiality, sound judgement and fairness, and contended that confidence in the Chair had been undermined by a series of incidents and public controversies. Councillor R Coogan emphasised that the motion was not intended as a standards or legal process, but as a judgement on confidence in a Civic office holder. He argued that concerns related to the cumulative impact of the Chair's conduct, including perceptions of impartiality and the separation between political activity and Civic responsibilities. He concluded that public confidence and accountability required Members to consider whether the Chair continued to represent the Council and its residents in an impartial and effective manner.

Speaking against the motion, Executive Leader, Councillor S Conboy, argued that a distinction should be made between mistakes, potential breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct, and a vote of no confidence in the Chair. She noted that the Chair had already publicly acknowledged and apologised for recent mistakes and observed that all Members could make errors in judgment. She stated that the motion was not a standards hearing and argued that many of the concerns raised related to political opinions, media reports and allegations rather than formally established findings. She emphasised that, where concerns about conduct existed, the Council had established procedures through the Code of Conduct process to consider evidence, context and responses from the Member concerned. Referring to the Council's Constitution, she noted the role of the Chair in promoting high standards of debate and local democracy, and argued that no clear evidence had been presented to demonstrate a breach of the Constitution. She cautioned against reaching conclusions on conduct or confidence without following established procedures and urged Members to uphold due process and natural justice. In concluding her remarks, she stated that concerns about misconduct should be addressed through the Council's established Code of Conduct procedures, which provided for the proper consideration of evidence and due process. She urged against using a political motion to determine matters that should be considered through an independent process and, for those reasons, advised that she could not support the motion.

Speaking against the motion, Councillor G Seeff stated that he had known Councillor S Ferguson for a number of years and, despite political differences, had always found him to be courteous, professional and committed to fulfilling his public responsibilities. He referred to Councillor S Ferguson's previous service in Civic and Council roles and expressed confidence in his integrity and dedication. He acknowledged that Councillor S Ferguson had recently made an error of judgement but noted that he had issued an unreserved apology. He argued that the matter should be viewed in context and highlighted that there had been no findings of serious misconduct. He concluded by expressing his confidence in Councillor S Ferguson's ability to continue carrying out the role of Chair fairly and effectively and urged Members to reject the motion.

Speaking against the motion, Councillor R Tomlinson stated that where concerns arose regarding a Member's conduct, established procedures existed for complaints to be reported and investigated. He noted that, to his knowledge, no such process had resulted in findings against Councillor S Ferguson. He further argued that the motion did not present a detailed case and that Members were being asked to withdraw confidence without the benefit of a formal investigation or findings. On that basis, he advised that he could not support the motion.

Speaking against the motion, Councillor A Bulat noted that interruptions and points of order were a normal part of Council debate and should not necessarily be viewed as personal or political actions. She expressed disappointment that the Council was debating matters of this nature rather than focusing on issues that residents regularly raised, such as infrastructure, development and Council services. Having reviewed the evidence submitted in support of the motion, s She stated that she did not consider it demonstrated a sufficient case for the action proposed. She noted that an apology had been issued and observed that no formal findings had been made through the Council's conduct processes. She also commented that the Chair's exercise of discretion in meetings was not prescribed in the manner suggested by the motion. She concluded that, having considered the evidence and his experience of working with Councillor S Ferguson in various public roles, she did not believe the case for removing confidence had been made. She therefore advised that she would not support the motion.

Speaking against the motion, Councillor L Dewey-Beckett thanked Councillor R Coogan for bringing the matter before Council and stated that it provided an opportunity for Members to reflect on the standards expected of elected Members. Referring to concerns regarding the Chair's use of a casting vote at the Annual Council meeting, Councillor L Dewey-Beckett noted that the Chair had acted in accordance with the powers provided by the Constitution. Whilst Members might have disagreed with the outcome, he argued that this did not make the decision undemocratic. He further stated that where concerns existed regarding a Member's conduct, the appropriate route was through the Council's Code of Conduct complaints process, which allowed matters to be considered independently and fairly. He expressed concern that motions of no confidence could risk substituting political debate for established procedures and concluded that he would vote against the motion.

Speaking against the motion, Councillor R Martin expressed the view that the matter did not warrant further debate and argued that the motion would not achieve its intended outcome, noting that the Chair would remain in office unless he chose to resign. He questioned the basis of the motion and argued that individuals should be free to express opinions within the law. Referring to documentation circulated in support of the motion, he criticised the content and suggested that not all relevant information had been presented. He concluded by stating that public office holders should expect scrutiny and differing opinions as part of public life and confirmed that he would not support the motion.

Speaking against the motion, Councillor B Mickelburgh stated that, having reviewed the supporting documentation, he did not consider that it provided sufficient evidence to justify a vote of no confidence in the Chair. Referring to concerns regarding the Chair's use of casting votes, Councillor Mickelburgh noted that these had been exercised in accordance with the Council's Constitution and argued that the lawful use of a constitutional power should not be regarded as misconduct. He observed that much of the material presented comprised allegations and opinions rather than formal findings. Councillor B Mickelburgh acknowledged that Councillor S Ferguson had made an inappropriate comment and had subsequently issued a public apology. He maintained that any concerns regarding conduct should be addressed through the Council's established complaints procedures rather than through a motion of no confidence.

