



EAST  
CAMBRIDGESHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Agenda Item No 7**

**Minutes of a Meeting of  
East Cambridgeshire District Council held at  
The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE on  
Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2023 at 6.00pm**

**PRESENT**

Councillor Christine Ambrose Smith	Councillor Julia Huffer
Councillor David Ambrose Smith	Councillor Bill Hunt
Councillor Sue Austen	Councillor Mark Inskip
Councillor Anna Bailey	Councillor Alec Jones
Councillor Ian Bovingdon	Councillor Daniel Schumann
Councillor David Brown	Councillor Joshua Schumann
Councillor Charlotte Cane	Councillor Alan Sharp (Chairman)
Councillor Lorna Dupré	Councillor John Trapp
Councillor Lavinia Edwards	Councillor Paola Trimarco
Councillor Lis Every	Councillor Jo Webber
Councillor Mark Goldsack	Councillor Christine Whelan
Councillor Simon Harries	Councillor Gareth Wilson

3 members of the public were in attendance.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, tributes were given and a minute's silence was held as a mark of respect following the deaths of former District Councillor Chris Morris (Dullingham Villages Ward 2011-2019) and former District Councillor Geoffrey Woollard (Bottisham Ward 1985-1991).

Tributes to former Councillor Chris Morris:

*Cllr Alan Sharp* - I took over representing the Dullingham villages - there was a Ward boundary reorganisation in 2019 - but the villages that Chris represented of Dullingham, Stetchworth (which is my home village) and Woodditton were part of his Ward. He was a conscientious councillor for the eight years of his term of office and supported his parish councils with a great deal of diligence. I discovered at his funeral, that he was involved in many activities around the area and that he grew up about 5 miles from where I originally lived, just on the west side of London, but our paths never crossed. So, I commend our thoughts to Chris.

*Cllr Anna Bailey* - "I was incredibly saddened to hear of the untimely death of Chris who, as you say, served as a Conservative councillor for the Dullingham Villages here at the Council from 2011 to 2019. I was also pleased to attend Chris's funeral. There was a huge turnout and it was testament to the multitude of organisations and clubs and charities that Chris was involved in that so many people turned out to his funeral. Chris gave freely and very generously of his time and his energy and his accountancy

expertise to dozens and dozens of good causes. It was truly astonishing to hear the amount of activities that he was involved in. He certainly wasn't known for his time-keeping, but Chris was known for his keen interest in a very wide range of activities and his generosity to all of them. He will be sorely missed I know and we send our grateful thanks and our condolences from this Council to his wife Ros and his family."

*Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith* - "I had the pleasure of working alongside Chris for a couple of years and I echo everything that's been said. He was a very kind and generous man and will be sadly missed."

Tributes to former Councillor Geoffrey Woollard:

*Cllr David Brown* - "I first met Geoffrey Woollard in 1990 when I worked for the National Farmers Union in Broad Street, Ely. Geoffrey was representing the views of local farmers and seeking help. He was a passionate advocate on behalf of those he represented. That is something I will always remember about Geoffrey - his passion for what he believed in. Some of us will remember his successful campaign "Don't Ditch our Lodes", against the Environment Agency plans. Others may remember his campaign to successfully save the "Little Chapel in the Fens". Geoffrey was a prolific letter writer both to the local and national press. I suspect all of us will have read a letter from Geoffrey in a newspaper at some point. Whether you agreed with his views or not, he always argued his case clearly

Then, when I was County Councillor for Burwell, I had the pleasure of meeting with Geoffrey on numerous occasions in his role as a member of Swaffham Prior Parish Council. He was an active member, and always ready with an incisive question or word of advice. I became friends with Geoffrey, and I am proud to have known him."

*Cllr Mark Goldsack* - "I have actually known Geoffrey for the best part of a couple of decades. I got to know him through business first and foremost. Words I can use for Geoffrey were bombastic, competitive, forthright, confrontational, and passionate, just as David said. You knew exactly where you stood whether he liked your idea or whether he didn't like your idea. Geoffrey was not shy in standing forward. In fact, full credit to Geoffrey who stood as an Independent in the last County Council by-election against myself and he walked every street, knocked on every door, all by himself at the age at that point I think he was then in his late 70s. So, he will be missed.

And a message about both of the gentlemen – I'd like to thank them for what they brought to the town of Soham which is where they finished up living. They were very generous in their spirit and very generous to what they did locally, so thank you."

#### **50. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from members of the public.

#### **51. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Starkey, Stubbs and A Whelan.

**52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No Declarations of Interest were made.

**53. MINUTES – 20<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER & 15<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2022**

It was resolved:

That the Minutes of the Council meetings held on 20<sup>th</sup> October and 15<sup>th</sup> December 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**54. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman announced that Joan Cox, Electoral Services Team Leader, would be retiring in March following 41 years of service to the Council. The Chairman thanked Joan for her work on behalf of the Council and the District's residents, and all Members and Officers paid tribute to Joan with a round of applause.

**55. PETITIONS**

No petitions had been received.