He concluded that he did not believe the case for withdrawing confidence in the Chair had been made and confirmed that he would vote against the motion.

Speaking in response to the motion, Councillor S Ferguson stated that he had not been provided with the evidence bundle referred to during the debate and therefore had not had the opportunity to review or respond to the allegations being made. He expressed concern that the process was unfair and did not allow him to defend himself properly. He also highlighted what he described as a pattern of bullying and harassment, including the circulation of manipulated images depicting him in his capacity as Chair. He argued that such attacks were directed not only at him personally but also at the office of Chair and the Council as an institution. Referring to his experience in a number of Civic and local government leadership roles, he stated that he had consistently sought to carry out his duties with integrity and impartiality. He cited previous occasions on which he had exercised his casting vote contrary to the interests of personal or political associates, arguing that this demonstrated his commitment to acting independently and in accordance with his responsibilities as Chair. he concluded by stating that impartiality did not require silence in the face of discrimination and that he remained committed to treating all Members fairly whilst upholding principles of fairness, inclusion and decency.

Speaking in support of the motion, Councillor R Ioannides argued that the issue extended beyond a single incident and instead concerned whether the Chair continued to command the confidence and demonstrate the judgement required for the role. He referred to concerns raised during the Annual Council meeting regarding the Chair's impartiality, noting that questions about the Chair's conduct had arisen during the appointment of Committee chairs and Vice-Chairs. He also highlighted issues relating to the display of a flag at a Council building and subsequent public comments made by the Chair. He contended that the Chair's response to the matter did not sufficiently accept responsibility and suggested that this had contributed to concerns regarding public confidence in the office of Chair.

Raising a point of order, Councillor L Davenport-Ray raised concerns regarding references being made to statements and evidence contained within a supporting evidence bundle. She advised that neither she nor Councillor S Ferguson had received the documents and therefore had not had the opportunity to review or respond to their contents. The Vice-Chair acknowledged the concern. The Elections and Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer clarified that the Council had not formally received or been provided with the documents referred to.

Continuing his speech in support of the motion, Councillor R Ioannides referred to a social media post made by Councillor S Ferguson in relation to a local farm fire and argued that, although an apology had subsequently been issued, the original comment demonstrated poor judgement. He also referred to comments made on social media which he said had affected him and his family. He stated that he was not alleging that Councillor S Ferguson had authored the comments in question, but raised concerns regarding his involvement in the wider discussion.
He referred to concerns raised publicly by residents regarding the Chair's conduct and argued that these concerns should not be dismissed, even where individual allegations had not been formally proven. He stated that the motion was based not on any single incident but on what he considered to be a pattern of behaviour that had given rise to concerns about confidence in the office of Chair. He concluded that the central question for Members was whether the Chair continued to command the confidence of the Council and advised that, in his view, he did not. He therefore urged Members to support the motion.

During the debate, Councillor H Tobias sought permission to make a further contribution despite not having reserved the right to speak when the motion was seconded. He argued that, in the interests of fairness and consistency, he should be afforded the same opportunity that had been given earlier in the meeting to another Member. Clarification was provided regarding the procedural circumstances under which Members may reserve the right to speak. Following further discussion and a point of order concerning the Procedural circumstances, the meeting was adjourned.

The meeting adjourned at 8.45pm.

The meeting resumed at 8.53pm.

Following the adjournment, the Vice-Chair clarified that Councillor H Tobias had seconded the motion and, as he had not been invited to indicate whether he wished to reserve his right to speak at the appropriate point, would be permitted to address the Council before the mover exercised his right of reply. Speaking in support of the motion, Councillor H Tobias stated that the debate was not about policy, party politics or personalities, but about fairness, accountability and good governance. He argued that Members had a responsibility to challenge matters of concern where appropriate and to act in the interests of residents rather than political loyalties. He emphasised that the motion should be considered on the basis of democratic accountability and the standards expected of public office holders. He concluded by urging Members to focus on fairness, justice and effective representation when determining the motion.

In exercising his right of reply, Councillor R Coogan stated that, while an apology had been issued in relation to previous comments, he would have preferred to see a direct apology to those affected. He argued that the issue before Council related not to political views, but to the judgement and visible fairness expected of the holder of a Civic office. He noted that no formal findings had been made regarding the matters raised but stated that the motion was not intended to be a Code of Conduct process. Instead, he emphasised that it was a matter of confidence for Council to determine on the basis of the information before it. He concluded by stressing that Members were not being asked to judge Councillor S Ferguson's entire public service record, but rather whether he continued to command the confidence necessary to fulfil the role of Chair. Councillor R Coogan stated that, in his view, that confidence had been lost and urged Members to support the motion.

A Motion for a recorded vote having succeeded, following this debate in accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 the following Members voted for, against or abstained from a vote on the Motion.

For (8) Councillors Coogan, Francis, Gammons, Henly, Ioannides, Lancaster, M Simpson and Tobias.

Against (23) Councillors Blackwell, Bulat, Burke, Claffey, Conboy, Davenport-Ray, Dewey-Beckett, Harvey, N Hunt, A Hunt, J Hunt, Innes, Kerr, B Mickelburgh, D Mickelburgh, Mokbul, Sanderson, Sarkies, Seeff, Tomlinson, Wells, Wood and Young.

Abstain (8) Councillors Bywater, Cawley, Gardener, Keane, Lowe, Martin, McIlwain and P Simpson.

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

The meeting adjourned at 9.03pm.
The meeting resumed at 9.09pm.

Councillor R Coogan moved, and it was duly seconded by Councillor J Francis that

The Council notes that:

All councillors must retain their individual rights to speak, vote, ask questions, submit motions and represent residents, and that statutory political-balance requirements must continue to be met.

However, this Council believes that very small political groups should not create disproportionate administration, duplication or officer workload.

This Council therefore resolves to:

1. amend the Constitution so that groups of five councillors or fewer receive only the recognition required by law, and no additional group-based administrative or procedural support unless expressly agreed by Council. This Council believes this change will help cut waste, reduce bureaucracy and ensure Council time and taxpayers' money are focused on delivering services for local people.

In presenting the proposed motion, Councillor R Coogan set out the proposed amendment to the Constitution whereby political groups comprising five or fewer Councillors would receive only the recognition required by law, with any additional administrative or procedural support subject to Council approval. He stated that the proposal would not affect individual Councillors' democratic rights to speak, vote, ask questions, submit motions or represent residents, nor would it alter statutory political balance requirements. He argued that recognition of very small political groups could create disproportionate administrative demands and officer workload, and that the proposed threshold would provide a proportionate approach while retaining Council discretion to approve additional support where justified. He further stated that the proposal would reduce unnecessary bureaucracy, make more effective use of Officer resources, and help ensure that Council time and public funds remained focused on the delivery of frontline services and good governance.

Councillor B Mickelburgh moved an amendment to the motion. In presenting the amendment, he referred to Part 3 of the Constitution, which placed responsibility for considering proposals to amend the Council's constitutional arrangements and making recommendations to Council within the remit of the Corporate Governance Committee. he stated that any proposed constitutional change should follow the process set out in the Constitution and be subject to appropriate consideration before being referred back to Full Council for determination. The amendment was described as ensuring compliance with the Council's established governance procedures.

The amended wording proposed was:

"Initiate the process that considers amendments to the Constitution so that groups of five Councillors or fewer receive only the recognition required by law and no additional group-based administrative or procedural support unless expressly agreed by the Council."

Councillor L Dewey-Beckett seconded the amendment and expressed his support, stating that it was not intended to reject the proposal but to ensure that any constitutional change was considered through the Council's established governance processes. He argued that the proposal should first be reviewed by the Constitution Review Working Group and the Corporate Governance Committee before returning to Council for a final decision. It was noted that constitutional amendments had long-term implications and should be subject to appropriate scrutiny. He concluded by urging Members to support the amendment.

Councillor R Martin spoke against the amendment, stating that if the intention was to refer the proposal for consideration by the appropriate body, this could already be achieved through the procedures set out in the Constitution. He argued that the matter should have been referred through the established constitutional process from the outset and questioned the need for the amendment.

Councillor R Coogan spoke against the amendment, stating that the original motion was intended to reduce unnecessary administrative costs and officer time as quickly as possible. Councillor Coogan argued that the proposal was straightforward and did not require additional scrutiny or another stage in the decision-making process. Whilst acknowledging that the administration may wish to follow the process proposed in the amendment, he expressed the view that the amendment would create further bureaucracy and officer workload, contrary to the objective of improving efficiency and reducing waste.

The Chair moved for a vote on Councillor B Mickelburgh's amendment.

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

The amendment became a substantive motion.

Councillor J Kerr spoke against the substantive motion, stating that she considered it to be directed at the Independent Group, of which she was the Leader. She noted that she had been elected as an Independent Councillor and argued that neither she nor members of her group placed an unreasonable demand on Officer time. She expressed concern regarding the purpose of the motion and suggested that more Officer and Council time had been spent debating the proposal than would ordinarily be spent supporting her group.

Councillor L Davenport-Ray spoke against the substantive motion, expressing concern that it implied constitutional change without clearly identifying the relevant constitutional provisions or following the appropriate process for amendment. She also stated that the motion appeared to be directed at leaders of smaller political groups.

During the speech, a number of points of order were raised by Councillor R Coogan. The Chair did not uphold the points of order..

She further argued that the motion would have little practical effect on smaller groups, questioned the rationale behind it, and stated that matters relating to electoral systems and representation were beyond the Council's powers. Concluding, she described the motion as an unnecessary use of Council time and urged Members to vote against it.