**56. MOTIONS**

**Voter Identification**

The following Motion was proposed by Cllr Dupré and seconded by Cllr Cane:

This Council notes

1. The passing of the Elections Act 2022 including a new requirement for electors to show photographic identification at polling stations in order to vote in person;
2. The concerns expressed by a variety of organisations that this is likely to prevent large numbers of people from participating in elections, with black and minority ethnic, low income, disabled, LGBT+, elderly and young voters being particularly likely to be disenfranchised;
3. That the acceptable forms of ID listed by the Government are weighted towards more affluent and older voters, who are more likely to have passports, driving licences, and senior citizens' bus passes, while forms of photo ID more likely to be held by younger people such as young persons' railcards have been excluded;
4. The comments of the Electoral Commission in September 2022 that the new rules could not 'be delivered in a way which is fully secure, accessible and workable', pointing out that 7.5 per cent of voters do not currently hold an acceptable form of ID and over 1,000 voters

were denied the opportunity to vote during Voter ID trials in the 2018 and 2019 Local Elections;

5. The view of the Association of Electoral Administrators that 'it is no longer realistic to successfully introduce Voter ID in May 2023', and that the timetable for implementation should therefore be put back; and
6. The concerns expressed by the Local Government Association that there is insufficient time to make the necessary changes ahead of the May 2023 elections without risking access to the vote, and that the introduction of voter ID requirements should therefore be delayed.

This Council believes that

- a. All residents eligible to vote should be encouraged and enabled to do so, with as few barriers to participation as can be proven to be absolutely necessary;
- b. The new requirement is disproportionate given that in the 2019 General, Local, European, and Mayoral Elections there were only four convictions resulting from allegations of in-person voter fraud out of 58 million votes cast, and in the 2021 Local Elections just one caution for election fraud was issued by the police;
- c. The role of local authorities such as East Cambridgeshire District Council that are responsible for electoral registration and administration is to ensure access to the democratic process for all eligible electors; and
- d. The rushed and last-minute timeframe in which this legislation has been enacted will put considerable strain on staff and resources at East Cambridgeshire District Council to communicate the new rules to voters, provide Voter Authority Certificates to thousands of local residents, and train polling station staff in less than four months in the run-up to the 2023 Local Elections.

This Council therefore resolves to

- I. Instruct the Chief Executive to write to the Cabinet Office to express the Council's complete opposition to the proposals for mandatory Voter ID in view of the damaging effect it will have on UK elections, and to demand that this section of the new legislation is repealed immediately;
- II. Write to every household in East Cambridgeshire about the new requirement for voter identification and the risk that electors may be disenfranchised;
- III. Work with partners including parish councils and the County Council to increase awareness of the change in legislation and the new barriers to electoral participation;
- IV. Liaise with the County Council and other partners to develop and implement a targeted programme to ensure that residents particularly at risk of losing their right to vote are made aware of the requirement to apply for identification papers in order to vote, and supported to do so; and

- V. Receive a report to the March meeting of the Council's Finance & Assets Committee to update on the activities carried out under I-IV above, publish the numbers of applications for Voter Authority Certificates received, and the number awarded, and advise of any issues arising.

Speaking as proposer of the Motion, Cllr Dupré stated that the introduction of Voter ID was an expensive solution to a very small issue – the Government estimated that the implementation cost would be £65-180m over 10 years but the independent Electoral Commission annually reported that there was no significant voter fraud. Many people with a right to vote would be prevented from doing so as a result of the new legislation because it was estimated that approximately 2 million people in the UK did not have suitable ID, many others did not know about the requirement, and those without suitable ID were not evenly spread through the country's demographics. Individuals could apply for a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) but the timing meant that most people were unaware of it and to date only 21,000 of the potential 2 million affected electors had applied. East Cambridgeshire District Council had received only 19 applications in the first three weeks of availability. Turnout for elections was already low and this additional requirement would further reduce it at great cost. The Motion sought to note the concerns of other bodies and called for action to protect democracy.

The Leader of Council thanked the proposer and seconder for placing a spotlight on Voter ID. The legislation would not be repealed and therefore since the start of the year the Council had been focussing on raising awareness of the new requirements. Attention was drawn to the Council's posters and literature that had been provided to Members at the meeting and to the list of activities that had previously been supplied by the Electoral Services Team Leader. There were multiple acceptable forms of ID and the process for obtaining a VAC was also straightforward. All Members were encouraged to work together to raise awareness and to increase turnout at the May elections.

A Member stressed the importance of preserving democracy and the right to vote and stated that the new requirements protected it. Another Member emphasised that in their view the principle of requiring ID in order to vote was unremarkable, but the manner and speed of implementation was a concern and the awareness campaign was insufficient. They considered that the level of voter fraud in the UK was very small and did not warrant the swift introduction of new ID requirements; as a country without mandatory ID cards for all citizens there was a risk of disenfranchising communities that were statistically less likely to already have suitable ID.

Speaking as the seconder of the Motion, Cllr Cane reiterated the risk of an estimated 2 million people being unable to vote due to not having the necessary form of ID. Referencing the process for obtaining a VAC, she commented that for some people it would not be straightforward, for example if they did not have internet access or a digital photograph, or the ability to visit The Grange for help from Officers. Additionally, many people did not know that it was necessary

and for that reason the Motion called for the Council to write to all of the District's residents to explain the new requirements. The independent Electoral Commission had said that the timetable of the Voter ID introduction meant that the May 2023 elections could not be conducted in a fully secure, accessible and workable manner. Therefore, as the authority responsible for managing elections in the District, the Council should do everything in its power to protect democracy by undertaking all of the actions set out in the Motion.

Summing up as the proposer of the Motion, and responding to points raised during the debate, Cllr Dupré disagreed with the suggestion that Voter ID would protect the vote and reiterated criticism of the high cost of Voter ID implementation and the speed of its introduction. Attention was drawn to the costs of obtaining a VAC in terms of time and bureaucracy, and that many residents may be unaware of the requirement until too late. The Electoral Commission, Association of Electoral Administrators, and the Local Government Association had all raised concerns as detailed in the Motion and Members were therefore called to support the Motion as a defence of citizens' right to vote.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was lost with 9 votes in favour and 14 against with 1 abstention.