Councillor R Martin spoke against the substantive motion, arguing that it would not deliver the waste reductions claimed and questioning what practical changes it proposed. He noted that political groups were recognised in law and expressed concern that the motion appeared to target smaller political groups. He emphasised the rights of all elected Members to engage with Officers and represent their residents, regardless of group size. He concluded that he viewed the motion as unnecessary and politically motivated, and confirmed that he would not support it.

Councillor A Bulat spoke against the substantive motion, noting that, as a non-aligned Member, she was unclear what additional administrative or procedural support small political groups were alleged to receive. She stated that Councillors were responsible for raising casework and requests directly with Officers and questioned whether the issue identified by the motion existed in practice. She further suggested that the time spent debating the motion outweighed any potential savings that might result from it. In the absence of evidence demonstrating a problem, she concluded that the motion sought to address an issue that had not been substantiated and confirmed that she would vote against it.

Councillor J Francis spoke in support of the substantive motion, stating that it was founded on the principle of accountability in the use of public resources. He argued that, where administrative or procedural support exceeded statutory requirements, its provision should be justified and approved by Council rather than granted automatically. He emphasised that the motion would not affect the democratic rights of individual Councillors or the role of smaller political groups. He stated that the proposal sought to promote transparency, accountability and value for money by ensuring that discretionary support arrangements were subject to appropriate scrutiny. He concluded by urging Members to support the motion.

Councillor R Coogan exercised his right of reply, reiterating that the motion sought to reduce unnecessary administrative burden and officer time while preserving the rights of all Councillors to speak, vote, ask questions and represent residents. He argued that the proposal related only to additional support beyond statutory requirements and would help ensure officer capacity and public resources were used efficiently. He concluded by urging Members to support the motion.

Having been put to the vote, the Motion as amended was declared to be DEFEATED.

23. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10.1, the following Public Question was presented to the Council –

In February this year Houghton & Wyton Parish Council presented the 'Pause the Plan' petition to Full Council on behalf of almost 900 residents from across Huntingdonshire.

The petition raised concerns about infrastructure, cumulative impacts and the evidence supporting the emerging Local Plan.

The Council's own Petition Scheme explains that, following presentation and questions, the Council will consider what course of action to take and that this may include referral to Cabinet, a Committee or Overview & Scrutiny for further consideration. It also states that the petition organiser will be informed of the steps taken or proposed in response.

Can the Executive therefore explain what consideration has been given to the petition since February, what actions have been taken in response to the issues raised, and why, 5 months on, petitioners have not yet received a substantive response outlining the Council's conclusions?

The Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor T Sanderson, thanked Holme and Whittlesey Parish Council for its presentation in February 2026 and for attending the meeting. Members noted that the issues raised had been carefully considered.

It was reported that the Local Development Scheme had been amended, with the pre-submission Local Plan now scheduled for September rather than June. Officers had continued to engage with statutory consultees and infrastructure providers to ensure the evidence base was robust, up to date, and capable of supporting a sound and deliverable Local Plan in accordance with national planning policy.

Members noted that the Infrastructure Delivery Study (Stage 2) was published on 22 July, alongside further supporting evidence including heritage impact assessments, ecological constraints assessments, the Integrated Water Management Strategy, Water Cycle Study (Stage 2), and Whole Plan Viability Assessment (Stage 2). This work had been undertaken collaboratively with key stakeholders, including the NHS, Environment Agency, Anglian Water and other infrastructure providers.

The Committee was advised that Statements of Common Ground were being published with infrastructure providers, including Anglian Water, the NHS, UK Power Networks, the Environment Agency and the Lead Local Flood Authority, with further statements to follow as they were finalised.

An apology was offered if the Parish Council felt that previous responses had not fully addressed its concerns. It was assured that representations received through the Local Plan process have been and will continue to be carefully considered, including through independent examination by the Planning Inspector.

24. 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.

Councillor Conboy opened her address by reflecting on the Council's strong performance and progress during the current administration, noting that difficult but necessary decisions had been taken to address significant financial challenges inherited four years ago. It was reported that these decisions had contributed to improved service delivery, stronger financial stability and better outcomes for residents.

Members were advised of a number of key achievements, including a substantial reduction in the planning application backlog, improved performance against planning determination targets, reliable waste collection services, increased Council tax support for residents, growth in leisure and active lifestyles participation, homelessness prevention outcomes, significant improvements in broadband and 5G coverage, delivery of affordable housing, and progress in implementing the Council's climate programme.

The Council's new Corporate Plan was presented as building on this progress through three priorities: improving quality of life; creating a better Huntingdonshire for the future; and delivering core services effectively. The importance of early intervention, health and wellbeing initiatives, leisure provision and the proposed Huntingdon Sport and Health Hub was emphasised as part of the Council's commitment to supporting stronger communities.

Members noted the Council's continued focus on supporting businesses, strengthening market towns, attracting investment and ensuring Huntingdonshire benefits from opportunities associated with the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor. It was stressed that effective planning for growth was essential to ensure the provision of homes, jobs, transport infrastructure, education, healthcare and green spaces.

The Leader also reaffirmed the importance of delivering high-quality core services, including waste collection, planning, environmental maintenance, customer support and sound financial management, which underpinned public confidence in the Council.

Reference was made to ongoing Local Government Reorganisation and the uncertainty surrounding the Government's preferred option. Members were advised that, regardless of the outcome, the Council's priority would remain maintaining service delivery, supporting staff, protecting financial stability and ensuring a strong transition to any future unitary authority arrangements.

In closing, the Leader reflected on the collective efforts of Councillors and Officers over the past four years, acknowledging that while challenges remained, the Council was in a stronger financial and operational position, and remained committed to serving the residents of Huntingdonshire and leaving the authority in a stronger position for the future.

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor R Martin, thanked the Executive Leader for her leadership of the Council and acknowledged the positive working relationships that existed across political groups despite differing viewpoints. Appreciation was also expressed to Council Officers and staff for their professionalism and commitment in delivering services and supporting the Council's work.

Members were assured of the Opposition Group's support for officers and staff as the Council approached Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), recognising the uncertainty this process may create. A commitment was given to ensuring officers had the resources and support required to maximise future opportunities within any successor authority arrangements.

Councillor R Martin challenged the characterisation of the Council's financial position four years ago, noting that significant sums had subsequently been added to reserves and arguing that this demonstrated a stronger financial position than suggested. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that the Council remained a well-run authority and that services continued to be delivered effectively.

Reference was made to the importance of focusing on the future, particularly in light of the Government's forthcoming decision on LGR. Members were reminded of the need to provide reassurance to residents that the Council will continue to deliver services, represent local interests and maintain high standards regardless of any future governance changes.

Councillor R Martin highlighted several strategic opportunities for Huntingdonshire, including Project Fairfax and the development of the geospatial technology sector associated with RAF Wyton. The significant contribution of Officers and the Economic Development Team to advancing these initiatives was recognised, and it was noted that the projects enjoyed cross-party and cross-government support. Members were advised that these opportunities had the potential to attract investment, create jobs and support long-term economic growth in the area.

The potential economic benefits arising from the proposed Universal Studios development in Bedfordshire were also highlighted. It was suggested that Huntingdonshire should seek to maximise opportunities associated with the scheme, including improved public transport links and access to employment opportunities for local residents.

In closing, Councillor R Martin reaffirmed a commitment to constructive cross-party working in the interests of Huntingdonshire and expressed pride in serving the Council and its residents.

25. QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

In response to a question from Councillor R Tomlinson, the Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor B Mickelburgh, advised that confirmation of the programme would need to be informed by the latest scheduling and project management information. By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Tomlinson sought assurance that St Neots Town Council would be notified promptly and directly should there be any risk to the planned completion date of March 2027.

Councillor B Mickelburgh acknowledged that a range of factors could affect project delivery timescales and noted that any assessment of risks to the programme should be based on a detailed review of current project plans and scheduling information. It was therefore considered appropriate to review the latest programme data before providing further assurances regarding the project timeline.

Councillor Burke asked for an update on repair works to the skate ramps at Hill Rise Park, St Ives, and on the potential delivery of a second phase of improvements. In response, the Executive Councillor for Parks, Countryside, Waste and Street Scene, Councillor J Kerr, advised that repair works to the skate park were underway and expected to be completed by the end of the week.

Members were informed that a second phase of improvements was being developed through the Council's Play Sufficiency Project. To support this work, officers from the Play and Funding Team attended the St Ives Carnival to engage with residents and gather feedback on the skate park and wider local play provision. This information would be used to inform the next stage of the project. It was reported that the Council had allocated £730,000 of capital funding over a three-year period to improve outdoor play spaces across the District. Investment priorities would be determined based on factors including site condition, age, accessibility, inclusivity, community need, usage levels and location.

Members noted that Hill Rise Skate Park had been identified as a priority scheme within Phase 1 of the Play Sufficiency Programme for 2026/27. Other planned improvements during this phase included sites in Huntingdon North, Huntingdon East and St Neots. Community engagement exercises were being planned to help shape the scope of improvements at each location.

Councillor R Martin raised concerns regarding the safety of Councillors, citing recent incidents. following recent reports of the murder of Anne Widdecombe, credible death threats made against a Fenland Councillor, and incidents of intimidation and harassment experienced by elected Members. He requested that Officers urgently review the protections available to Councillors and consider further training to help Members recognise and respond to intimidation, harassment and threatening behaviour. Concern was also expressed about instances where individuals had supported perpetrators of such behaviour, highlighting the importance of appropriate training and support.

In response, the Executive Leader, Councillor S Conboy, acknowledged the seriousness of the issue and noted that the Local Government Association (LGA) Member safety training had previously been provided and should be considered for inclusion in future induction programmes. Members were encouraged to access the online training resources available. It was also noted that updated guidance on reporting concerns to the police had been circulated to Councillors earlier in the day. Members experiencing safety concerns were advised to contact Democratic Services, who could coordinate appropriate support and advice.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Martin thanked officers for their existing support and requested that personal safety devices (such as lone worker alarms or SOS devices) be made available, on request, to any Councillor who felt they would benefit from them when undertaking Council duties, including community engagements and surgeries.