## **57. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS**

Six questions were received and responses given as follows:

### **i) Question to the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group from the Leader of the Council:**

I note that the Liberal Democrat Group began this four-year administration period with 13 Councillors and are now depleted to 9. I also note that Cllr Matt Downey, who isn't here this evening, has been expelled by his colleagues from the Liberal Democrat Group.

Can Cllr Dupré please explain to this Council and to East Cambs residents why Cllr Matt Downey has been expelled from the Liberal Democrat Group and will Cllr Dupré now condemn the behaviour of Cllr Matt Downey that led to his having been found in breach of the Code of Conduct by an independent external Code of Conduct expert, costing Council Tax payers thousands of pounds, and leading to the censure of Cllr Downey?

### **Response from the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Cllr Lorna Dupré:**

Cllr Matt Downey was excluded from the Liberal Democrat Group under its standing orders in accordance with the Group's procedures.

### **ii) Question to the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, and a County Councillor, from Cllr Bill Hunt:**

I note that there have been some 24,000 replies to the recent consultation proposing road charging in Cambridge. I am aware from conversations with

East Cambs residents and from public opinion testing that this proposal is generally opposed and hated. I also note that the final County Council decision will not now be made until after the District Council elections in May.

Please will Cllr Dupré confirm that if there is a majority of replies to the consultation that oppose the charge that she will honour democracy and vote against road charging?

**Response from the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Cllr Lorna Dupré:**

The Making Connections consultation has indeed attracted significant levels of response. Neither Cllr Hunt nor myself knows the content of those responses, which will take some time to be analysed.

Decades of decline have left many of our towns and villages poorly served by public transport. Young people struggle to get to college, work or leisure. Older people and those with disabilities also lose out. Many low income families can't afford to run a car.

A Liberal Democrat council will work with other councils to get East Cambridgeshire properly connected. We want attractive, reliable, affordable public transport for those who can't drive and those who want a convenient alternative to using a car.

Meanwhile local Conservatives continue to campaign against public transport—calling for the axing of ten bus routes based on misleading figures, opposing the £1 a month Mayoral precept to keep existing rural buses, and trying to sabotage the trials of the experimental 'Ting' demand responsive bus service.

I know residents are concerned about proposals for a 'congestion charge' in Cambridge to fund improvements. My Group wants major changes to public transport to provide high quality alternatives to driving before charging is considered. And any plan for charging needs to be fair and equitable. The current proposals don't pass that test.

**iii) Question to the Chairman of the Finance & Assets Committee from Cllr Christine Whelan:**

The UK has seen a significant rise in the last few years of hate towards the LGBTQ+ community especially trans women in local communities. There has also been verbal abuse towards LGBT+ people in our own District.

- Only this last week we saw a young trans girl Brianna Ghey murdered. This is particularly highlighted as this month is LGBT+ history month.
- What provisions have the council made regarding protection for the LGBT+ community and what did the council do this month to recognise LGBT history month this year?

Will the Council join other councils next year in flying the Progress Pride flag during February next year and fly the Progress Pride flag during Ely Pride?

**Response from the Chairman of the Finance & Assets Committee,  
Cllr David Brown:**

Any incident/crime that comes to the Council's attention is dealt with thoroughly, sensitively, in confidence and with the victim's full support.

Hate crime/incident training took place online in November 2022 for Community Safety Partnership (CSP) partners and parish councils. The training covered what a Hate Crime is, how to spot it and what to do about it if you suspect or are told a Hate Crime against the LGBTQ+ community has occurred. Four Hate Crime reporting centres have been established across the District in Fordham, Littleport, Sutton and The Lighthouse centre in Ely. East Cambs District Council and the CSP are promoting these and encouraging further partners to sign up.

Hate Crime is also a feature in our Community Eyes & Ears programme. The Council has distributed information booklets, provided training to Neighbourhood Watch groups, Members and Parish Councils and there is a link to it on the CSP webpage for the public to access. Working with the CSP, we have also created a Hate Crime toolkit which has been distributed to all schools in East Cambridgeshire and is available on the CSP webpage for all to access.

There is a specific LGBTQ+ section in the Councils Engagement Toolkit. This covers the importance of and methods of engagement, barriers, and benefits of engagement for this specific group.

With all of our communications, we make the content specifically relevant to the people of East Cambridgeshire, where possible. For the past two years, the Comms Team has been unable to find specific events being hosted in East Cambridgeshire to support LGBTQ+ History Month, hence no posts have been shared to date. If Members are aware of any events or activities taking place then the Comms Team is very happy to promote them. The Comms Team is working in partnership with the CSP to produce a proactive comms plan for 2023/24 at which events such as LGBTQ+ History will be showcased.

On the 16 November 2016, Agenda Item 10, Council took the decision to fly the Union Flag on a permanent basis, unless otherwise instructed by His Majesty's Government.

**iv) Question to the Chairman of the Operational Services Committee  
from Cllr Charlotte Cane:**

As Chair of Operational Services Committee and an Observer on the ECSS Board, why did Cllr Huffer not bring the financial issues at ECSS to the Committee Members' attention when they were discussing cancelling January's scheduled meeting of the Committee due to "lack of business"? Why did she consider that an overspend by ECSS of at least £300,000 was not worthy of discussion at an Operational Services Committee meeting in January?



**Response from the Chairman of the Operational Services Committee, Cllr Julia Huffer:**

An email cancelling the Operational Services Committee that was due to be held on 16 January 2023 was sent to Members of the Committee on 14 December 2022. The meeting was cancelled due to a lack of substantive business. At the time of cancellation the level of overspend was still being calculated. An indicative overspend figure of £300,000 was reported to the Finance & Assets Committee on 23 January 2023.

ECSS held a formal Board Meeting on 31 January 2023 to consider a request to ask the Council to increase the 2022/23 Management Fee. Only Council can make the decision to agree this request as it is outside the budget of the Operational Services Committee.

**v) Question to the Chairman of the Operational Services Committee from Cllr John Trapp:**

As one of the Council's Observers at the ECSS Board meetings, how frequently did Cllr Huffer receive and review Management Accounts for ECSS?

**Response from the Chairman of the Operational Services Committee, Cllr Julia Huffer:**

ECSS Board last reviewed the management accounts on 31 January 2023. Prior to this, as it is essentially on operational budget, the Board did not receive management accounts, instead it discussed and approved the annual statutory accounts.

**vi) Question to the Chairman of the Operational Services Committee from Cllr Mark Inskip:**

When did the ECSS Board first discuss the forecast overspend for the year to 31 March 2023 and when did the Board first discuss that the overspend would be at least £300,000?

**Response from the Chairman of the Operational Services Committee, Cllr Julia Huffer:**

The ECSS Board first discussed the overspend on 31 January 2023.

**58. CHANGE TO POLITICAL GROUP, PROPORTIONALITY AND MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES**

Council considered a report (X150, previously circulated) concerning revised proportionality as the result of a change to the membership of the Liberal Democrat Group. Revised appendices had been circulated to all Members in advance of the meeting.

The Democratic Services Manager explained that since the publication of the original paper, notification had been received from the Liberal Democrat Group of a proposal that meant agreement had been reached by the Group Leaders

as to how the correct proportionality could be achieved. Group Leaders were asked to inform the Democratic Services Manager of their revised committee memberships in due course.

The Chairman moved the recommendation in the revised appendix, seconded by the Vice-Chairman.

It was resolved unanimously:

That the revised proportionality as the result of a change to the membership of the Liberal Democrat Group, as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report, and the resulting changes to the allocation of seats on Committees etc as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report, be noted.

**59. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2023/24**

Council considered a report (X151, previously circulated) containing the Council's Pay Policy Statement 2023-24 as required under the Localism Act 2011.

The HR Manager introduced the report and highlighted that spinal column point 1 would be removed from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 as part of the NJC Pay Award Agreement for 2022/23. The lowest point on the Council's pay scale would be £10.60/h and the ratio between the highest and lowest grades had reduced.

Cllr Brown moved the recommendation in the report, seconded by Cllr Bovingdon.

It was resolved unanimously:

That the 2023-24 Pay Policy Statement at Appendix 1 to the report be approved and adopted.

**60. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW – BURROUGH GREEN/DULLINGHAM**

Council considered a report (X152, previously circulated) concerning a proposal from Burrough Green Parish Council to alter the parish boundary between the parishes of Burrough Green and Dullingham. The Electoral Services Officer introduced the report and explained that a First Stage Consultation had been undertaken, resulting in a single response which objected to the proposal. No responses had been received in support of the proposal and the suggested new boundary passed through a resident's property meaning that a boundary anomaly would result if implemented. Members were therefore recommended that no further action should be taken and the boundary should remain unchanged.

Cllr Sharp moved the recommendation in the report, seconded by Cllr D Schumann. As the Ward Member for Burrough Green and Dullingham, Cllr

Sharp commented that he would explain to Burrough Green Parish Council that the proposal could be revisited in the Polling Districts and Polling Places review later in 2023, with greater details provided by them, if they so wished.

It was resolved unanimously:

1. That the parish boundary between the parishes of Burrough Green and Dullingham not be amended.
2. That the Council not proceed with the Second Stage Consultation.

## **61. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMITTEES AND OTHER MEMBER BODIES**

Council considered report X153, previously circulated, detailing recommendations from the Finance and Assets Committee and the Audit Committee as follows:

### **1. Finance and Assets Committee – 24<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

#### Treasury Operations Mid-Year Review

The Chairman of the Finance and Assets Committee proposed the recommendation and drew Members' attention to the extract from the Minutes of the meeting explaining that the figures were correct at the end of September 2022 and would be updated in the next report to reflect the changes to the economic climate since then. The Vice-Chairman of the Finance and Assets Committee seconded the proposal.

It was resolved unanimously:

That the contents of the mid-year review report on the Council's Treasury operations during 2022/23, as set out in Appendix A1 of the report, be noted.

### **2. Finance and Assets Committee – 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023**

#### 2023/24 Annual Treasury Management Strategy, Minimum Review Provision (MRP) Policy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy (AIS)

The Chairman of the Finance and Assets Committee proposed the recommendation, seconded by the Committee's Vice-Chairman.

The Leader of the Council highlighted that the Council continued to have no external borrowing planned for 2023/24 and would therefore not be subject to any high interest charges.

It was resolved unanimously:

That approval be given to:

- i) The 2023/24 Treasury Management Strategy
- ii) The Annual Investment Strategy
- iii) The Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement
- iv) The Prudential and Treasury Indicators.

### **3. Audit Committee – 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

#### Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy

The Vice-Chairman of the Audit Committee proposed the recommendation, seconded by Cllr Sharp.

It was resolved unanimously:

That the Anti-Fraud & Corruption Strategy, as set out in Appendix C1 of the report, be approved and adopted.