Councillor S Conboy confirmed that this proposal would be explored and indicated support from Senior Officers. Members were reminded to undertake appropriate risk assessments and avoid situations where they may be placed at risk. Whilst such incidents remained relatively uncommon, the importance of member safety was emphasised.

Councillor A Bulat referred to comments made by Executive Councillor for Planning, Councillor T Sanderson on social media, stating that they suggested his views had been misrepresented during the earlier debate on government housing targets. She apologised if any misrepresentation had occurred and invited Councillor T Sanderson, as Executive Councillor for Planning, to clarify his position for the record. Councillor T Sanderson responded that it was unsurprising that the Government had increased housing targets, given that insufficient homes had been built under the previous Government. He stated that it was therefore important for the Council to progress a sound Local Plan and move out of the current position of tilted balance.

Councillor J Hunt asked Councillor T Sanderson what percentage of planning applications were currently being processed within the required timescales.

Councillor T Sanderson reported that year-to-date performance was:

- **Major applications:** 87.5% determined within target timescales, against a target of 85%;
- **Minor applications:** 94.4% determined within target timescales, against a target of 85%; and
- **Householder applications:** 92% determined within target timescales, against a target of 90%.

Councillor T Sanderson added that there was a backlog of approximately 11 applications and commended the Planning team for its performance.

Councillor R Ioannides raised concerns regarding Councillor safety and advised that he had submitted a report under Operation Ford on 2 July, followed it up the next day, and received an initial response shortly afterwards. The Member stated that they had received no further communication since and expressed concern that, despite assurances regarding Councillor safety, the case had not progressed.

In response, Councillor Conboy apologised that the Member felt unsupported and advised that she was not familiar with the specific protocol in this case. She undertook to follow up with Officers to establish how the matter had been handled, whether it had been reported through the Council or directly to the police, and what level of feedback the Member could reasonably expect. She acknowledged the seriousness of the issue and agreed to ensure the Member received the appropriate information.

By way of clarification, the Member advised that the matter had been reported to both the police and the Monitoring Officers at the District and County Councils, and reiterated that they had not yet received a further response.

Councillor D McIlwain referred to comments made regarding the promotion of 4G and 5G connectivity across Huntingdonshire and highlighted ongoing issues with mobile phone coverage in Warboys and Ramsey. He requested that these areas not be overlooked when improvements to digital connectivity were being considered.

Councillor J Francis noted that Yaxley has similar connection issues.
In response, Councillor S Conboy acknowledged that mobile coverage varied across Huntingdonshire and undertook to raise the matter with Officers and seek an update on progress. She advised that the Council worked with partner organisations to support the delivery of telecoms infrastructure and invited Members to provide details of other areas experiencing poor coverage so that these could also be considered.

Councillor S Claffey asked what practical measures the Council had taken to protect the wellbeing of refuse and recycling crews during recent periods of exceptionally hot weather, including arrangements for drinking water, rest breaks, modified working practices and welfare monitoring.

In response, Executive Councillor for Parks, Countryside, Waste and Street Scene, Councillor J Kerr stated that the welfare of frontline staff was a priority for the Council, particularly during increasingly frequent periods of extreme heat. She explained that crews received toolbox talks on safe working practices in high temperatures and that, where extreme heat was forecast, collection rounds were started earlier to reduce exposure during the hottest part of the day. Staff were provided with caps, sunscreen, UV-protection safety glasses and bottled water, with additional supplies made available throughout the day. She also noted that an ice cream van visit had recently been arranged to recognise staff for their work. She added that the Council's commitment to staff welfare extended throughout the year, with appropriate clothing and equipment provided for all weather conditions. She thanked frontline staff for their continued dedication in delivering essential services.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Claffey, Councillor J Kerr confirmed that these arrangements already formed part of the Council’s standard response to hot weather conditions.

She noted that any decision to bring collection rounds forward would continue to be communicated to residents when required.

26. VARIATION TO PART 3 OF THE CONSTITUTION - RESPONSIBILITY FOR FUNCTIONS: ADOPTION OF NATIONAL SCHEME OF DELEGATION OF DECISIONS ON PLANNING APPLICATIONS

A report was presented by the Executive Councillor for Governance and Democratic Services, Councillor L Dewey-Beckett (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) advising on changes to the Constitution as a result of the adoption of the National Scheme of Delegation of Decisions on Planning Applications.

By way of introduction, Councillor L Dewey-Beckett advised that changes to planning legislation now limited Planning Committee membership to a maximum of 13 councillors. As the Development Management Committee currently comprised 16 Members, an amendment to the Constitution was required to ensure compliance with the new regulations by the prescribed deadline.

It was noted that the Corporate Governance Committee had considered and endorsed the proposal. Councillor L Dewey-Beckett then moved the recommendation that the Council approve the constitutional amendment reducing the membership of the Development Management Committee from 16 to 13 members.

The Executive Councillor for Finances and Resources, Councillor J Harvey seconded the motion.