### **62. REVENUE BUDGET, CAPITAL STRATEGY AND COUNCIL TAX 2023/24**

Council considered a report (X154, previously circulated) setting out the Council's proposed revenue budget, capital strategy, and the required level of Council Tax in 2023/24. The report also assessed the robustness of the budgets, the adequacy of reserves, and updated the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

The Director Finance introduced the report and highlighted the eight recommendations in section 2.1. The Council Tax Resolution (Appendix 1) had been circulated to Members after publication of the report because the details from all of the preceptors had not been available earlier. The final Local Government Finance Settlements and Business Rates information had not been available when the draft Budget Report was presented to the Finance and Assets Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023 but had now been published and were included within the report together with other relevant updates since that meeting. In net terms, there was a positive difference from the position reported to the Finance and Assets Committee which reduced the amount of the surplus savings reserve that would be used for a balanced budget in 2023/24. Use of the surplus savings reserve would provide a balanced budget in 2023/24 and 2024/25 with no need to increase Council Tax in 2023/24 or make changes to service delivery. However, consideration was required as to how to balance the budget in years 3 and 4.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by the Leader of Council and seconded by the Deputy Leader of Council. The Leader stated that the Conservative Group considered that increased taxation should be the last resort for a local authority, but not at the expense of high-quality services, and was pleased to recommend a Council Tax freeze for the tenth consecutive year;

the only district or upper tier local authority to be able to do so. The budget was balanced for two years and the Council was not incurring any interest payments since it continued to have no external borrowing. 10% of the operating budget was maintained in general reserves, separate to the surplus savings reserve. She detailed recent investment from the Council, such as the £2.3m recently awarded to nine community groups, and highlighted that Council-owned car parks within the towns and city centre remained free to use. Investment in the waste service continued with money set aside for black wheeled bins and £2.8m earmarked for the purchase of waste collection vehicles that would be fuelled by hydro-treated vegetable oil, thus reducing the Council's emissions. The Council's wholly-owned East Cambs Trading Company (ECTC) continued to focus on supporting the Council's running costs to help keep Council Tax low. Trading as Palace Green Homes, the Company built new homes for local people, often in conjunction with Community Land Trusts (CLTs), and brought funds to the Council *via* sales, new Council Tax receipts and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments. The Markets team within the Company ran the popular and award-winning markets in Ely at no cost to the Council and delivered a modest surplus. The Parks and Open Spaces team also delivered an excellent local service and reduced the Council's own costs. The proposed budget included a £1.7m increase in the loan facility to ECTC to continue its development programme delivering new homes and generating income for the Council in the form of interest payments. ECTC had already benefitted the Council by over £3.6m, expected to rise to £4.6m by the end of the financial year. By contrast, a 1% increase in Council Tax would only generate approximately £45k of additional income per year. Other Councils had approved significant Council Tax increases, whereas the proposed budget for this Council was responsible and well-managed and would be the tenth year of Council Tax freeze for residents.

On the invitation of the Chairman, the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Cllr Dupré, then proposed a previously-circulated Amendment, seconded by Cllr Cane:

To approve:

- i) The formal Council Tax Resolution which calculates the Council Tax requirement as set out in Appendix 1
- ii) The draft revenue budget for 2023/24 and MTFs for 2024/25 to 2026/27 as set out in Appendices 2(a) – LibDem and 2(b) – LibDem, specifically to reflect the following proposals:
  - a. To initially create a reserve and then fund the forecast costs of a new Local Plan
  - b. To fund the initial capital (£500,000) and then on-going revenue costs to implement Civil Parking Enforcement within the District (£40,000 in 2024/25)
  - c. To increase the Environment Fund from £100,000 to £200,000 per year
  - d. To provide grant funding to local parish councils and community groups to mark the Coronation (£20,000 in 2023/24 only)

- e. To build in a (£200,000) turnover allowance on staff costs in recognition that there will be staff vacancies throughout the year
- iii) A Council Tax freeze in 2023/24
- iv) The Statement of Reserves as set out in Appendix 3 - LibDem
- v) The 2023/24 Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix 4
- vi) The Capital Strategy and financing as set out in Appendix 5 - LibDem
- vii) The extension of Business Rate reliefs (which will be fully funded by the Government through Section 31 grants) as detailed in Sections 6.6 to 6.10 of this report.
- viii) The discretionary element of the Council Tax Support Fund as detailed in paragraphs 11.9 to 11.11.

Cllr Dupré listed the five additional proposals included in the budget amendment and highlighted that the amendment retained the proposed Council Tax freeze. She stated that the amended budget was responsible and would address several areas that the Liberal Democrat Group considered to be important. The existing Local Plan was an important document that was now eight years old and consequently struggled to prevent unsuitable development in some areas. Therefore, a turnover fund from staff vacancies throughout the year would be allocated to a reserve to fund the development of a new Local Plan. The Council would shortly be one of only three councils nationwide that did not use Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) and instead relied on the police to manage parking issues. Funding from the County Council and from CIL would be used to implement CPE for the District, leaving the police to concentrate their efforts elsewhere and enabling the potential to enforce weight limits on some routes. An additional £100k would be allocated to the Environment Fund over the next four years in recognition of the climate emergency, and a small one-off grant pot would enable communities to mark the occasion of the King's Coronation in May. The amended budget proposal had been fully-costed and funded, retained a Council Tax freeze, and was balanced.

A Member questioned the purpose of ring-fencing money to develop a new Local Plan since it was known that a new system was due to be introduced soon. They also expressed concern that the introduction of CPE would inevitably result in the introduction of charges for all Council-owned car parks; a move that would not be welcomed. Another Member commented that the proposed £20k for Coronation grants equated to just £571 per parish council, which would be a very small sum for a community event.

Members supporting the amendment considered that it addressed important or urgent issues within the District. It had now been more than three years since the Council had declared a climate emergency but it was in the bottom 20% of councils in terms of electric car charging points and the Local Plan made no mention of climate issues. The amendment made provision for the development of a new Local Plan and assigned additional funds for environment-related projects. They commented that CPE would be a sensible solution to the parking concerns of residents, without adding to the pressures

faced by the police, and stated that it did not have to mean the end to free parking. One Member stressed that funds from developers and time-limited funding from the County Council could be used to set up CPE, and that without it the Council could not take on the necessary powers to enforce weight limits that would stop HGV “rat runs” through villages.

As seconder of the Amendment, Cllr Cane emphasised the importance of an updated Local Plan, in part in order that aspects such as energy efficiency and active transport could be addressed in Planning policies. Inconsiderate, unsafe and illegal parking was a problem throughout the District and therefore the amended budget included allocation for CPE, which did not mean that there would be charging for the use of car parks but did mean that those who parked illegally would be fined. More ambition was required for the Council to reach net zero in a way that was not restrictive, therefore additional environmental funds were allocated. The funding for Coronation events was modest but realistic and would enable communities to join together for a celebration. As a whole, the amended budget delivered on issues that residents had asked for.

As proposer of the original Motion, Cllr Bailey responded to the Amendment by stating that it was not fully funded since there was a clear budget gap in future years. She criticised the use of part of the staff budget for Local Plan development and emphasised that the new style of Local Plan development process would not be in place until late 2024 so development of a new Local Plan should not take place until then and funding would be provided at that point. She stated that the introduction of CPE would inevitably mean a move to charging in the Council’s car parks, and reminded Members of the work that had taken place with the local police to develop a new volunteer role to tackle illegal parking and speeding, with recruitment expected to start in the spring. No information had been provided about what the additional environmental funding would be for, and the Council already had a commitment to reach net zero by 2040 with progress being made in many areas towards that goal including the planting of community orchards, the forthcoming purchase of lower-emission waste collection vehicles and black wheeled bins, and the District already had the best recycling rates within Cambridgeshire. Whilst keen to work with the Liberal Democrat Group on new proposals for the Environment Plan, she could not support the amended budget.

In accordance with the requirements of The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, a recorded vote was taken on the Amendment:

FOR: (8) – Cllrs Cane, Dupré, Harries, Inskip, Jones, Trapp, C Whelan, Wilson

AGAINST: (16) – Cllrs C Ambrose Smith, D Ambrose Smith, Austen, Bailey, Bovington, Brown, Edwards, Every, Goldsack, Huffer, Hunt, D Schumann, J Schumann, Sharp, Trimarco, Webber

ABSTENTIONS: (0)

The Amendment was declared to be lost.

During debate on the Motion, some Members commended the community funding provided by the Council and drew attention to projects such as the improvements to Soham Town Rangers' building that would become a community hub for north Soham, the new community hub in Stretham, and improvements to Witchford Village Hall. They supported the budget and the freezing of Council Tax for a further year.

Other Members stressed the importance of a net benefit to residents from their Council Tax, and that low tax did not necessarily lead to economic growth whereas realistic taxation could provide better services for all. Concerns were raised about the lack of an independent advice service for residents and about the relationships between the Council, its property company ECTC, and some CLTs. Referring to the new community hub in Stretham, one Member commented that a poll in Stretham had shown 2/3 of responses were in favour of pausing the project until after the May 2023 local elections.

As seconder of the Motion, Cllr J Schumann reflected on the Council's successes in maintaining and improving services over the previous 10 years along with maintaining a freeze on Council Tax throughout that time. He drew attention to the delivery of the Hive Leisure Centre, grants for sports and other facilities, and the provision of new affordable housing in the form of £100k Homes and other developments with CLTs. The budget reflected years of hard work and dedication from the Conservative administration and the Council's Officers.

Summing up as proposer of the Motion, Cllr Bailey stressed the Council's lack of external debt and emphasised good financial management that had enabled Council Tax to remain frozen while delivering good services to the District's residents and investing in community projects and infrastructure. She highlighted recent spend on feasibility studies for active travel routes and for the completion of the Soham – Wicken cycle route. Affordable homes were being delivered with CLTs and using the £100k Home model. The Housing and Community Advice Team helped support those in need, working with them before they reached crisis point, and as a result the Council did not need to house anyone in temporary B&B accommodation. Investments were also being made in a cleaner and greener East Cambridgeshire. Overall, the budget and the Council Tax freeze demonstrated the Council's financial competence.

In accordance with the requirements of The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, a recorded vote was taken on the Motion:

FOR: (16) – Cllrs C Ambrose Smith, D Ambrose Smith, Austen, Bailey, Bovingdon, Brown, Edwards, Every, Goldsack, Huffer, Hunt, D Schumann, J Schumann, Sharp, Trimarco, Webber



AGAINST: (8) – Cllrs Cane, Dupré, Harries, Inskip, Jones, Trapp, C Whelan, Wilson

ABSTENTIONS: (0)

The Motion was declared to be carried.

It was resolved:

That approval be given to:

- i) The formal Council Tax Resolution which calculated the Council Tax requirement, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.
- ii) The draft revenue budget for 2023/24 and MTFs for 2024/25 to 2026/27, as set out in Appendices 2a and 2b of the report.
- iii) A Council Tax freeze in 2023/24.
- iv) The Statement of Reserves, as set out in Appendix 3 of the report.
- v) The 2023/24 Fees and Charges, as set out in Appendix 4 of the report.
- vi) The Capital Strategy and financing, as set out in Appendix 5 of the report.
- vii) The extension of Business Rate reliefs (which would be fully funded by the Government through Section 31 grants), as detailed in Sections 6.6 to 6.10 of the report.
- viii) The discretionary element of the Council Tax Support Fund, as detailed in Sections 11.9 to 11.11 of the report.