Councillor R Martin stated that he supported the recommendation before the Council. He noted that, whilst he did not fully support the National Scheme of Delegation, the decision before Members was solely to implement the statutory changes required to Committee Membership numbers and was not a decision on the merits of the national scheme itself. He commented that the report was somewhat confusing, as it contained significant detail regarding the National Scheme of Delegation rather than focusing on the specific change being considered. He suggested that future reports should be more closely aligned to the decision required, to avoid unnecessary debate on matters that were not before the Committee.

To conclude, Councillor L Dewey-Beckett clarified that Council was being asked to determine only the reduction in Committee Membership from 16 to 13 members, as the size and structure of the Committee was a matter reserved to Full Council. Members were not voting on Schedule 1, Schedule 2 referral criteria or the removal of call-in provisions, as these were prescribed by the 2026 Regulations and would take effect through national legislation from 31 October. It was noted that the report included this information to provide context on the wider implications of the changes to the national scheme of delegation.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the Council adopt the National Scheme of Delegation of

Decisions on Planning Applications.

27. REPRESENTATIONS OF POLITICAL GROUPS ON DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEES AND PANELS

A report was submitted by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) relating to the principles and proportionality to be applied to the appointment of Committees and Panels in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and Part II of the Local Government Act 2000.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the allocation of seats on District Council Committees and Panels to political groups and non-aligned Members be determined as set out in the report now submitted.

28. PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2026

The Council were asked to approve additional meetings of the Cabinet and Council on 9 September 2026 and to approve the change to the meeting of the Employment Committee from 9th September 2026 to 23rd September 2026.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the additional meetings be scheduled.

29. CORPORATE PLAN REFRESH 2026/27

In conjunction with a report by the Project Manager for Transformation & Corporate Reporting (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance, Councillor N Hunt presented the Corporate Plan Refresh 2026 report. He set out the administration's strategic priorities and resource allocation. The Plan retained its three core priorities: improving quality of life, creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations, and delivering core services effectively.

Key actions included expanding One Leisure provision, improving housing standards, bringing empty homes back into use, increasing support for care leavers, and helping residents access financial assistance. It was noted that frontline services would be protected and that Overview and Scrutiny (Performance & Growth) Panel comments had been considered.
Councillor N Hunt commended the refreshed Corporate Plan to Council.

Councillor S Mokbul left the meeting at 10.23pm.

Councillor S Mokbul rejoined the meeting at 10.25pm

The Executive Leader, Councillor S Conboy seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak.

Councillor R Martin stated that he could not support the refreshed Corporate Plan and highlighted that concerns had also been raised during Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) Panel. He questioned the timing of the review, noting that a Corporate Plan had been approved only a few months earlier and that the outcome of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) decision was imminent. He argued that the Plan should be deferred until after the LGR announcement, when the implications for the Council's future structure and priorities would be clearer. He suggested that the existing Corporate Plan should remain in place in the meantime and urged the administration to reconsider and bring forward a revised Plan at a later date.

Councillor N Sarkies left the meeting at 10.28pm.

Councillor N Sarkies rejoined the meeting at 10.29pm.

Councillor R Coogan questioned the timing of the Corporate Plan review ahead of the Local Government Reorganisation decision. He argued that the Plan's priorities did not adequately reflect residents' priorities and expressed concern about the absence of clear performance measures for some objectives. He advocated placing greater emphasis on delivering value for money and high-quality frontline services. He also questioned the prominence of carbon reduction objectives within the Plan, suggesting that the Council should focus on practical environmental measures and core service delivery. He suggested that delivering effective services to residents should be the Council's primary priority.

Councillor A Bulat queried comments that there was a lack of appetite within central government to fund local authorities adequately, citing recent increases in local government funding and reforms intended to provide greater financial certainty for Councils.

Councillor A Bulat expressed concern at reports that Members of the administration had raised objections to the Corporate Plan, stating that administration Members would ordinarily be expected to support it. However, she noted that she broadly supported the Plan, observing that it largely built upon the previous Corporate Plan and the work undertaken by the former administration. Accordingly, she confirmed that she would support the proposal.

Councillor R Tomlinson referred to the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) timeline set out in the Corporate Plan and questioned whether the Council had sufficient capacity to deliver the proposed actions alongside the additional work required as part of the reorganisation process. Noting that only 33 of 67 actions had been completed in the previous year, he expressed concern that the 57 actions contained within the refreshed Plan were not realistic and suggested that some objectives may not be achievable given the demands of LGR.

The Executive Leader, Councillor S Conboy stated that the Corporate Plan provided an important framework for officers and guides the delivery of day-to-day services. She advised that the Plan had been developed with Officers and was considered deliverable within existing resources.

Whilst acknowledging that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) would place additional demands on the Council, Councillor S Conboy stated that preparations were already underway and that every effort would be made to ensure that business-as-usual services were maintained. She noted that further work relating to LGR would be brought forward separately. She emphasised that the refreshed Corporate Plan had been streamlined to focus on key priorities and objectives and expressed confidence that it was both realistic and deliverable. She confirmed that the Council would continue to progress both the Corporate Plan and LGR requirements, regardless of the outcome of the forthcoming LGR announcement.

Councillor P Gammons left the meeting at 10.39pm.

Councillor P Gammons rejoined the meeting at 10.41pm.

In closing the debate, Councillor N Hunt reaffirmed his view that local government remained under significant financial pressure and maintained that central government funding was insufficient to meet increasing demands on Councils. He rejected suggestions that the ordering of the Council's priorities implied differing levels of importance, reiterating that all three priorities were equally weighted. In response to comments regarding carbon reduction objectives, he noted that a number of climate-related initiatives had generated financial savings for the Council, citing energy savings achieved through solar panel installations at One Leisure sites. He concluded that the Corporate Plan provided clear direction for Officers and supported the delivery of the administration's objectives, and urged Council to support the Plan.

Prior to the vote, the Chair advised Council that three Members had left the meeting during the debate and, based on advice received, would not be eligible to vote on the item. A point of order was then raised querying whether, under the Constitution, Members were only required to be present at the time of the vote.

The Chair agreed that the constitutional position should be checked and adjourned the meeting to obtain clarification before proceeding to the vote.

The meeting adjourned at 10.42pm.

The meeting resumed at 10.54pm.

The Elections and Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that the Council's constitutional position remained unchanged and that Members who had left the chamber during the debate should not vote, as they had not heard the full discussion.

The Chair ruled that Councillors S Mokbul, N Sarkis and P Gammons would not be permitted to vote on the item. Councillor R Tomlinson queried the ruling in relation to Councillor P Gammons, who had left during the right of reply, but legal advice confirmed that the right of reply formed part of the debate..

Having been moved and seconded, and upon being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED

a) that the refreshed Corporate Plan (attached at Appendix 1 of the report) be approved; and

b) that the Key Performance Indicator changes (attached at Appendix 4 of the report) be approved.

30. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE ANNUAL REPORT

Councillor M J Burke, former Chair of the Corporate Governance Committee presented the Annual Report of the Committee for 2025/26 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which summarised the Committees activities and the issues that arose within the financial year.

Councillor M J Burke highlighted the acknowledgements contained within the report and expressed thanks to Officers, Members and the Council's Independent Member, Philip Webb, for their contributions and support during the year.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the Annual Report 2025/26 of the Corporate Governance Committee be received and noted.

31. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

Councillor N Hunt, former 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 2025/26.

In presenting the report, Councillor N Hunt reflected on the significant improvements made to the Council's scrutiny function over the past four years.

It was noted that the scrutiny process had previously become less effective, with an overburdened work programme limiting opportunities for detailed policy review and meaningful recommendations. Since then, substantial work had been undertaken by Members and Officers to strengthen both the culture and operation of overview and scrutiny, with the past year representing a particularly important period of progress.

Key improvements included the removal of the previous "conveyor belt" approach to work programming, the introduction of a strengthened process for Member-led items, and earlier engagement in policy development, enabling panels to influence and shape proposals at a formative stage. These changes were recognised as having had a positive impact on policy outcomes and the effectiveness of scrutiny.

The importance of continued engagement from Executive Councillors, Panel Chairs, Vice-Chairs and Members was highlighted to ensure scrutiny remained effective and constructive. Support was expressed for those continuing this work in the new municipal year.

Thanks were extended to former Councillors Simone Taylor, Ben Pitt and Councillor Cath Gleadow for their contributions as Chairs and Vice-Chairs, and to the Democratic Services Officers for their support to the Overview and Scrutiny function.

The Panels were acknowledged as having a strong foundation on which to build, and best wishes were offered for a productive year ahead.

The Chair called a vote, 33 For, 0 Against, 8 Abstentions.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

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

32. 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.

There were no questions raised.

33. USE OF SPECIAL URGENCY PROVISIONS 2025/26

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.

It was 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.

Councillor R Martin raised concerns regarding the accuracy and completeness of the report. He noted that the use of special urgency provisions in relation to parking fee changes in December had not been included and expressed disappointment that an item listed in the report had not been accompanied by a report to Cabinet explaining the use of the provisions, as he believed was required. In response, the Head of Paid Service acknowledged the points raised and confirmed that they would be reviewed.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

to note the contents of the report.

34. OUTCOMES FROM COMMITTEES AND PANELS

A copy of the list of meetings held since the last meeting of the Council held on 25th February 2026 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.

35. VARIATIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS

On the recommendation of Councillors S Conboy, R Martin, R Coogan, J Kerr and L Davenport-Ray, it was

RESOLVED

a) that Councillor G Seeff be appointed to the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) Panel in place of Councillor S Ferguson.
b) that Councillor D McIlwain be appointed to the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnership) Panel in place of Councillor M Burke
c) Councillors J Gray and R Ioannides will be coming off the Development Management Committee.
d) that Councillor S Smith will be appointed to Membership of the Licensing Committee in place of Councillor M Hassall
e) That Councillor M Hassall be appointed to membership of the Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) Panel in place of Councillor S Smith

The meeting ended at 11.25pm.

Chair