*7:54pm Cllr Paola Trimarco temporarily left the Chamber.*

**63. THE MAKING (ADOPTION) OF THE SWAFFHAM BULBECK NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

Council considered a report (X155, previously circulated) regarding the adoption of the Swaffham Bulbeck Neighbourhood Plan. The Director Community introduced the report and highlighted that 87% of votes cast in the referendum had been in support of adopting the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Chairman congratulated all those involved in the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan for their hard work and moved the recommendation in the report. Cllr Trapp, Ward Member for Swaffham Bulbeck, seconded the proposal. He thanked the Strategic Planning Manager for his help throughout the process and commented favourably about the number of people who had cast their votes in the referendum. Other Members also highlighted the substantial amount of work involved in preparing a Neighbourhood Plan and thanked all those responsible.

*7:57pm Cllr Paola Trimarco returned to the Chamber.*

It was resolved unanimously:

- a) That Swaffham Bulbeck Parish Council be congratulated on its preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan and a successful referendum outcome, becoming the sixth parish council to do so in East Cambridgeshire.
- b) That the Swaffham Bulbeck Neighbourhood Plan, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be formally made part of the Development Plan for East Cambridgeshire with immediate effect.

**64. APPOINTMENT OF BOARD DIRECTOR (EAST CAMBS STREET SCENE)**

Council considered a report (X156, previously circulated) recommending that the Director Operations, Isabel Edgar, be appointed as a Board Director of East Cambs Street Scene (ECSS).

Cllr Huffer moved the recommendation in the report, seconded by Cllr D Ambrose Smith.

A Member expressed concern about the proper governance of the company should the Council's Director Operations also be an ECSS Director. In effect this would mean that the Council Officer responsible for monitoring the delivery of the company's improvement plan would also be a Company Director. In stating their objection to the proposal, they stressed that it was a matter of principle unrelated to the individual candidate.

The proposer stated that she had no such reservations about the proposed appointment.

It was resolved with 16 votes in favour, 0 votes against, and 8 abstentions:

That Isabel Edgar, Director Operations, be appointed as a Board Director for ECSS.

*8:00 – 8:08pm The meeting was briefly adjourned for a comfort break.*

**65. EAST CAMBS STREET SCENE (ECSS) MANAGEMENT FEE 2022/23**

Council considered a report (X157, previously circulated) regarding a request from the ECSS Board for an increase in the management fee for 2022/23 to meet the additional costs that the Company had incurred during the year.

The Director Finance introduced the report and explained that the ECSS Board had requested an additional up to £500k due to overspend in staffing, vehicle maintenance and hire costs, and fuel costs, as detailed in the report. Members were recommended to approve the increase in the management fee.

Cllr Bailey moved the recommendation in the report, seconded by Cllr Huffer. Cllr Bailey emphasised that all waste collection services had experienced the same high increases in costs. East Cambridgeshire District Council delivered its waste service *via* a company structure operating in a non-profit manner because that was financially beneficial to the Council, but in all other respects it was the same as other Councils' waste services. Members were aware of the issues resulting from the round reconfigurations earlier in the year, as well as serious staff sickness, and the company had since worked hard to secure recovery and build better resilience. Staff pay rises had been higher than the NJC requirement following well-managed agreement with the Union. She urged all Members to support the proposed increase in management fee to recognise and address the increased costs that all waste services were facing.

Cllr Cane then proposed the following Amendment (hardcopies of which had been tabled at the start of the meeting), seconded by Cllr Inskip:

Council notes with grave concern that ECSS Board only brought this significant overspend to members' attention at the end of January after a year of failing to meet its agreed levels of service and the build-up of cost pressures and:

- approves a loan to ECSS in 2022/23 of up to £500,000;
- authorises the Director, Finance in consultation with the Chair Finance & Assets to agree terms and make the loan of up to £500,000 at the end of the financial year, based on an open book accounting approach with monthly 18 month rolling management accounts;
- requires the Directors of ECSS to provide a written report to the Operational Services Committee meeting on 27 March and attend the meeting to answer questions from members – the report to explain why it took so long to report the financial issues to members and what improvements the Directors have made to controls to prevent a recurrence of this late reporting;
- requires the Council's Observers to the Board, Cllrs Julia Huffer and Joshua Schumann to provide a written report to the Audit Committee meeting on 20 March and attend the meeting to answer questions from members – the report to explain why they did not report the financial issues to members and what they plan to do in future to ensure shareholder interests are protected;
- instructs the external auditors for ECSS to review the governance and controls in the company and report to shareholders, detailing any weaknesses and recommendations for improvements to ensure delivery of agreed service levels on waste collection and street cleaning and sound financial management;
- instructs the Council's internal auditor to review the governance from ECDC of ECSS and ECTC, detailing any weaknesses and recommendations for improvements to ensure better oversight of service delivery and financial management; and

- requests that the Council's external auditor reviews the 'Value for Money' being achieved by delivering the waste collection and street sweeping services through this structure.

Cllr Cane recognised that cost increases were not unexpected, due to inflation and the necessary pay rises. However, the overspend was large and had been presented to Members without prior notice. The earlier answers from the Council's Observer on the Board were also concerning regarding the timeframe for receiving details of the overspend, and that management accounts were not presented to the Board prior to January 2023. The proposed Amendment would provide a loan to the Company, the details of which would need approval from the Chairman of the Finance and Assets Committee as well as the Director Finance, and would put in place various measures to clarify and improve the governance and financial management of the company. Approval of the Amendment would ensure that the services were delivered and that the Company was well run.

A Member criticised the Amendment as being an unnecessary increase in bureaucracy and Officer time. The increased costs were understandable, as a result of changes in circumstances over the course of the year and in the context of the Council's balanced budget they could be accommodated. Another Member emphasised that the Company was well-managed and operated with a lean budget which necessarily meant that large fluctuations would require extra finance. The request for an increase in the management fee was being considered at Full Council which gave it full transparency whereas the proposals in the Amendment would place decisions and oversight in less public arenas, which could not be supported.

Other Members reiterated concerns about the structure and governance of the Company and that the extent of the overspend appeared not to have been recognised until close to the end of the financial year. They supported the Amendment's measures to investigate the Company's reporting and controls to ensure that any future matters came to light at an earlier stage. A Member stated that the Council's committee meetings were no less public than Full Council and timely notice of the overspend should have been brought to the relevant committee at an earlier stage.

As the seconder of the Amendment, Cllr Inskip stated that it should be recognised that the management of a limited company and a local authority were very different. He questioned why Full Council was considering an increased management fee in month 11, rather than a committee having been informed of the increased costs earlier in the financial year, and the cancellation of the January Operational Services Committee meeting suggested that either the Chairman was unaware of the overspend, or had not felt that it needed to be discussed. As the Company's customer, the Directors and Observers should have been aware of the issue since many of the increased costs had occurred earlier in the financial year. The provisions in the Amendment were important to understand what had happened to reach this situation.

The proposer of the Motion, Cllr Bailey, disagreed with the concept of a loan to the Company since it had neither the reserves nor the ability to service a debt at commercial rates. ECSS was not set up to make a profit and would therefore be unable to make the capital repayments. She reiterated that the Council's delivery of waste services *via* a company structure provided transparency on the impact of substantial cost increases, whereas budget changes for in-house waste services elsewhere were less obvious. She disagreed with the assertions of poor governance and reminded Members that the financial circumstances of the year had been exceptional. As a financially responsible Council the requested increase to the management fee could be supported.

Following a recorded vote at the request of Cllr Cane, the Amendment was declared to be lost with 8 votes in favour and 16 votes against with 0 abstentions:

FOR: (8) – Cllrs Cane, Dupré, Harries, Inskip, Jones, Trapp, C Whelan, Wilson

AGAINST: (16) – Cllrs C Ambrose Smith, D Ambrose Smith, Austen, Bailey, Bovington, Brown, Edwards, Every, Goldsack, Huffer, Hunt, D Schumann, J Schumann, Sharp, Trimarco, Webber

ABSTENTIONS: (0)

During subsequent debate on the Motion, several Members again highlighted their concerns about the structure and governance of the Company, and the apparent lack of financial oversight of the Board and Observers since management accounts were not regularly presented to them. They also commented that the service was not being delivered well for part of the financial year that an additional management fee was now being requested for.

Speaking as the seconder of the Motion, Cllr Huffer recognised the issues with service delivery for several months from April 2022 and stated that most had now been resolved. The company was now running a more efficient service closer to its previous high standard. The areas that still required improvement were being addressed.

Summing up as proposer of the Motion, Cllr Bailey stressed that if the additional payment was not agreed then the waste service could not continue. She reiterated that all Cambridgeshire waste authorities had seen cost increases and in East Cambs these were now built into the current and future years' budgets without the need for a Council Tax increase. Staff salaries had been increased above the national collective agreement as part of a change to staff terms and conditions including the introduction of a collective task and finish working model, rather than a round-specific task and finish model, for greater efficiency.

Following a recorded vote at the request of Cllr Cane, the Motion was declared to be carried with 16 votes in favour and 8 votes against with 0 abstentions:

FOR: (16) – Cllrs C Ambrose Smith, D Ambrose Smith, Austen, Bailey, Bovingdon, Brown, Edwards, Every, Goldsack, Huffer, Hunt, D Schumann, J Schumann, Sharp, Trimarco, Webber

AGAINST: (8) – Cllrs Cane, Dupré, Harries, Inskip, Jones, Trapp, C Whelan, Wilson

ABSTENTIONS: (0)

It was resolved:

- a) That an additional one-off management fee payment to ECSS in 2022/23 of up to £500,000 be approved.
- b) That the Director Finance be authorised to make the payment of up to £500,000, based upon an open-book accounting approach, at the end of the financial year.

**66. CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY UPDATE REPORTS – SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2022 AND JANUARY 2023**

Council received the reports (previously circulated) from the Combined Authority's Audit and Governance Committee (30<sup>th</sup> September and 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2022, and 13<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> January 2023), Overview and Scrutiny Committee (17<sup>th</sup> October and 28<sup>th</sup> November 2022, and 10<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023) and the Board (19<sup>th</sup> October and 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022, and 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023).

A Member asked the Council's representative on the Combined Authority Board to explain what had led to the Combined Authority deciding to charge a Mayoral Precept to all households. The Leader of the Council provided background information regarding the Combined Authority's funding and explained that Conservative members of the Board had unsuccessfully moved an amendment to the Mayor's budget proposal that would have removed his proposed Mayoral Precept. She criticised the governance of the Combined Authority and stated her opposition to the Precept.

It was resolved unanimously:

That the reports on the activities of the Combined Authority from the Council's representatives be noted.

**67. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The Chairman thanked all members of the public and press present in the Council Chamber, or watching the livestream online.

It was then unanimously agreed:

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the subsequent item because it was likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the item there would be disclosure to them of Exempt information under Categories 3 and 4 of Part I Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

*The public section of the meeting concluded at 9:04pm and the meeting moved to Exempt Session.*

**68. SECTION 113 BUSINESS CASES – FRAUD SERVICES ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP (ARP)**

Council considered two reports (X158 and X159, previously circulated) from Anglia Revenues Partnership regarding section 113 fraud services agreements.

It was resolved unanimously:

That the recommendations in the reports be approved.

The meeting concluded at 9:07pm

Chairman.....

Date.....